

Homily for Sunday
November 9, 2008

Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome

Introduction

Today's is a unique commemoration. As far as I know, it's the only feast in the Catholic liturgical calendar which celebrates a building, an edifice, a physical space: the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome.

That church is of course a special place, built some 1700 years ago, the first Christian cathedral in the city of Rome and thereafter considered the mother church of Western Catholic Christianity.

This commemoration causes us think about the idea of sacred space - room set aside for God. It makes us think of this church of ours here at Our Lady Queen of Peace - small, simple and intimate. This is a lovely space, which symbolizes, I believe, what we as a parish community wish to be.

(Often on Sunday afternoons, when everything is over, I come back here to sit and reflect on all of the prayers that have been offered earlier in the day - the Masses, the people, the worship that has gone on. It's always a graced time for me.)

I

A segue to a deeper reflection on the significance of today's feast comes in the form of a story about Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who, as you know, was martyred at the altar in 1980 for standing with the poor of his country. His was a very unimposing cathedral in the city of San Salvador - ugly almost - with cinder block walls, a tin roof and a gritty tile floor which bore witness to the constant traffic in and out of that church. When they asked the Archbishop why he did not fix up the cathedral he replied that he would not get into building while there were hungry people in his country.

The lesson one takes from that anecdote is, of course, that buildings are not the Church. They are only a symbol - an important symbol - that say much about the community they serve; like our church here at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish. But the buildings are only symbolic.

II

The Church, as we know, is you and I and all who are baptized into the Body of Christ. We know this especially after it was stated categorically by the Second Vatican Council. Still, it's very important to reflect on us-as-Church because the notion has serious consequences.

III

For one thing, the Church, like Christ, is never totally comfortable in any society. This is clear when we think of atheistic societies; but it is equally true in a society like ours.

At a moment in our country's history, for example, when we have just accomplished such a remarkable feat - the election of an Afro-American as president of the United States - we, the Church, have to press the agenda of Jesus' teaching and example, asking some hard questions of our nation and its new administration:

-how shall we end the two wars our country is currently fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq.

-how shall we help Wall Street and Main Street AND ALSO those who live on the street.

-how do we save the lives of the unborn and help their mothers who find themselves in unwanted pregnancies.

-how will we respect the rights of all minorities in our country - and around the world - such as the Palestinian population in Israel.

These are huge problem areas for the next president to deal with and they must be raised by us who take them seriously.

Conclusion

On this Sunday after our remarkable election these considerations really come down to the old question: are we Americans who happen to be Christian-Catholics; or are we not rather Christian-Catholics who just happen to be Americans.

As we move now to baptize little Ryan Robert into the community of faith, into the Church, and recall our own baptism into the Body of Christ, let this question permeate our minds and hearts.