



The Feast of St. John Lateran

If we were to take a survey and ask ten Catholics the question, “Which church is the ‘Pope’s Church?’” most of them would probably answer, “St. Peter’s Basilica.” The feast that is celebrated on November 9, the dedication of the Lateran Basilica, reminds us that the correct answer to the question is not St. Peter’s Basilica, but that of St. John Lateran. The Lateran Basilica is the cathedral of the Diocese of Rome, where the Bishop of Rome (the pope) resides.

In the fourth century a basilica was built on land that Emperor Constantine received as a donation from the Laterani family. Over the centuries fires, earthquakes and wars took its toll on the buildings but St. John Lateran remained the church where popes were consecrated until the 15th century. The present building was commissioned in 1646 by Pope Innocent X. The façade of this beautiful church is crowned with fifteen enormous statues of Christ, St. John the Baptist, St. John the Evangelist and twelve doctors (theologians) of the church. The church was later dedicated to St. John the Baptist. Underneath the high altar one can see the remains of a small wooden table. This small table, tradition tells us, served as an altar where St. Peter celebrated Mass.

The dedication of a church is a feast for all of its parishioners. In a sense, St. John Lateran is the parish church for all Catholics. This church of St. John Lateran is our spiritual home, and so as one family, we celebrate the dedication of this important structure and all that it stands for, particularly our unity as Catholic Christians.

Father David