



DEDICATION OF THE ABBEY CHURCH

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, October 5th, 2024)

Zachæe, festinans descende...
Zacchaeus, make haste and come down...
(Lk 19:5)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

A COMBINATION OF CIRCUMSTANCES has led us to celebrate the Dedication of our abbey church today, and not on the 12th of October, which is the traditional date in the Congregation of Solesmes. Seventy years ago took place inside and outside these walls the magnificent rite of the dedication.

Why such a ceremony in so old and noble a church? The destruction of the nave and the reconstruction work our Trappist brothers had undertaken throughout the second half of the 19th century made this ceremony necessary. They had planned everything for this day, but a sectarian government forbade the ceremony on its very eve.

The dedication of a building, its consecration to God exclusively, is an act in which heaven meets the earth. The Old Testament already mentions this rite, setting apart a place in which henceforth will dwell a special presence of God. This rite however is fully carried out only with the mystery of the Incarnation: God comes among us clothed with our human nature, namely, a man made of flesh and blood, and possessed with a soul. God has made Himself one of us. In that sense,

Bethlehem is the first church of Christendom. And the very pure bosom of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Throne of Wisdom and Ark of the Covenant, is the place in which this human nature was conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit, and in which it developed. Celebration of the Mass is therefore at the heart of the ceremony of the dedication of a church.

In a providential way, 1954 was a Marian Year. The first one in the history of the Church, it was celebrated on the occasion of the centenary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception dogma. Archbishop Joseph Charles Lefèbvre, Archbishop of Bourges, considered the dedication of the Fontgombault church to be the greatest event in honour of Mary during this holy year.

The chronicle of the monastery recorded its details. The ceremony had been minutely prepared for months, both in the souls through Father Abbot's conferences, as well as in the various premises in which it was due to take place, the church itself, its vicinity, the chapter where was to be held the vigil near the relics of the saints due to be inserted into the various altars. In a word, the whole house had been cleaned to receive this event and those who were to attend it.

Yet, if man dedicates places to receive in those the presence of God, we shouldn't forget that God made Himself a man for us men and for our salvation, as taught by the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. A church, which also often receives in its tabernacle the real presence of the Lord, is thus the privileged place for a salvific encounter of man with God. Let us willingly encounter Him by taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, or by taking time for adoration.

Too many churches today seem to be forsaken by men. Aren't they a reflection of so many human souls?

Since October 2nd, a documentary film has been released in a few movie theatres, called *Libres [Free]*¹. It consists of a series of interviews with Spanish monks and nuns. These figures of religious men and women, with sometimes rather atypical paths, bring us back to life's essential questions, questions that don't belong exclusively to monastic life, but which monks and

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJIEudQSmZA>

nuns will also encounter on their own paths. The richness of this especially accomplished work consists in sharing with us an answer coming from the cloister to these questions.

One conclusion is clear: God calls all men and women, even those who have put themselves in situations that seem to be, humanely speaking, beyond all recovery. “Nothing is impossible to God,”^a above all when what is at stake is the salvation of a soul. The price that was once and for all paid for our salvation, is the death on a cross, and the fruits of this death are poured out into each heart that opens itself to the mystery of God. The encounter of a man with God, our own encounter with Him, seems to be as unlikely as the call to Zacchaeus perched in his tree. What is astonishing, indeed, is that God, the almighty and eternal One, should address each of us.

a. *Lk* 1:37.

The unlikely has become likely and, we should even affirm it, common, as the second Vatican Council reminds us:

For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal mystery.^b

b. *Gaudium et spes*,
n. 22.

The Lord addresses therefore each man, as He addressed Zacchaeus: “Make haste and come down: for this day I must abide in thy house.” Isn’t it astounding that God, Who dwells in the heights of heaven, should address man asking him to climb down from where he was perched up? For such is our difficulty, our handicap: living perched up. God invites us to encounter Him today, in the present moment of our lives, in our humble duty of state. “For today I must abide in thy house.”^c What will our answer be?

c. *Lk* 19:5.

Zacchaeus’ eagerness fills us with wonder. His life changes radically. It is not said that he has forsaken his trade, at least not immediately. No. But what a change! Joy enters into him and his house, whereas some of the lookers-on are seized by murmuring: “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”^d

d. *Lk* 19:7.

God’s calling resounds inside each of us... It is astonishing. What is incomprehensible is that each of us doesn’t strive to

receive this calling.

A story reported in the documentary film we have mentioned is luminous. It is the testimony of a nun who entered late monastic life, and just a few months after her entry was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of cancer.

Suddenly, I realised that Christ was alive. That's all... Christ is alive. And at this thought, I felt my heart exploding... Because I told myself, "Christ is alive, and you, where are you?"

This morning, this very same question is addressed to each of us: "And you, where are you?"

Amen.

