

Rev. Derek Fairman

Dedication of the church

This day, November 12, marks the anniversary of the dedication of our church. We celebrate this in the liturgy every year, and this year November 12 happens to fall on Sunday. Why is it important to celebrate the dedication of our church each year? What does it mean?

In the time of the Old Testament, “Israel” was both the name of the people that God had chosen and the land that they occupied. God had promised Abraham descendants, and the land, and so the name Israel applied to both Jacob’s descendants and the Holy Land. This is seen in the Song of Songs, in which the Bride of the Song is the people collectively, but described in terms of the natural features of the land.

There is another image that pertains to Israel, and later to the Church, and that is the image of Daughter Zion. Daughter Zion is a synecdoche, a figure of speech in which some part stands for the whole, or in which a geographical place stands for the people who are associated with that place. The city of Jerusalem and what happened there was emblematic of the people and what was happening to them. In the prophets, Daughter Zion could be faithful to the covenant or she could be unfaithful. Even when Daughter Zion was unfaithful, the Lord still showed her favor and promised her redemption.

Whenever the Lord Jesus established the New Covenant, His Bride the Church was taken from His side as He hung upon the Cross. The Church can mean several things. The church can obviously refer to the sacred building, and that is what we celebrate today. The Church can sometimes refer to the hierarchical Church, or the teaching Church, or the Magisterium. The Church can refer to the activity or life that happens in the church building: teaching catechism, celebrating baptisms, blessing items, celebrating Mass, etc. The Church can refer to the institutional elements that provide the skeletal structure that gives the Church strength.

The Church also means the people who belong to it. If the Church is the Body of Christ, then the Church is one with Christ as husband and wife are one. That means that we are members or parts of the Mystical Body, and the Church is made up of many people. The members of the Church do not all have the same roles, but all are important to the Body. Other images for the Church include a vineyard, or the vine with many branches, but especially important is the image of a building, with the Lord as the foundation, and everyone built together into a structure that is fitted together well.

The Gospel finds us with the Lord as He speaks to the Samaritan woman about those who worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. Why does the Lord mention truth? In the Old Testament images of the Bride or Daughter Zion, fidelity and duty are paramount. Israel remaining faithful to the covenant is like a faithful bride, or a dutiful, obedient daughter. In the Church, the Bride remaining faithful to her husband is about the Church remaining faithful to the teachings or the truths that the Lord has handed on to us. The universal Church will not deviate from the Lord's teachings, but as individuals we can err. However, we look to the Virgin Mary, the Virgin Daughter Zion, who was faithful to the Lord her whole life, including faithful to His teachings.

We also come to worship the Father in the Spirit. What does the Lord mean? The Lord would give the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The Lord's disciples, those who were the remnant, and who believed in the Lord's teachings, would constitute a temple for the Holy Spirit. This temple was prepared in the time of the Old Testament, and it came together on the day of Pentecost. The Church is a temple for the Holy Spirit, and we are temples of the Holy Spirit as well. Whenever the Holy Spirit dwells in our souls, then we can worship the Lord appropriately.

As we remember the dedication of this church, we can recall our own dedication in Baptism. We likely do not remember our own baptisms, but we can recall how we have been chosen to be a member of God's own family. We receive Confirmation, whenever the Holy Spirit consecrates us to the Lord, and He comes into our souls with His seven gifts. We receive the Eucharist, in which we receive our Lord, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

The gifts that the Lord gives to us are meant to be shared, are meant to be given to not just us, but to the whole Body. Each of us has a role to play in our parish, no matter how great or small. We are fitted together, and things work together, because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and the Holy Spirit makes His home in our church, but also in each of us. We need the Lord to make our hearts a home where He wants to dwell.

We pray today for our church, that it will continue to sustain us. We recognize that our church is a place of peace, a place of holiness and a place where we can come when we need to find God in our lives. This is a place where we come to offer to God what we can, and to receive blessings from Him. This is God's house, and we ask the Lord to help us to find in His house a home away from home. The Lord Jesus has told us, "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." Our prayer is that we can find our treasure and our hearts here.