

**November 9, 2008**  
**DEDICATION OF ST. JOHN LATERAN—CYCLE A**

For all, if not most of us, certain places have almost sacred meaning. If you are married, it might be the place where you proposed or the where you were married. For parents, it could be the church where your children were baptized or the place where you stood or sat when you first learned you would be a parent. For all of us, deeply meaningful moments of worship or places where we felt close to God or uncommonly close to another human being are sacred spaces. Not defined so much by square footage or appointment, sacred spaces become holy in our minds because there, our lives changed in some memorable way.

The Gospel today from St. John recalls our Lord's cleansing of the Temple in the City of Jerusalem. Only John tells us our Lord cleansed the Temple at the beginning of his ministry, rather than at the beginning of Holy Week. For Jews in that day, the Temple was considered the holiest of places on earth. There, it was believed, God uniquely and powerfully touched earth through the worship of God's people and ministrations of priests.

From our story, it was obvious that not all embraced this idea of the Temple's sacred nature. Some, callous and even crude, had turned the outer areas of the Temple into a place where money was changed and animals bought and sold. Mind you, this commerce was required for Temple business. Only animals bought in the Temple and paid for with official Temple coins, could be offered as sacrifices. But for Jesus, the deafening noise of braying animals and the messy, crowded mass of greedy people had turned this sacred space into a cheap and tawdry market.

Paul, writing to the Corinthians some 25 years after our Lord's death and resurrection, had an issue with sacred spaces not unlike our Lord's Temple cleansing. There, in the ancient, bawdy city of Corinth, the gasping, struggling Christian church was trying to eke out its infant existence amidst pagan temples fronted by smoking altars. There, high above the valley, beautifully carved columned temples gazed across Corinth. For the Corinthians, sacred spaces were not so much places of warm spiritual memory as they were places where priests and priestesses plied their craft, tending their rituals with exact precision.

To citizens of that ancient, pagan city, Paul wrote reminding the Christians there that they were God's temple of holy and sacred worship. Paul lays faith's foundation in Jesus Christ. The underpinning of their lives was not a carefully placed granite footer, able to sustain tons of dressed, brilliant marble. Rather, the very life of our Lord Jesus Christ was to be the foundation upon which they erected their lives both individually and as a church. Sacred spaces might include a building, but only because people made new by God's sacred grace dared believe God was working in and through their lives for high and holy purposes.

There is a beautiful, elegant house of worship in the City of Rome not quite as well-known as St. Peter's. This church, one of Rome's four major basilicas is known as the Pope's church. Tradition says that on the site of the basilica of St. John Lateran, Constantine was baptized in the early third century. There is a tradition that designates today, November 9<sup>th</sup>, as the day to remember the dedication of this great church. How fitting that we have heard these scriptures asking ourselves, what makes a place, a building, a location a sacred space? Why do we drive down a marker in God's warm earth and claim ground to be holy?

I am not sure we really know why we do this? My hunch is that God has placed within all of us a divine homing instinct. There is within every one of us the need to say, "I was standing here, or sitting there, or resting under that tree, or reading a book on that park bench, or sitting in this pew in this church when something holy, something inexplicably wonderful and life-changing happened to me." And everyone of us that feeling quite well.

But there is something even more precious, deeper, more profound going on here. In John's Gospel and the Corinthian Epistle, from the life of our Lord and from the pen of the Apostle Paul, **we glimpse the fact that God chooses to make God's home within us.** As magnificent as the ancient Temple in Jerusalem was, as majestic and grand as St. John Lateran in Rome is, as deeply memorable as any place you would name "sacred" could be, no place on earth is as sacred as the holy place within you and me.

Unsure if his Corinthian Church understood his building-foundation metaphor, Paul finally breaks down and speaks plainly. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" To make this point even more profound, Paul uses the plural "you" in this question, best translated "you all." Speaking to the entire Corinthian church, he wrote,

“Do you all – all of you individually and collectively as the church – do you all know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

Here we draw back the veil of mystery and peer into one of the great, eternal truths of Christian faith. No elegant building, no daisy dappled meadow, no spacious cathedral, no gurgling, shady brook, not even a consecrated altar is as sacred a space as the sacred space within every one of us and between and among all of us. We are God’s sacred spaces in this busy and noisy world. And in this sacred space between and within us, God chooses to live and do God’s sacred work.

So today, we have remembered our Lord’s memorable visit to the Temple in Jerusalem, re-visited the ancient city of Corinth with all of its marbled shrines, and celebrated the dedication of a church that has blessed the city of Rome for some 1700 years. But most of all, God has called us again to remember to honor the sacred spaces within our lives where God does holy work on our needy hearts and in so doing, transforms our lives into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Based on GraceWorks. November 9, 2008*