

FEAST OF LATERAN BASILICA:

Nov. 9, 2025

Today is an unusual Sunday celebration. It is the feast of the anniversary of the dedication of the Basilica of the Most Holy Savior, perhaps the first real Church, the Cathedral Church of the Bishop of Rome. The palace to which the church is attached was given to the newly legalized Church by the Emperor Constantine in the year 324. It has been known simply as the Church of Saint John Lateran. Now there is no saint known by this name. The property had been owned by the Laterani family. The name of Saint John applies to the beautiful baptistery outside of the church. The façade of the cathedral, rededicated in the 18th century, has the inscription, "The Most holy Lateran Church, mother and head of all churches in the world". Of course there are those who believe this gift of Constantine set the church on its imperial and clerical ways. Whatever the case, it remains a work of art and history.

I thought we might utilize this feast to reflect on the church in our lives and in our times. We live in an era in which the church has been disgraced by the sexual abuse crisis of priests and religious. Priestly vocations are down and churches have been closing. What is this all about and why are we still here?

My old training taught that the church consists of creed, code and cult. I think you know what Creed means. With Christians throughout the world we recite at every Sunday Mass our common creed, either the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed, both ancient statements. Yet these are very incomplete creeds. No mention of the teachings of Jesus, the centrality of the reign of God. The creed is still developing even though there are some Christians, converts and others, who argue that change of any belief is impossible. What we believe should be always the same.

The second ingredient of church is called code, how we live and act. The ten commandments remain basic but they have been enhanced by teachings of the church on murder, abortion, warfare, capital punishment, the positive duties of social justice and so on. Usury and slavery were once accepted but are now condemned. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII began the modern teachings on social justice with his encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, on just labor principles following the industrial revolution. The Second Vatican Council followed by Popes John, Paul, John Paul II, Benedict and Francis have developed these teachings and called us to

bring about the reign of God in our times, especially by attending to the needs of the poor and marginalized peoples.

The third part of this triune meaning of church is called cult which is about worship, the meaning of Incarnation and sacrament, the care of creation, the recognition of art and beauty and the human person as well as all created beings. This has been the touchiest part of church life for many as it involves us personally and locally. Beginning with the Council, the Popes have been trying to overcome the passivity of all the baptized to take responsibility, in worship as well as everyday life, for the mission of Jesus Christ in our world. Adaptation by monks and laity alike has been fraught with stumbling and mistaken paths of adaptation. Some would just like to go back to passive and inactive ways of the Christian life. However, there are many cultural problems to face. Following Christ and being faithful to the Church requires a better, learned, active body of the Christian faithful. Creed, code and cult help us in our identity as Christian Catholics.

There may be another reason you are here and people are Catholics. I think people are attracted to the Church in the same way that people 2000 years ago were attracted to Jesus. They witnessed love, compassion, wisdom, reaching out, healing care, a deep meaning and relationship to God, a person and place to find who I really am and find meaning and belonging. The Vatican Council wrote that the Church is the sacrament of Jesus Christ. Yes, a very imperfect sacrament, still on its way, a community of saints and sinners.

Our culture sees us as rugged individuals. The Church calls us to community. Corporate America tells us we find meaning by buying, accumulating. The Church reverberates the words of Jesus to shun greed and share all we have with others. Our culture is drowning in individualism, isolation, loneliness. The Church draws us together in common prayer and service. We are bombarded with noise, constant distraction, social media full of untruths and falsities. The rich tradition of Church mystics, scriptures, and ways of prayer offers deep silence and connection.

The Church does not deliver everything it promises. But the call of the Second Vatican Council was to call us all, priests and laity, to be more active to come together to build the reign of God. The vision of the Council is still to be made flesh. Popes Francis and now Leo are voices in the wilderness of a secularized world who speak up for love and justice.

Today's feast of the cathedral of Rome is a sign and reminder of what the Church can and should be. Is it time to turn over the temple sellers and purify the house of God? We are God's building and, in fact, celebrate ourselves and our community today.

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