

“So everything will live where the river goes.”

Ezekiel 47:9

Today is the feast of the Dedication of the Archbasilica of St John Lateran, one of the four major basilicas in Rome, alongside St Peter's, St Mary Major's, and St Paul Outside-the-Walls. Built in the year AD 324, it is the oldest public church in Rome and is the cathedral for the diocese of Rome whose bishop is, of course, the Pope. Originally, the palace belonged to the Lateranus family, but it fell into the hands of the Emperor Constantine who became a Christian and who, in turn, gave it to the then pope, St Miltiades. It became the pope's official residence in Rome and the palace building was extended to include the new church of St John Lateran.

Because it is the first public church in Rome the Lateran Basilica symbolizes the source of all the goodness that flows from God through His Church and into the lives of His people. And that is why today's First Reading is all about the river of life that flows from the heavenly Temple.

In the First Reading we hear how the Prophet Ezekiel is shown a vision of the heavenly Temple in the new Jerusalem, and how water flows from the east side of the Temple and gives life to the swarms of every living creature. Why the east side? Because as you look at a map, the east is on the right hand side, and it was through the right side of His body that Our Lord's heart was pierced by the soldiers lance at the moment of His death on the Cross. And when Our Lord's heart was opened by a spear, there flowed out blood and water (Jn 19:34). The pierced heart of Our Lord is the true source of all the graces that pour into the lives of God's faithful people through the Church He founded for just that purpose.

Universally, the Catholic Church is the pipeline, if you like, through which all graces flow. In the Catholic Church we can find all that we need for our sanctification and our salvation: the life-giving waters of Baptism; the Blood of the Lamb that washes us clean from sin in the Sacrament of Confession; the nourishment for our souls that comes to us in the Blessed Sacrament; the strength to witness to, to defend, and to live our Christian lives fruitfully in the Sacrament of Confirmation; the reservoir of grace made available to married couples for them to draw upon in good times and in bad; the grace of Ordination by which Christ's sacramental work of salvation is continued down the ages through His priesthood; and the grace to heal and restore us in the final stages of our journey towards heaven in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, Extreme Unction.

Spiritually and supernaturally, the Church teems with an abundance of life as every living creature draws upon the cleansing Blood of the Lamb and the waters of salvation. In the First Reading, not only do the waters teem with life, but life is brought forth on the banks of the river, and the trees bear fruit throughout the seasons. In other words, those who receive God's grace through the Sacraments will – if they also live a life of Christian virtue – bring forth the fruit of good works as they serve God and their neighbour. And what's more, good works that are watered by God's grace carry an *eternal* value, which means they count towards getting us into heaven *and* the level of reward we receive once we get there.

And this, in part, is what we recall on Remembrance Sunday. Today, we call to mind those who bore great fruits indeed. Our Blessed Lord Himself taught us that 'greater love than this no man has, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (Jn 15:13). This was the supreme sacrifice offered up by Christ Himself: He, the Saviour of the world, laid down His own life – no one took it from Him, He laid it down and took it up again Himself (Jn

10:18) – for the sake of those whom He loved. In Christ’s sacrifice was brought about the greatest fruit since the work of creation itself, namely the redemption of a fallen race.

We know perfectly well that some of those who died in conflict would have got out of this particular duty if they could have done so. They did not want to be there. Nonetheless, they were there, and they did die in the service of their country and their fellow human beings back home. They laid down their lives for others, and greater love has no man than that.

Whatever our political views about the two World Wars and subsequent conflicts, whatever we think about how things have developed since those wars were lost and won, those men and women who died whilst responding to their country’s call of duty gave their lives for others. In so doing, whether they were Christian believers or not, whether they intended to follow in Christ’s footsteps or not, they followed Our Lord to Calvary and died for others.

Their sacrifices have since borne much fruit, and the goodness of God has flowed through them and on into the world which has continued to teem with life. Our job now is to pray for their souls in Purgatory, and to remember their parting words: ‘When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today.’