

The light of the  
(First Sunday 2<sup>o</sup>)

A visitor to HK once remarked to me about the curious collection of prominent foundation-stones you can see in a short walk along the lower end of Waterloo Rd., near where it joins Natten Rd. There are a number of buildings there which almost seem to be vying with each other to proclaim more loudly than the next that Jesus Christ is their foundation and corner-stone. My visitor thought they did, perhaps, protest too much. I was reminded of that curiosity by the other curiosity of what we celebrated in our <sup>Cathedral</sup> church yesterday. For instead of the ordinary Sunday celebration for the 32nd Sunday of the year, we had a celebration for the Dedication of a church, a most unusual substitution, even if the particular church is a bit unusual too. For it's the Basilica of St John Lateran, in Rome. What's so special about that is that it's the cathedral church of the Pope as Bishop of Rome, and is rather grandiloquently called the "Mother and Head of all Churches of the City and the world". Yesterday's date <sup>9<sup>th</sup> Nov.</sup> is (according to a tradition going back nearly a thousand years) the day of the dedication of a basilica built on Rome's Lateran hill, by the emperor Constantine; not, of course, the same church as the one that now stands there. Keeping the anniversary of a dedication of a far-off church (or even a local one, for that matter) doesn't exactly excite many people or turn them on — and unless they heard a particularly good sermon yesterday, I imagine most people in our church must have been a bit puzzled about the whole celebration, to say the least: "underwhelmed", as someone <sup>once</sup> expressed it.

Yet there is a very natural human desire to celebrate and make a show of the completion or dedication of something, some work — from the child calling you to admire and praise his or her newly-made sandcastle (or whatever), to having a <sup>Duke</sup> princess formally open <sup>the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of a massive power-station</sup> (an underground railway-line). The point is, I suppose, that when you've put a lot of work and effort into something and brought it to completion, you want to share your rejoicing & celebration, let off some steam perhaps. It's not that you're courting praise for yourself, necessarily: nor is it any kind of sinful pride. The trouble about the Basilica of St John Lateran really is that it wasn't you or I who physically built it, or had anything to do with its building. And anyway that was such a long time ago. So why does the church keep in its calendar, and as an important festival, the anniversary of the dedication of this building (and in each diocese similarly, for the local cathedral's dedication date)? To make a celebration of the actual dedication — that's natural enough: but year after year? Well, it's really a symbolic thing, and a symbolism that's rather complex in fact. Perhaps it's a bit too complex, or un-appealing as symbol, to our modern literal-mindedness and (who knows?) not very deep sophistication. But for now, in our prayer today, and prayer for each other, let's be reminded of the real unity and communion that does bind us all together as Christians, with each other and with Christ our foundation and corner-stone, in the household of God, the house of God (if you like), in the church. And for a prayer of praise is also appropriate for this month. Here's 'In Paraisyon' from Duraffe's music. (Here's something from 'Vezalet', an invocation of the famous

ARGO.E.634  
 2<sup>5</sup> Requiem, & also sung in a North-west Cathedral - from Westminster Cathedral, London  
 Vejalay  
 CHAR.0.14  
 2<sup>5</sup> Cathedral in the French town of that name: it's by Ingelbrecht and was completed  
 in 1952] MUSIC - PRAYERS (ECP §275)

The most obvious symbolism of a church building is for the church itself, the people who are members of each other in Christ. So, being reminded of the construction and completion of a particular building which is where our pastor presides, is a reminder of the wider community we belong to, in fact the whole family which looks to him as its pastor. An invitation, then, to renew and strengthen our links, to be concerned and to pray for the whole family in its various needs and situations. A church is a house of God, a house of prayer: but that too is what each of us is supposed to be. For God's presence isn't confined to a physical, delimited space of bricks and mortar or reinforced concrete: nor do we need that kind of sacred place in which to pray. Our own bodies, as the scriptures say, are temples of the Holy Spirit: and we must pray in our hearts. So, what about the construction, the building, of these houses of God and of prayer? That's a work that's not finished yet for any of us sharing these few <sup>morning-time</sup> (midday) minutes. But there will, please God, come a time for our celebration and dedication too, when the building is completed and a wholeness made, through the binding of love, of all the separate bits and materials, the gifts and talents God's given each of us to build with. And together, we are the live stones and building materials of which God's dwelling-place among people is being built, to have its completion and dedication in the second coming of Christ.