



THE DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA: The Mother Church

A homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: *Ezekiel 47: 1-2,8-9,12; 1 Corinthians 3:9-11;16-17; John 2:13-22*

As we recover from the annual delights of the peculiarly English celebration of the grisly execution of Catholics trying to restore the true faith (Guido Fawkes et al) against a background of illegitimate, disloyal and perverse monarchy (James I), and hear the sound of that bogus Cornish anthem, 'Trelawney', an utterly misplaced paeon of praise for a ghastly old bigoted Catholic hating bishop, ironically penned by a priest who became a Catholic on his deathbed, Parson Hawker, echoing in our streets, we may wonder what all the fuss is about that elevates The Dedication of the Lateran above the national demands of Remembrance Sunday.

Well, let's clear a little ground. Remembrance Sunday is not unimportant. It is, after all, one of those days when the largely lapsed native population may actually ship up at church to say a prayer or two.

Remembrance is, after all, now fashionable again. There was a time in the 1960s and 70s when it was in decline because of its supposed glorification of war. For Catholics, however, the sight and sound of people praying for the dead is not a novelty but regular and familiar territory. Remembrance is the very stuff of the Mass. But it is not the Remembrance that is an historical marker of events we could not have known- which is the reality of Remembrance Day. Rather it is the ancient Hebrew concept of Re - Membering – the joining together of the event of the past into the eternal present and presence of God.

On our altars we are not offering bread and wine and a recitation of a holy story but rather the transformation, by the invocation and power of the Holy Spirit of God, of those material

elements into the reality of the Calvary sacrifice and the triumph of the Risen Lord in the eternal 'NOW' of the God who declares Himself as 'I AM' – the first person singular of the verb 'to be'. As Catholics we 'do' Remembrance every day.

But why should a building in a foreign land trump this national festival? The significance of the Lateran is twofold. First, what many do not realise is that it is the Church of the Pope and our first loyalty is to the Church. But more than that, St John Lateran, in all its present glory and belated magnificence, is the very place where the Emperor Constantine chose to build the first officially recognised Christian church at the place where he entered the Eternal City of Rome following his triumph in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. It was at this battle that he saw the sign of the Cross of Christ in the sky and heard the words, 'In this sign conquer'. As such this moment in history saw an end to the persecution of Christianity which had been going on for almost the entire three centuries since its emergence onto the international stage. Suddenly the church of the ghettos, the church of the catacombs, could emerge into the daylight, could have its own buildings, takes its place in the public discourse in the forum without a death warrant hanging over its head.

We, who live in different times, take for granted that we have buildings to worship in and can move freely in our land. The Church built by Constantine was a signal to the whole empire of Rome to cease the persecutions and pay attention to the claims of this burgeoning faith adopted by the Emperor himself. Although the Lateran today is a much grander building than Constantine's, its significance is undiminished in the history of the Faith. While our native annual Remembrance Day calls to mind the sacrifices of the last century or so against the growing power of the dark, the Lateran speaks of the Eternal victory of Christ over the whole empire of evil, the springtime of Christendom and the glorious freedom of the Gospel.

On a day like today we not only thank God for that day of freedom and rejoicing, which is symbolised by the Lateran, but pray mightily for those places, like Nigeria, where that freedom is increasingly, gainsaid by the brutal forces of an alien creed.

It is, after all, because of the Creed symbolised by the Lateran, that we can Remember the more recent struggles for the defence of justice and peace that lead so many to the solemn stone memorials at the heart of our towns and villages, to stand in silence, to speak the prayer

and hear Reveille ring out, the triumphant bugler breaking through the veil of sorrow and recalling the Resurrection from the dead.

Pilgrimage tips – see below

NB. Lateran is named after the family whose land there was stolen by Nero. The Church's original dedication was to the 'Most Holy Saviour'.

It is the mother church of Christendom (not, as most people think -St Peter's) Opposite the Lateran, when you visit, is the Scala Sancta – the holy staircase where you can spend a happy half an hour ascending in prayer on your knees as a beautiful spiritual (and physical exercise). As a reward you can then slip across the road to CANAVOTTA'S for luncheon. It's an old fashioned family restaurant where you can indulge in their delicious Seafood Risotto washed down with a glass of gently chilled Gavi.