

Sunday Homily

Title On Thinking Catholic

Date: November 9, 2025

Sunday: Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

Scripture: John 2:13-22

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Text: Why do we have feast days; and why have feasts for a building? St. John Lateran is a fine church, the cathedral of Rome. But why have a feast for a building?

First to the Gospel, then we will have a clear run at that question. The evangelist John places the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of his Gospel. The other evangelists place it right before the Lord's crucifixion. In John, it follows the Lord's first big miracle. Jesus turns water into wine to maintain a wedding celebration. Jesus fulfills the role of the Messiah. Isaiah once prophesied: "On this mountain," he wrote, "the Lord of hosts will provide for ALL PEOPLE a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines (Isa 25:6). Notice Isaiah says ALL PEOPLE will enjoy what the Lord provides.

After the wedding party, Jesus goes to the Temple. Jesus notices how temple procedures separate people. The buying and selling of animals for sacrifice created a class system: the rich afforded larger, more showy animals for sacrifice; the poor bought smaller, lessor animals. And the Temple re-enforced other divisions. Various spaces were for certain people. Jews separated from gentiles, men from women, the clean from the unclean, priests from non-priests. A theologian, Henri de Lubac wrote, "Every breach with God is at the same time a disruption of human unity." I would quibble and say: Every disruption of human unity is a breach with God. The cleansing of the Temple marks a transformation of religion, FROM one that separates peoples TO a religion that unifies God's family.

Now, we know why we need feasts. We need constant reminders of God-creating and God-saving. Feasts remind us of how things should be. Let's look.

At the beginning of the Bible, we find two creation stories telling us about the goodness of creation and the goodness of humankind. Genesis asserts this original goodness existed before humanity divided into tribes and nations or became race and class conscious. We need reminders of the original goodness and the original unity.

In addition, God revealed God's plan. God will partner with humankind to care for the good earth and nurture life. We should be awestruck at the idea: God wants us to partner in maintaining all that is good. God partners with us in creating a just order so humanity can flourish. God partners with us so the earth can bloom.

Not long after creation, evil and sin darkened our vision. So, God sent his Son to awaken our sense of goodness. Through his birth, through his resurrection, Christ fills our hearts and minds. We should be awestruck at God's bold plan for our salvation. But we need constant reminders of the resurrected Lord's presence.

Another theologian, one of Pope John Paul and Benedict's favorites, invites us to think about God's design for us. The five senses feed the heart, the mind, and the soul. The theologian says that our senses are wonderfully made and perfectly fitted to experience the divine goodness all around us. Our eyes see God's glory. Our ears hear God's Word. Our noses smell God's fragrance. Our mouths taste his sweetness. Our hands touch God's presence. The experience of God elevates our entire selves—body and soul. We must pause, spend a day, eat good food, drink fine wine—in short, have holidays and feasts—to re-open our eyes to what God has done and to feel again the resurrected Lord's presence.

That theologian commented on hearing God's voice. He did not say you should listen to more homilies, not even mine. He said to listen to good music. All good music elevates the spirit;

some even makes us dance. In the same way, we have feasts, festivals, and holidays to re-open our eyes and ears, our minds and hearts to experience the divine goodness.

Feasts remind us how things should be. We SHOULD gather as one just as God made us. We SHOULD give gifts to remind ourselves that self-giving love is divine. Good food, fine drink reminds us our partnership with God to grow and distribute the earth's bounty.

And we come to sacred spaces—this church, St. John Lateran—to raise our minds to the things of God that lead to the fullness of life: forgiveness, reconciliation, inclusion, tolerance, understanding, peace. And, of course, divine love. Sacred spaces welcome everyone. Rich and poor, all races, all nationalities, people from every background bend the knee to the same Lord Jesus Christ and through Jesus to the same God who made us all. We should be in awe that God intends to unite God's family through a partnership with us.

Each weekend, we have an hour to renew our partnership with God. We consume the Body and Blood of Christ to have a union with the divine and through the divine, to have a mystical bond with all humanity. Every Sunday, we recall how things should be.