

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today the Church universal celebrates the feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome. In the year 324, Pope Sylvester I consecrated this building built upon land formerly belonging to the Laterani family, but which was given by the emperor Constantine to the Catholic Church. It's original name was the Archbasilica of the Most Holy Savior, but it came to be called St. John because the monks from the monastery of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Divine ministered there, and Lateran after the Laterani family.

Ever since its consecration it has served as the cathedral of the Diocese of Rome, and consequently the cathedral of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. Contrary to what a lot of people think, St. Peter's Basilica is not the Pope's cathedral. San Giovanni Laterno is.

On the front of the building there is a Latin inscription carved in marble that reads: "omnium ecclesiarum Urbis et Orbis mater et caput." Translated, this means, "the mother and head of all churches of the city and of the world." Because it is the oldest cathedral in the world; because it is the mother church of Catholicism; and because it is the cathedral of the Pope, all Catholic churches in the world celebrate this feast on this day every year.

We celebrate this feast chiefly because of what it represents. Because it is the cathedral of the Pope, and contains his official seat - his cathedra - it represents to all Catholics the teaching and governing authority of the Pope. Celebrating the dedication of the Pope's cathedral shows our unity with the Pope and our respect for him and the office that he holds. Not only that, but it shows that we are united with each other in the Church; and that we are united with all of those faithful and obedient Catholics across time and space who have come before us.

As such, this is a feast of unity in the Catholic faith, the faith of our fathers, the infallible, unchanging, magisterial, immutable, saving faith to which we pledge our devotion and our obedience. It is in this faith that we strive to live out our Christian discipleship day by day. As we celebrate the dedication of this temple made of bricks and stone, we are reminded, in the words of St. Peter, that we must: "come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be ourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:4-5).

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