



Episode 19: The Door of the Church

SUMMARY

The door of the church is not simply a practical or pragmatic thing; it is not simply for entry and exit. The door of every church is a sacramental sign that reminds us of our future entry into paradise. The Church's worship always moves us in the direction of our heavenly homeland.

Every church is dedicated before it is put into service for worship; the prayer of dedication tells us what the church building and its furnishings signify.

From the moment of the opening of the doors, the crossing of the threshold, of the entering in, the doorway becomes significant. This is the place where couples about to be united in Holy Matrimony are greeted by the Church's official representative. This is the place, too, where that same couple will be greeted again as they carry their children for Baptism. Here, again, is the station where mourners pause as they carry their deceased loved one a final time to church for the Mass of Christian burial. Every Catholic, crossing this threshold, pauses to dip fingers into holy water and trace the Sign of the Cross.

The Roman Pontifical

Because the church is a visible building, this house is a special sign of the pilgrim Church on earth and an image of the Church dwelling in heaven.

The Order of the Dedication of a Church, n. 2

A church, as its nature requires, should be suitable for sacred celebrations, dignified, evincing a noble beauty, not mere costly display, and it should truly be a sign and symbol of heavenly realities.

The Order of the Dedication of a Church, n. 3

The door of the church to be dedicated should be closed.

The Order of the Dedication of a Church, n. 29

When the door is unlocked, the Bishop invites the people to enter the church...

The Order of the Dedication of a Church, n. 34

Otto Von Simson

"The church is, mystically and liturgically, an image of heaven... The authoritative language of the dedication ritual of a church explicitly relates the vision of the Celestial City, as

described in the Book of Revelation, to the building that is to be erected.”

IN THE TRADITION

“O gates, lift high your heads;
grow higher, ancient doors.
Let him enter the king of glory!
Who is this king of glory?
He, the Lord of hosts,
he is the king of glory.”

Psalm 24:9-10

“Enter the gates of the Lord with thanksgiving,
His courts with songs of praise.”

Psalm 100:4

“The way lies open from earth to heaven. Let
the prophet’s trumpet sound again... The King
of glory will make his way in, to intercede for us
at the Father’s right hand.”

Saint Augustine
Exposition on Psalm 24 (23)

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “The Church is a sheepfold whose one and indispensable door is Christ. It is a flock of which God Himself foretold He would be the shepherd, and whose sheep, although ruled by human shepherds; are nevertheless continuously led and nourished by Christ Himself, the Good Shepherd and the Prince of the shepherds, who gave His life for the sheep.”

Lumen Gentium, n°. 6

✠ “In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims ...”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 8

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Grant that, with all our brothers and sisters who will celebrate the divine mysteries in this church,
we may come at last to the heavenly Jerusalem.
Dedication of a Church

Almighty ever-living God,
pour out your grace upon this place
and extend the gift of your help
to all who call upon you,
that the power of your word and
of the Sacraments
may strengthen here
the hearts of all the faithful.

Collect for the Dedication of a Church

Here may the Gospel of peace resound
and the sacred mysteries be celebrated,
so that your faithful,
formed by the word of life and by divine grace
on their pilgrim way through the earthly city,
may merit to reach the eternal Jerusalem.
Intercessions, Eucharistic Prayer III for the Dedication of a Church

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Many of the Church’s sacramental rites begin at the door of the church. Which ones can you name?
2. The crossing of a threshold represents the progression from one place or from one state to another. What significant crossings in the Sacred Scriptures are symbolized in the sacramental life?

FOR FURTHER READING

Otto Von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, (Princeton University Press, 1988).