

I wonder how many of us have been to a ceremony of the dedication of a church. It is not the kind of ceremony that happens every week or even every year. It is a special ceremony marking a special occasion. Because of some extra elements, the dedication of a church is longer than a usual Mass and it might seem rather complicated. Yet it basically simple. The ceremonies for consecrating a church for Christian worship are like the ceremonies for consecrating a person as a Christian.

When a person becomes a Christian, they are first of all baptised in water. Then in Confirmation they are anointed with oil. After that, they receive Holy Communion as the community celebrates the Eucharist. These are the rites for becoming a Christian. The rites for consecrating a church are similar. First there is a sprinkling with water, as though we are baptising the building. Then we anoint the altar and the walls of the church with oil, which is like confirming the building. Then we celebrate the Eucharist, and this is like the first Holy Communion. This completes the consecration of a building as a place dedicated to Christian worship.

The prayers that we have in the dedication ceremony recognise that we can worship God anywhere. In one of the prayers we say, "O God, you have made the whole world a temple of your glory, that your name might be praised in every place." But the prayer then speaks of places that we dedicate as special places for worship, places where we can gather to give praise to God and share the peace of Christ with one another. This cathedral is one of those special places.

In many ways, the most obvious focus of a dedication ceremony is the building. People gather to celebrate the consecration of the building as a house of prayer. Yet, there is another theme that runs through the ceremony as well. While the prayers and readings refer to the stones that make up a physical building, they also refer to the *people* as living stones making up a temple of God.

This is clear in the reading that we heard a few minutes ago from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians. "You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundation, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone. As every structure is aligned on him, all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:20-22)

Today we are celebrating the anniversary of the dedication of this cathedral. The foundation stone had been laid in 1858. Building works continued for some years. In a way, the dedication in 1891 marked the completion of a long building project. And yet, a building is always in need of ongoing care. There is always maintenance to be done. In this sense, the cathedral is always a work in progress. This is true of this building. It is also true of *us* as the temple of God. As St Paul said, we *are being built* into a house where God lives, in the Spirit.

Today we give thanks for this cathedral building and we pray that this might be a house of prayer for many years to come. We also pray for ourselves. We *are being built* into a house where God lives, in the Spirit. We are a work in progress. May God who has begun this work in us bring it to fulfilment. May we become more and more a house where God lives. May we become more and more aligned with Christ as the cornerstone. In our daily lives, may we become more and more a holy temple, filled with the Spirit of God.