

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, November 9, 2014**

## **The Dedication of the Lateran Basilica**

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

### **DESTROY THE FOOTPRINTS!**

The Islamic extremists of ISIS seem to hate all people and all things that do not conform to their way of seeing the world and their particular religious beliefs.

Among the objects of their hatred are Christian churches. Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant church buildings have been vandalized, bombed, and destroyed by these extremists in their quest to establish their version of an "Islamic State."

They consider houses of worship made of stone, concrete, wood, metal, glass, and other construction material as "enemies" to be attacked. Yet other structures made of the very same materials are left untouched. What makes a building used by Christians a target while one used as a clothing store, a supermarket or a flower shop is not?

The answer can be found not in what churches are made of or in their architectural design, but rather in what Christian churches represent. Churches "concretely" represent the presence of Jesus Christ. They are proof that Jesus Christ is alive and active in our world. We might say that every church is a footprint left by Jesus Christ as he continues his walk through human history.

The places where he has set foot are where his followers gather to renew their Christian faith and to experience the presence of Christ in word and sacrament and in the gathering of his people. As Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)

This Sunday, we celebrate the dedication of the most important place where followers of Jesus have gathered over the centuries – not Saint Peter's Basilica as we might think – but rather the Lateran Basilica in Rome. This church, which has been rebuilt several times, has served as the cathedral of the Diocese of Rome for some 1,700 years. It is the cathedral church of the Pope in his role as Bishop of Rome. In a sense, that makes the Lateran Basilica the cathedral church of the entire Catholic world.

In celebrating the dedication of the Lateran Basilica we are called to remember the importance of the buildings in which we assemble with our fellow Christians. They are holy places where God and his people meet during the liturgy and places made holy by the generations before us who stood, knelt, and prayed where we now gather.

In this Sunday's Gospel (John 2:13-22), we see Jesus come to the Temple in Jerusalem, the "cathedral" of his day. There Jesus drives out those who had turned parts of this holy building into a marketplace where animals were being sold for sacrifice and money was being changed so that that only approved coinage was placed in the offering boxes. Rather than being a place where God was encountered, the Temple was being treated as just another building for commerce.

Today's feast and today's Gospel challenge us to ask ourselves how deeply we reverence, value, appreciate, and care for our church buildings. They are the places where we gather to grow in our relationship with Christ so that we might be his living presence in our world, so that we might be "churches" not of stone and brick but of flesh and blood.

Perhaps the fury and hatred directed at Christian churches can remind us that these buildings are far more powerful than we might imagine. They are visible proof that Jesus Christ is walking through our world, touching lives, and leaving his footprints as he goes.

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