

## NOVEMBER 9 2024 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

Today we celebrate the Dedication of Saint John Lateran, the very first of the four archbasilicas in Rome. It was built in 324, and it is the Church of Catholic believers. Now, some might protest, "But the Pope lives at Saint Peter's, and Saint Peter's is in the Vatican; shouldn't that be the first and the most important place?" Eh, yes and no...

There are four archbasilicas—one in the Vatican itself, Saint Peter's, and then three in the city of Rome, just outside the Vatican. These are Saint Mary Major, the largest basilica of the four; Saint John Lateran, which is actually called "the Church of Christ our Saviour, and Saint John the Baptist, and Saint John the Evangelist"; and finally, Saint Paul Outside the Walls. But the church of the Pope, and the Pope is the parish priest of this Church, is Saint John Lateran, which was the very first of the archbasilicas built by Constantine in his time. It is run on a day-to-day basis by the rector.

To understand the importance of this, let me put it in our context. For us in Canada, 24 Sussex Drive is important. For the people in England, Buckingham Palace is important. For Americans, the White House is important. In the same way, for Catholic believers, Saint John Lateran is the important place. All these four buildings, in themselves, have no importance apart from the fact that they have the glory and fame of being the seat of the person who directs and leads these countries. But it also stands for the dignity, honour, and respect we give to all citizens—in Canada, in England, in America, and for Catholic believers all over.

That beautiful reading from Ezekiel, in the first reading, shows the glory and fame of the dedication of this archbasilica, Saint John Lateran. It is a sacred space. It is a place where God is present—the God who gave life to everything, to the animals, to the birds, to the fishes, and who created humankind in God's own image and likeness. This is God's place where we can encounter God.

The imagery in Ezekiel is beautiful: "From there, water flows out from the temple, water which is a sign of life." But in the same book of Ezekiel, chapters eight to ten, we find just the opposite. There is corruption—the priests are leading people astray, worshiping false idols, and offering blemished sacrifices. In today's Gospel, we find Jesus taking a whip of cords and driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple, saying, "Do not make my Father's house into a den of thieves."

Sometimes we think our Church is like that today, even now. We wish there would be somebody who would make a cord of whips and drive out those who are corrupting our Church—whether it's through sex abuse or financial corruption. Things haven't really changed. Bishops are saying one thing, and other bishops are contradicting them. This hasn't changed since the times of the Council of Nicaea, Ephesus, or Constantinople; we had bishops putting other bishops in prison. Life does not change, but we do need prophets, just as Jesus did, to bring our Church back to what it was meant to be—a place where we can encounter God.

But who will come? Who are the Samuels today, who say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening?" Who are the Ezekiels and Isaiahs, who say, "Here I am, send me?" We do have people. You have to look around in your parishes. In our own time, we have had people like Mother Cabrini, Mother Teresa, and Acutis, who died in 2006 and is soon to be canonized.

Look within your Church; there are men and women whose lives are full of integrity, kindness, and generosity. They don't have to go to a pulpit and preach; their very lives show light to everyone and make them realize that God is here. God bless you all.