+

Dedication of the Abbey Church

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean Pateau
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, October 12th, 2026)

Oportet me manere…
I must abide…
(*Lk* **19**:5)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

When the sun isn't beating down with its powerful rays, making the atmosphere unbreathable, the central squares of Mediterranean cities are teeming with life. Merchants, strollers, the poor, and the injured can be found there. Jericho is no exception to this rule. But on this particular day, a special gathering is stirring the city. A rabbi has just arrived, preceded by his renown. A crowd has assembled. Perhaps he will perform some miracles, some healings?

At the other end of the square, a small man also wanted to be part of the spectacle. He, too, longed to see the rabbi. His chances were slim. The crowd was large. As a tax collector, he wasn't well-liked by his fellow citizens and couldn't count on anyone's goodwill. So, he had the idea of climbing a sycamore tree so he could observe the scene at his leisure.

Yes, there was definitely life in Jericho that day.

Yet neither this large crowd nor Zacchaeus knew what occupied Jesus, what motivated His coming. He stopped and considered the sycamore tree. Jesus had a plan: "Zacchaeus,

make haste and come down: for this day I must abide in thy house."

With one word, "abide," Jesus stills the commotion around Him. Life comes to a standstill. Zacchaeus, however, comes down and welcomes the Lord into his home.

Jesus asked to abide in Zacchaeus's house. Everyone was dismayed. Not him: he was a sinner. The life that had animated the square had vanished. Miracles had been expected. As Jesus settled into Zacchaeus's house, a murmur spread through the hearts of those who had surrounded Him just moments before.

Zacchaeus, on the contrary, the one who had died, returns to life, to true life. Not the life he once sustained with money taken from taxes, but the life that springs from the presence of God within. Jesus now abides in Zacchaeus's heart, in his home, spreading salvation there.

The Church has chosen this episode from the life of Jesus for the Feast of the Dedication of churches. The church is the place where Jesus abides under the consecrated species in the tabernacle. It is also a place where the sacraments that transmit grace and effect salvation are received, in particular the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance.

In his Vespers homily delivered at Notre-Dame de Paris on September 25th, Pope Leo referred to the cathedral and every church as the central place of Christian life:

> Brothers and sisters, we must not forget that this cathedral, like every other church, was built for the purpose of prayer and the worship of God. It is the place where the Christian community celebrates the highest form of prayer and worship, renewing in the Eucharist the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. This cathedral is not merely a stone structure to be admired; instead, it lives by the sacred mystery celebrated within it. Without the liturgy, it would lose its soul. […] Here the Church appears for what she is, namely a living organism, a believing community that gathers into its praise everything that culture and tradition have handed down to her. The Church is a body which, through her celebration, tells each person the reason for her existence.

The Pope thus makes the transition from the church of stone to the Church, the mystical body of Christ, founded by Him, the Bride of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. Composed of men and women of all times, she is a reality that is both visible and spiritual, without sin but not without sinners, a communion of saints, a universal sacrament of salvation. Therefore, each of her members on earth advances on a path of conversion. The Pope invites us to this:

> This call to conversion also concerns the Church herself as she makes her earthly pilgrimage. She must have the courage to begin with herself. In order to heal the deep wounds, infidelities and painful errors that have occurred within her, we must humbly place ourselves under the Lord's purifying gaze. Recognising our own faults is essential to our spiritual growth. As St. Augustine wrote, "Do not be content with what thou art, if thou wantest to become what thou art not yet" (*Disc.* 169, 15, 18).[a]

a. Mass, Lourdes, September 27th, 2026.

Let us be careful not to dwell on the cumbersome aspects of an institution that encompasses the world. Let us remember that the Church is first and foremost a Mother, our Mother, who day after day gives birth to us in the life of God, an educator through the liturgy and the Magisterium, an intercessor for the whole world, a missionary to all people. Addressing priests, deacons, and religious, the Holy Father called them to mission:

> Heirs by grace, brothers and sisters gathered here, it is now up to each of you, this praying and living assembly, to become the flesh and voice of this promise. Clergy and consecrated persons of France, you are called to be the first guardians of this open house, the living stones of a Church that hopes and does not fear the future.[b]

b. Vespers, Paris, September 25th, 2026.

The call applies to everyone. At the heart of the Church are also the sick and the poor. The Pope does not forget them:

> Dear brothers and sisters who are sick, I want to tell you that you are not a burden. You are the beating heart of our humanity and a precious treasure for the Church.[c]

c. Accueil Notre-Dame, Lourdes, September 27th, 2026.

> Dear friends who are sick, so many of you here in Lourdes are familiar with suffering. You can live your trials and pains in this spirit of offering, and so take part in the redemptive work that the world so greatly needs. In this way, you are truly at the heart of the Church, and your role is irreplaceable.[d]

d. Mass, Lourdes, September 27th, 2026.

A few words whispered by a priest in the ear of a seminarian he was accompanying to the altar on the day of his ordination express, it seems to me, the feelings that should fill our hearts before the mystery of the Church: "Look, how beautiful your bride is."[e]

e. Fr. François Potez, *La Grave Allégresse*.

How can we not finally mention her who received the title of Mother of the Church? The Holy Father offers her to us as a guide:

> The holy Mother of God watches over your journey, she shelters the Church beneath her mantle of tenderness and, as the radiant Morning Star, guides your steps, so that with joy she may bring you to new birth in the very life of her Son Jesus.[f]

f. Mass, Lourdes, September 27th, 2026.

Amen.

