

Today's feast is unique in a couple of ways. It's unique in that it's rare that we celebrate a feast like this on a Sunday.

Rarer still that we've celebrated special feasts two weekends in a row.

Last weekend we celebrated both All Saints and All Souls.

But more unique still is what we're celebrating today: the dedication of a particular church, the dedication of a building.

Usually, when we celebrate a special feast it's for a saint, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, or hundreds of others.

Or we might celebrate a feast centered around a specific church teaching, a dogma, like the Immaculate Conception or *Corpus Christi*, The Body and Blood of Christ.

Today, we celebrate the feast of the dedication of a church building, St. John Lateran. Two other times during the year, usually on weekdays, we celebrate the dedications of three other basilicas: St. Mary Major one day, and the Basilicas of Saints Peter and Paul on November 18.

St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, Saint Peter's and 'St. Paul Outside the Walls' are the four major basilicas in the City of Rome. All extremely large, beautiful and important.

Some call today's feast 'Mother Church Day' - for in honoring St. John Lateran we celebrate the dedication of the principal church in all Christendom, our mother church.

It's the pope's official church and the Cathedral of the Diocese of Rome. And it's the only 'Archbasilica' in the world.

St. John Lateran is steeped in history. The Roman emperor, Constantine, a pagan who became a Catholic in the 300s, and who made it legal for

Catholics in the Roman Empire to practice the faith, received a property on a hill in Rome owned by the ancient Laterani family.

Constantine built a church on that hill and named it after Christ. He called it Holy Redeemer.

From that church, scores of popes, who lived right next door, guided the entire Catholic Church for a thousand years.

Later, its name was expanded to honor St. John the Baptist. And still later the name was expanded to honor St. John the Evangelist.

So, though we call it “St. John Lateran” in brief, its full name is “the Archbasilica of the Most Holy Redeemer and Saints John the Baptist and John the Evangelist at the Lateran.”

I was there once. It’s gorgeous and almost as big as St. Peter’s Basilica which, of course, as the largest church in the world, seats thirty thousand people.

St. John Lateran is the spiritual home of all Catholics in the world. It’s a feast for all Catholics.

For all of us are the Church. Of course we have buildings, and we need them, and we love them and we care for them. But more importantly we are a people.

More than simply focusing on a single church building today, we celebrate something far deeper: that you and I are a living temple, the Body of Christ, the Church.

In our first reading today, we heard Ezekiel’s vision of a river flowing from the Temple in Jerusalem and bringing life everywhere it went. That’s a vision of the Church receiving life-giving grace from Jesus.

And St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians says so beautifully, "You are God's building."

"Like a wise master builder," St. Paul wrote, "I laid a foundation, and another has built upon it."

"But each one must be careful how he builds upon it, because Jesus is the foundation."

There's no foundation of the worldwide Church, or of all the hundreds of thousands of church buildings, or of our building here at Christ the King, without Christ. There's no Church without Christ.

In that same reading, St. Paul asks: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

As the temple of God, "you are holy."

This belief in our holiness, in the fact that we are living stones, raised up like a building to give glory to God, has been emphasized by great teachers and bishops and popes throughout history.

You are holy and called to holiness.

Without that understanding, we've lost something big.

We are living stones.

Without Christ, without his Church, without the faith that was given to us, our lives have very little value.

I am so appreciative of the gift of faith given by my parents, my teachers along the way and the leaders of the Church in my nearly eight decades of life.

There are so many good people that God has placed in my life, to enrich that faith. And that's true of all of us. But this teaching also means that I have the responsibility of being a living stone in God's great church, and that we all do.

What we do that is good and right helps everyone else in the family of the Church. What we do when we sin or when we've been selfish hurts everyone else in the family of the Church.

That's why the Church chooses the Gospel of the money changers in the Temple today, those people who defiled the Temple by their own selfishness.

We must remember that we are called to holiness, and never to defile the Church, which is the presence of Christ in the world. We're to build up and strengthen the Church by all we do that is good.

All our acts of generosity and love and mercy will rise up to the Lord, like a building being built, and these will be far, far more beautiful even than the majestic Archbasilica of St. John Lateran.