

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THE DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA

Every year on 9 November, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica. To dedicate or to 'consecrate' a place to God is to recognise God's glory and honour.

In the earliest days, Christians met in their own homes to hear the teaching of Jesus and to celebrate the Eucharist. But as the Christian faith became more widespread, churches were built.

In the fourth century, Constantine the Great (reigned 306-337) declared Christianity as the religion of the Roman empire, and gifted to the pope a palace previously owned by the Laterani family. This building is now the oldest basilica of the Western world and the oldest public church in the city of Rome. It was initially known as the Basilica of the Saviour, though its later dedication to John the Baptist earned it the title of St John Lateran.

The Lateran Basilica was the centre of the Catholic world for many years and home to the popes: 28 popes are buried here. Christians consider the Lateran Basilica to be the 'mother church of all churches in the world', for it stands as a monument to God and all that God does through the Church.



Second Reading 1 Corinthians 3: 9c–11, 16–17

Corinth was a major port in Greece famous for its ship building and for the arts. In this letter, Paul answers two other communications concerning disputes and lack of harmony among the new Christian church that he had founded in Corinth. He was probably writing from Ephesus (in present-day Turkey) c. 57 AD.

Here Paul uses two images to explain how God dwells not only in each individual, but also in the whole community. This was a common belief in ancient Israel (see 2 Chronicles 6: 20–23 or Psalm 18 (19): 6).

The first is that of a **building**. The community is the building with Christ as its foundation; and each member is a mason helping to its careful construction.

The second is that of a **temple**. We are this temple where God's spirit lives. Anyone destroying that temple through dissension or arguments would encounter God's wrath.

Gospel John 2: 13–25

The Passover of the Jews was at hand

Jewish feasts are given prominence in John's Gospel: they exemplify institutions before the coming of Christ. Many Jews would converge on the Temple from far and wide, so there would have been an increase in the number of people looking to buy animals for sacrificial purposes.

The money changers sitting there

Roman and Greek coinage with the face of the Emperor engraved on it was not allowed by the Jewish authorities. Only half-shekels from the Tyre region, made of pure silver and without facial representation, were acceptable currency. This accounts for the presence of money changers.

'Do not make my Father's house a house of trade'

Contrary to the other Evangelists, John is not complaining here about unfair trading, but about trading in that particular place. Jews and Gentiles are equal in God's eyes: an important notion for the early Church.

Jesus begins to reveal his true identity as the Messiah by calling the Temple **MY Father's** house. He has a special relationship with God.

His disciples remembered that it was written ...

The quotation is from Psalm 69 (70): 9. We see here an example of the disciples understanding and their belief gradually unfolding with the help of Scripture. However, although the disciples are present, there is often a certain delay before they realise the full import of what they have witnessed.

'What sign do you show us?'

John's Gospel emphasises 'signs' rather than miracles. The Jews want a sign to justify his authority. Jesus's answer refers to his death and resurrection as the ultimate sign, but the Jews misunderstand his answer.

'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up'

At the time of writing this Gospel, the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed for several decades. Jesus is the new Temple; John always writes in the light of Jesus's resurrection.