

It would be hard for us to overstate the importance of the temple in Jerusalem for the people of Israel. Dr. John Bergsma states it well: “The Temple was the climax of salvation history and the embodiment of all God’s covenants. The people of Israel viewed the Temple as the successor of the Garden of Eden and the ark of Noah, built on the site where Abraham had attempted to sacrifice Isaac and therefore received a divine oath of blessing (Gen 22:1-18). The Temple originally contained the sacred liturgical furnishings and vessels made by Moses, and so was the successor of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The temple itself was thoroughly intertwined with God’s covenant with David, Israel’s king (2 Sam 7:1-17). So the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David were all tied up with the Temple. It was the place of communion with God and the place of sacrifice. Nothing was higher than the Temple but God himself.”[1]

“Jesus went up to the Temple as the privileged place of encounter with God. For him, the Temple was the dwelling of his Father, a house of prayer” (CCC no. 584). In Matthew’s Gospel the Pharisees complain to Jesus because his disciples are picking grain—working—on the Sabbath. Jesus responds, “I tell you, something greater than the temple is here” (Mt 12:6). This is one of the clearest and strongest Christological statements in the Synoptic gospels: He is explicitly claiming superiority over the Temple itself. Jesus not only equates himself with the Temple, but He is, in essence, telling the Pharisees: “The only thing greater than

the Temple is God himself—and He is in your midst.” The Greek word that St. Matthew uses for temple, ἱερόν (hieron), refers to the whole temple precincts, the buildings and the courtyards. Jesus is in effect saying that the climax of salvation history has arrived.

There is a second word for temple in Greek, which John places on the lips of Jesus in today’s Gospel. When Jesus says, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,” John uses ναός (naos)—meaning the inner sanctuary, the dwelling place of God. This refers to the Holy of Holies, the innermost sacred room of the Temple, where the Shekinah—the real presence of God—dwelt among his people.[2]

Paul uses the same Greek word in today’s letter to the Corinthians. When he tells us “you are the temple of God,” he means that the Shekinah—the Holy of Holies—dwells within each of us.

Today we celebrate the Dedication of the Church of St. John Lateran — the seat of the Diocese of Rome and the mother church of all Christianity. For the Jewish people, the Temple in Jerusalem was the one place on earth where God dwelt with his people. What the Temple was for Israel, St. John Lateran is a living sign of for us: the place where the presence of God in Christ dwells with his people. Not in stone alone, but now in the living stones Christ has made us to be. St. John Lateran stands as an icon of the universal

Church — the true Temple — from which the Holy Spirit flows forth as a life-giving river through the sacraments.

Our church buildings are not merely convenient places for us to gather for worship. They are sacred spaces, made holy by the presence of Jesus Christ himself in the sacraments; by the physical presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharistic sacrifice—the Paschal Mystery—which we celebrate on this altar; in the reserved Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle; and in this sacred assembly—the Christian people joined together in the power of the Holy Spirit. When the Catechism uses the term “Mystical Body of Christ” for the Church, it is not metaphorical—it is the essence of who we are.

“There is something greater here.” God speaks that word again to us today — to remind us that we are part of something greater than ourselves. We are not spectators in this Temple; we are the Temple. We are the living stones. Every one of us is called, needed, and chosen.

Your place in Holy Spirit Catholic Church is not accidental or incidental. *It is essential.* The Lord has placed you here, now, at this moment in time, so that through your faith, your generosity, your sacrificial love, and your prayer — others may experience the Shekinah, the real presence of God, in this parish. So today, as we celebrate the dedication of the Mother Church of all Christianity — let us rededicate ourselves. Let us say “yes” again: to our parish, to our call, to our mission, to the Holy Spirit who dwells here. And let us

ask Jesus — the true Temple — to make this parish a place where the river of life flows, where people encounter God, where the broken are restored, where grace is alive.

Because the Temple of God — which we are — is holy. And that holiness is meant to shine.

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[1] John Bergsma, *The Word of the Lord: Reflections on the Mass Readings for Solemnities and Feasts* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2021), 406–7.

[2] The word “Shekinah” does not appear in the Hebrew Bible itself. But Jewish rabbinic writings (Targums, Mishnah, Midrash) use *shekina* to speak about God’s real presence dwelling among his people. By extension, Catholic theologians and homilists commonly use “Shekinah” to describe the luminous presence of God in the Holy of Holies over the Ark of the Covenant (in the First Temple) and, later, the cloud-presence in the Second Temple.