

The Feast of the Dedication of the  
Lateran Basilica in Rome

*“Do the thing you fear, and the death of fear is certain.”*

November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008

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**Introduction:**

*“Do the thing you fear, and the death of fear is certain.”* These are the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American poet who was born in the early 1800's. (Pause) *“Do the thing you fear, and the death of fear is certain.”*

(Pause)

Today's question is simple: *what do you fear the most about being Christian?* Before you answer, *“why, nothing at all,”* consider this. Today in our church we celebrate a feast with which many of us may not be familiar. It's known as the *Feast of the Dedication of the St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome*. That's a long title, I realize, but consider the impact of the event that we remember on this day. Almost 1700 years ago (on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 325 AD, to be exact) this Cathedral was dedicated. Its dedication meant that Christians could *for the first time* practice their Christian faith openly *without the fear of death*. Christians were finally free to worship Jesus Christ publicly, openly, in their Churches.

**Bridge:**

Now, here we sit, one-thousand-seven-hundred years later, and we do so freely. There is no fear of being put to death simply because we were here. In this building, as we worship, there is little to no fear about being Christian.

(Pause)

But what about when we leave here? We may not leave here fearful of our death, but what *are we* fearful of? *Where does fear stop us from living the faith that we profess?* Because, whether or not we want to admit it, the fear is real. It may not be the fear of death, but there are other fears that you and I struggle with:

1. The fear of *rejection*
2. The fear of *being labeled*
3. The fear of *being talked about* behind our backs
4. The fear of *being made fun of*
5. The fear of *being left out of something*

These are our fears and they are real. So, if we want to take this feast day that commemorates the dedication of a building so long ago in history and make it real for ourselves here today, then just ask yourself, *what do you fear the most about being Christian?*

The only way to figure this out is to think about where in our public life do we back down from doing or saying what God wants us to do or say. It's easy to practice our faith in private, but go back to the statement that we made here a few weeks ago: *"Jesus wants followers, not admirers."* It's very easy to admire Jesus from a distance. It's in the day to day public following that we meet fear and risk.

### **Practical Life-Challenge:**

The best way for me to explain this is to use real images. Consider the Confirmation class that I'm teaching right now, for example; or the group of almost 30 teenagers who will be attending an optional 3 day retreat in a couple of weeks. When we're together in those groups, a certain trust builds, and everyone feels free to express their Christian beliefs. The same is true for the Monday night adult RENEW group that

has been meeting here in our parish for years now. We need places and moments like these to go to, but the hard part starts when we leave the group and return to everyday life.

And let's be honest about this too: as Christians and as Catholics there are some issues that we're really quick to stand up for, but there are others that we back down from. Let's be honest. For example, it's very easy for me to stand up here and say to you "abortion is morally wrong, always." Our faith teaches us, calls us to respect all human life from conception to natural death. And the right to life of the unborn is primary. But there are other life issues too that many of us often back away from. Think about the last time you were in a conversation and the topic was whether or not someone should be put to death for a crime that they committed. Think about the last time that you were in a conversation (or heard others cracking jokes about) someone over the issue of sexuality and whether or not someone is "gay" or "straight." Think about the last time someone said something in your presence or sent you a text message to your cell phone that contained some kind of racial slur or joke. (Pause) If we're gonna respect the dignity of human life, then we must respect the dignity of all human persons. We won't always agree, and we don't have to, but it's also about can we talk about these things without meanness.

Part of me feels like these words today won't really move any of us, because we live in a world where a lot of us take a lot of risks. It's just that, the risks that many of us take are the wrong ones. We often risk harm to our bodies, our minds, our lives. And we do it, unfortunately, without fear.

But that's not the kind of risk Jesus was talking about.

Do you and I want to be the "*best Christians possible?*" Then, ask yourself where you're backing down. Ask yourself what you fear the most, and remember Emerson's words, for they are so true: "***Do the***

*thing you fear, and the death of that fear is certain.”*