



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE DEDICATION OF THE BASILICA OF SAINT JOHN LATERAN

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Basilica of St. John Lateran
Saturday, 9 November 2019*

[[Multimedia](#)]

- [Prayer](#)
 - [Homily](#)
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For the millions of children bent by pangs of hunger who have lost their smile but still want to love.

For the millions of young people who, without any reason to believe or to live, search in vain for a future in this senseless world.

Father, we beseech you to send workers into your harvest.

For the millions of men, women and children whose hearts still beat strongly enough to fight, whose spirit rises up against the unjust destiny imposed on them, whose courage demands the right to invaluable dignity.

Father, we beseech you to send workers into your harvest.

For the millions of children, women and men who do not want to curse, but rather to love and pray, work and unite so that a more solidary earth may be born; An earth, our earth, where every man gives the best of himself before he dies.

Father, we beseech you to send workers into your harvest

For all those who pray, may they be listened to by God, and receive from him the strength to eliminate misery from a humanity made in his image.

Father, we beseech you to send workers into your harvest.

This evening, during this celebration for the Dedication [of the Basilica] I would like to *offer you three verses* taken from the Word of God that you can use as the subject of meditation and prayer.

I feel that the first one is addressed to us all, *to the entire diocesan community* of Rome. It is the Responsorial Psalm: "There is *a river whose streams make glad the city of God*" (Ps 46[45]:4). Christians who live in this city are like the river that springs from the temple: they bring a Word of life and of hope that can make fruitful the desert of hearts, just like the stream described in Ezekiel's vision (chap. 47) which fertilizes the Arabah desert and heals the salty and lifeless waters of the Dead Sea. The important thing is that the course of the water leave the temple and flow towards hostile looking lands. The city cannot but rejoice on seeing Christians becoming joyful proclaimers, determined to share with others the treasures of the Word of God and to devote themselves to the common good. The terrain that seemed destined to be arid, reveals an extraordinary potential: it becomes a garden with evergreen trees and leaves and fruit with healing properties. Ezekiel explains the reason for such fruitfulness: "the water for them flows from the sanctuary" (Ez 47:12). God is the secret of this new life-giving power!

May the Lord rejoice at seeing us in movement, ready to listen with our hearts to his poor that cry out to him. May the Mother Church of Rome experience the comfort of seeing once again the obedience and courage of her children filled with enthusiasm for this new season of evangelization. Meeting others, engaging in dialogue with them, listening to them with humility, generosity and poverty of heart ... I invite all of you to live this, not as a burdensome effort, but with spiritual lightness: instead of letting performance anxiety take over, it is more important to widen your perception in order to grasp God's presence and action in the city. It is a contemplation that stems from love.

I would like to dedicate a verse from the Second Reading, in the first Letter to the Corinthians, to you *presbyters*: "*no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor 3:11). This is your task, the heart of your ministry: to help the community always be at the Lord's feet in order to listen to his Word; to keep it far from all worldliness, from bad compromises; to keep the foundation and the holy root of the spiritual building; to defend it from vicious wolves, from those who want to make it deviate from the path of the Gospel. Like Paul, you too are "master builders", masters because you are well aware that any other idea or situation we may want to use as a foundation of the Church, instead of the Gospel, would perhaps guarantee us greater success or immediate gratification, but would inevitably lead to the collapse, the collapse of the entire spiritual edifice!

In my time as Bishop of Rome, I have come to know many of you more closely, dear presbyters. I have admired your faith and love for the Lord, your closeness to people and your generosity in caring for the poor. You know the neighbourhoods of the city like no one else and you keep in your heart the faces, smiles and tears of many people. You have set aside ideological differences and personal “spotlights” in order to make room for what God asks of you. The realism of those who keep their feet on the ground and know “the way of the world” did not prevent you from flying high with the Lord and from having great dreams. May God Bless you. May the joy of intimacy with him be the truest reward for all the good that you do daily.

And lastly, a verse for you, members of the *pastoral teams* who are here to receive a special mandate from the Bishop. I could not but choose it from the Gospel (Jn 2:13-22), in which Jesus behaves in a divinely provocative manner. In order to shake the obtuseness of mankind and lead people to make radical changes, God sometimes chooses to act in a strong way to bring about a break in the situation. With his action, Jesus wants to introduce a change of pace, a change in direction. Many saints shared that same style: some of their behaviour that was incomprehensible from a human point of view, was the result of intuitions caused by the Spirit, with the intention of arousing their contemporaries and helping them understand that “my thoughts are not your thoughts” (Is 55:8), which God says through the prophet Isaiah.

In order to better understand today’s Gospel passage, we must highlight an important characteristic. The merchants were in the courtyard reserved for Gentiles, the area that was accessible to non Jews. This very hall had been transformed into a market. But God wants his temple to be “a house of prayer for all peoples” (Is 56:7). Hence, Jesus’ decision to topple the currency exchange tables and to drive away the animals. This purification of the sanctuary was necessary so that Israel could rediscover its vocation: to be a light for all people, a small group of people chosen to serve the salvation that God wants to give everyone. Jesus knows that this provocative behaviour will cost him dear. And when they ask him: “What sign have you to show us for doing this?” (Jn 2:18), the Lord answers by saying: “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*” (Jn 2:19).

And it is this very verse which I want to offer to you pastoral teams, this evening. You have been entrusted with the task of helping your communities and pastoral workers to reach all the city’s inhabitants, identifying new ways to encounter those who are distant from the faith and from the Church. However, in carrying out this service, you bear within this awareness, this trust: there is no human heart in which Christ does not want to and cannot be reborn. In our lives as sinners, we often happen to distance ourselves from the Lord and to dampen the Spirit. We destroy the temple of God which is each of us. And yet this is never a definitive situation: three days are enough for the Lord to rebuild his temple within us!

As much as they may have been wounded by evil, no one is condemned to be forever separated from God on this earth. In an often mysterious but real way, the Lord opens new small openings in

hearts, the desire for truth, good and beauty that make room for evangelization. At times, one can come across mistrust and hostility. One should not allow oneself to be stopped but rather safeguard the conviction that for God three days are enough to resuscitate his Son in the heart of man. It is also the history of some of us: deep conversions that are fruit of the unpredictable action of grace! I am thinking about Vatican Council II: “since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22).

May the Lord give us the opportunity to experience all this in our evangelizing action. May we grow in faith in the Paschal Mystery and be associated with his “zeal” for our home. Enjoy your journey.