

**Reflection on the Gospel-Dedication of the Lateran Basilica
(John 2:13-22)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

My mother once told me never to replicate a mistake that she had made when she was first married. She received an unexpected £2000 bequest from a relative and found herself confronted with a choice between purchasing furniture for the house my dad had just built and investing in a Dobell painting that had come on the market and that she dearly loved. After a good deal of soul-searching, she opted for the furniture. Reflecting on this decision many years later, she told us: "You can sit on kerosene tins or wooden cartons, but you cannot live without beauty or the symbolic in your life. Never make the mistake that I made." That advice comes to mind again as I consider today's feast and as I reflect on those who, over the ages, have taken to heart the message of the prophet Haggai and have attended to the building of God's house of worship.

Why celebrate the dedication of a church? Why does this feast override the sequence of Sundays in Ordinary Time? Why is it so important? It is not so much a question of the beauty of the Church of St John Lateran in Rome that makes it important. It is more to do with what this particular church signifies for Christians. The first Lateran Basilica was built in the time of the Emperor Constantine. Many of the Church Councils from the 7th to the 16th century were held there. It was known as the "mother and head of all the churches of the city (Rome) and of the world." It is the Pope's church and the basilica of Rome. As such, it has functioned as a sign of unity for all Christians from the 4th century and has the potential to function in this way for all Catholic Christians in our times.

The selection from John's gospel presents Jesus driving the money-changers and the merchants from the Temple precinct in Jerusalem. These people had a legitimate function there, but some were more interested in financial gain than in respect for the Temple as God's dwelling place and as a locus of worship. Jesus affirms the Temple as God's 'house'. He goes on to speak of the temple of his body that God will "raise up" after three days. The gospel is thus a subtle reminder that the building is God's house only if our lives are congruent with what the building signifies. In Paul's theology, the church and its members are "God's building". The term "church" has come to designate both the architectural edifice and the believers who assemble for worship. The building plays a crucial role in raising our hearts and minds to God and in leading us to deep respect for all of God's creation. My mother was right about the power of the symbolic.