



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
**in the City of New York**  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
**[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)**

**Sunday, October 6, 2019**  
*The Feast of the Dedication of the Church*

*Solemn Pontifical Eucharist*  
*at 11:00 a.m.*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Mathew Moretz, *Associate Rector*  
on  
1 Chronicles 29:6–19, Ephesians 2:19–22, and John 2:13–22  
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### **Feast of Dedication**

“All things come of thee, O Lord. And of thine own have we given thee.” Amen.

On Nov. 21, 1911, with the ashes of the previous church still lingering in the hearts of the parish, if not in the air, Bishop Greer laid the cornerstone of the fourth Saint Thomas Church, the one in which we worship today. Less than two years later, October 4, 1913, the Dedication of the Church took place with the first service at this High Altar presided by the Eighth rector, Dr. Ernest Stires. After the service, a contemporary architect, George Ford, wrote that the newly completed church was “clothed with a mantle of inspiration, a masterpiece of craftsmanship, a work of genius.” My quibble would be that ours is a church that is not just “clothed” with inspiration, but one that is a veritable product of inspiration, an expression of the inspiration of our forebears from God that reaches us even now with a symphony of stone and wood and glass that still sings of God’s glory, lifting our hearts to sing of the same.

The inspiration to fashion splendid, abiding, and holy spaces like these for God, finds its primeval moment three thousand years ago in the pledge of King David to build a Temple for God in Jerusalem according to our reading from First Chronicles. It was Solomon’s temple to build, his young son, the future king. But it was David who ensured that Solomon had everything that he needed, all the gold and silver and iron and brass and onyx and glistening stones, like a sous-chef of a great banquet setting out the ingredients before the chef arrives. David also secured support from the chief of the fathers and the princes of the tribes of Israel, the leaders of the community who all gave of their resources willingly, a source of great joy. This commitment of resources was not only a capital campaign, but their way to put God first as a community.

We also read that getting all these materials into place was not enough for David. He knew that certain spiritual ingredients were foundational. That without these, the whole edifice would fall. He testifies that his heart is set towards God, and he prays that the people’s hearts may be “prepared unto” God, as well. He then prays before the transfer of the crown: “And give unto Solomon, my son, a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace (or in other words the Temple), for the which I have made provision.” Like the theme of our Annual Appeal, David’s prayer is that Solomon might *put God first* as he establishes the Temple. David knew that no matter how ingenious the plan, no matter how much a masterpiece of craftsmanship the Temple would become, that there had to be an interior fortification of the spirit, a continuity of holy desire running from his heart, to Solomon’s, and then to all those who would come after them, like an invisible steel beam running through generations of hearts, and then, securing the Temple’s walls, a mystical steel forged by hearts that burn for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Every Temple, every Church, needs not only to be dedicated on the first day for it to stand, but it needs to be re-dedicated, continually, every generation, at the very least. You know, it wasn’t long after this church was dedicated that a certain re-dedication occurred. Eleven years later, the un-buttressed north wall started to bulge dangerously. At great expense they fortified the wall using steel beams above every pair of north aisle columns. And not long after that, the

City started blasting under Fifty-third street for the new subway, and this destabilized the ground under our feet. So we thought it wise to place a steel beam under the High Altar. Although it would have broken the hearts of the architects who had intended this place to be stone on stone, a kind of Gothic purity, the steel of Saint Thomas is an internal and hidden sign of the re-dedication of our people to this holy place: an act of the heart, and then the purse, and then the hands. Every time we marshal our community's resources for this place, whether it be providing for a project that will last a hundred years, or whether it be providing for just one more year, every gift is a re-dedication of ourselves and this place to God.

But maintaining a temple, or a church, is no guarantee of faithfulness, or being on the right track, I'm afraid to say. Our Gospel reading this morning presents an uncomfortable example of this by telling us of a highly charged confrontation between our Lord Jesus and the authorities of the Temple of his day. By then, this was the second Temple in Jerusalem: built to replace the first that Solomon had built which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Jesus' disruption of this cherished place, turning over the tables which exchanged money for various sacred transactions, releasing the oxen and the sheep from certain death (quite the good shepherd from the animals' perspective!), this disruption was both a rebuke and an incisive act that would have ground the Temple ceremonies to a halt and, for a time, would have frozen the economy of the entire sacred precinct.

Why would Jesus do this? Because of his zeal, his disciple's said, because of his zeal for his Father's house. He wanted it to be better. He wanted it to live up to its promise. But the activity of the Temple had strayed from God's desire, one of mercy and healing. Jesus wept over this, you know. He wept at how the Temple had become a platform for political and financial corruption, tied up in knots under occupation by a brutal empire. He wept at how the well-meaning and the faithful pursued purity, cleanliness, and sacrifice in ways that didn't touch their hearts, even in ways that caused people to get hurt. The letter of the law was interfering with the spirit of the law. And the stones of the Temple had become stumbling blocks on the path to God and a dividing wall for the community. But Jesus had set his face toward Jerusalem so that the Temple might be cleansed, renewed, salvaged for God's purposes. But, alas, we know all too well the consequences of Jesus' action. This "scene" was so effective that the enemies he made that day would have only multiplied.

Before his enemies could trap him, though, he was sure to preach about another temple, "the temple of his body," he called it. A mystical structure, we now know, with him as the chief cornerstone, and his friends as the living stones. He made sure to make provision for this community to be built, a community to which we belong today. Before his enemies could march him beyond the temple grounds to death on unclean Golgotha, he made sure to show his disciples a new sort of sacrifice, one employing, not doves, or sheep, or oxen, or criminals, but, instead, bread and wine. Marvelously, bread and wine that they knew as his body, an exchange with God that had no need of holy ground or a temple's altar. A humble supper table anywhere in the world would suffice. And so, holy meal, by holy meal, that mystical Temple grew, stone by stone, made up of people that have longed for God to feed them, to heal them, made up of those that keep returning to the table and rededicating their hearts to God in that Holy Temple, hidden in God and in us. You and I, and all of those who share this bread and drink this cup, the living, the dead, and those yet to be born, we all belong to a community that both worships in this Temple and somehow becomes part of that Temple, too, baptism by baptism, communion by communion, annual pledge by annual pledge, a great litany of re-dedications of our lives. And in all this we become essentially mortared into that hidden Temple of which this place and every church is in comparison a mere shadow. Buildings and cities may fall. Nations and empires may dissolve. But the Temple of Christ's life endures. Indeed, that Temple proliferates with our cooperation, supported by our gifts and our lives, made one in Christ. But our gift comes second. It is God's gift that comes first. For this church is everlastingly supported not by our stone or steel, but chiefly by holy wood, by the wooden beams of Jesus' cross, a sign of human brutality transfigured into a sign of divine and human love of the most enduring strength we know. Upon those beams of wood he gave his life so that our lives might become a gift to God, so that we might put God first in all things, so that we might be his friends, and each others' friends, so that we might forgive and be forgiven, so that we might be channels of God's mercy blazing in the dark. In that spirit, we renew our calling to be stewards of a place both seen and unseen, rededicating this place and our hearts, so that God may be all in all.

"All things come of thee, O Lord. And of thine own have we given thee." Amen.