

Rev. Derek Fairman

6th Sunday of Easter C (Beautiful City)

On this 6th Sunday of Easter, the second reading from the Book of Revelation gives us a vision of Heaven that fills our imaginations with beauty and fills our hearts with joy. In this vision, St. John was taken to a high mountain, where the holy city Jerusalem came down out of Heaven. St. John described the New Jerusalem as radiant, filled with jewels and needing no sun, since the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, is the only source of light that is needed.

The New Jerusalem, the holy city that came down out of Heaven from God, fulfills a characteristic of the old Jerusalem. The old city of Jerusalem was renowned for its beauty, especially in the time of King Solomon. The Queen of the South, the Queen of Sheba, once came to Jerusalem, and she was overwhelmed by the grandeur of the Temple, the royal palace, and the general beauty of King Solomon's court. She was also impressed by his wisdom, for which Solomon had gained a great reputation.

Later, Psalm 48 also described the beauty and splendor of the city, which put foreign kings to flight. The psalmist invites the one praying the psalm to examine the city, to remember its beauty and grandeur. The city of Jerusalem was known as a place of justice and learning. We might remember King Solomon's just judgments, and his wisdom. By drawing foreign leaders to the city, a light would then extend to all parts of the earth, whenever they returned home.

However, as the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel would later explain, the city was like an arrogant and vain woman. The Lord had chosen her, and endowed her with great beauty, but she grew enamored of her beauty. She came from humble origins, but became vain, and proud. She used that beauty for evil, not for good. Whenever the city was attacked by the Babylonians, in response to her sins, she lost that beauty and renown. Jerusalem was humiliated, and the people mourned that loss, as described in the Book of Lamentations.

However, a new Daughter Zion, a new Jerusalem, would come. Whenever the Lord came down from Heaven, He dwelt in a new city, and this city contained all beauty within her. The Virgin Mary is the New Daughter Zion, the true Daughter Zion. The soul of the Virgin Mary was filled with the beauty and grandeur that the city of Jerusalem once held, before it was corrupted with idolatry, sin, pride, and vanity. Her soul was filled with the beauty of every virtue, but also the harmony with which the virtues fit together, and worked together. In this beautiful and radiant city, the Lord Jesus dwelt when He came down from Heaven.

Now, the Virgin Mary's beauty and radiance extends to her body. Her body, which was conceived without stain, and which later held within her the One the universe cannot contain, blossomed into eternal life. Although her body contained a certain radiance in this life, it possesses now an even greater radiance in Heaven.

The beauty that we can imagine as we hear the second reading, concerning the beauty and radiance of Heaven, was already in Mary. There is a kind of consonance between the beauty of Heaven, which brings the beauty and radiance of the old city of Jerusalem to fulfillment, and Mary. Mary's beauty and splendor are fulfillments of what was foretold long ago, which we will see manifested in Heaven, and for which we long now on earth. This beauty and radiance is but a reflection of the Lord's light and grandeur; Mary is not the source of the light, but she reflects it.

This teaches us about the virtues and about the beauty in our own souls. If Heaven is a place of light and beauty, then how could it contain the darkness of sin and mistrust in the souls of those who are there? Heaven is not about radiance on the outside, but darkness on the inside of people's souls; there must be a consonance between people's souls in Heaven, and the beauty and light that is there in Heaven.

If we are to shine with the light of Heaven, then we must open our hearts to what the Lord Jesus has in store for us. We must not only avoid sin, as important as that is, but we must trust in God. St. John's vision of a radiant and beautiful city can begin in our hearts and souls now. We do not have to wait for the end of time to have light in our souls. Faith, obedience, and trust help the light to grow ever brighter in our souls.

As we approach the altar, we all like Heaven as a place of light and peace and joy. We like the idea of living in Heaven, where there is perfect light and radiance and beauty. Yet, how is it going to work, that we live in a place of perfect light, if there is darkness within us? There cannot be the darkness in our souls in Heaven, which is why Purgatory is important. Still, the Lord gives us time here on earth to let Him chase away the darkness, to ensure that the light in our souls is not dimmed by any darkness.

In the journey to let go of darkness, the Mother of God is our help. Her radiance does not come from herself; she only reflects the Lord's light. Like the ancient Jerusalem, her radiance and beauty are means to draw us closer to herself and to her Son. Despite her radiance and beauty, she was never vain, never proud, but only eager to serve the Lord in humility. She can teach us to avoid vanity, pride, and to shine with virtue.