

Rev. Derek Fairman

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (City of Peace and Justice)

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah depicts the city of Jerusalem, and that the city of Jerusalem is like a mother through whom the Lord brings comfort to His people. This was no doubt meant to be comforting to people but also somewhat perplexing. The people had looked upon Jerusalem as a kind of mother, since it was a spiritual home which they would visit three times a year. Also, they received the Lord's blessings in Jerusalem.

Yet the idea of Jerusalem being a source of comfort was in stark contrast to the situation in which the people found themselves during and after the Babylonian Exile. Jerusalem was a source of pain and a deep wound in the people's hearts. They thought that they could rely upon the city and the Lord's presence to keep them safe and happy. The city of Jerusalem was thought impregnable, inviolable, that no army would ever conquer the city, because God dwelt there, or so the people thought.

Imagine their dismay whenever the city was conquered, and the Temple where God dwelt was destroyed. The holy city which was their pride and joy was reduced to ashes and contempt. The people likely felt betrayed, as if the Lord did not keep His promise to be with them. Perhaps the prophet Isaiah's vision seemed distant, a vision that would never come to pass. They had relied upon the Lord and the city, and the floor fell from beneath their feet, so it seemed.

There was a reason that all this misfortune fell upon the city and the Temple. The kings did not place their trust in the Lord; idolatry crept into the Temple. It was also a place where justice did not reside. The prophet Isaiah saw in his time the corruption, favoritism, and injustice which took place in the kingly and priestly powers. The city was meant to be a place of justice, because Jerusalem was the place where the Law should have prevailed. We might remember King Solomon and the case of two mothers each claiming a baby was hers, and how King Solomon rendered justice. The Chosen People were meant to be a light to the nations, but instead the kind of injustice which the other nations practiced made its way into the capital city.

Because the city of Jerusalem, Daughter Zion, was becoming increasingly corrupt, the Lord's presence could no longer remain there. The Lord left the Temple and the city, as the prophet Ezekiel saw in his visions. The people had to learn that the Lord was with them, but they also had to follow His Law. The name Jerusalem means that it is a city of peace. The people would enjoy peace so long as there was also justice.

After its destruction, the prophet Isaiah foresaw a time whenever the people could look to the city again and find comfort. Isaiah spoke once about driving swords into plowshares, and about people coming from all over to find justice on Mount Zion. The prophet also foresaw that the lion would lie down with the lamb. The prophet Isaiah could foresee a time when Daughter Zion would fulfill her vocation to be a place to find justice and peace.

The prophet Isaiah's vision was fulfilled in one way in the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary fulfilled this vision of Jerusalem as a mother in her own spiritual motherhood. In the Virgin Mary, we can find comfort and we can find true joy. Whenever we feel like life is unfair, or we are having a difficult time, the Virgin Mary is our spiritual mother, and she takes us into her arms, so that we can find the comfort and blessings we seek. She is that spiritual mother, because she also fulfills the prophet Isaiah's vision of Virgin Daughter Zion.

She is the true Daughter Zion, the Virgin Daughter Zion, where justice and peace reside. Sometimes we think of justice as harmony between two people or two parties, which it is. It is also a right relation with God. But there are rules and principles which make it possible for two parties to be right or in harmony with one another. Whenever one inculcates these principles into one's soul, then the virtue of justice resides in a person. For instance, rather than making restitution when a person steals something from another, and enacting an external justice, the virtue of justice means that people do not even think about or desire stealing from others. The Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius recognized this virtue of justice as one of the cardinal virtues.

In Mary, the virtue of justice resides perfectly. Thanks to her Immaculate Conception, she was righteous in the eyes of God, and she was in right relation with others. She desired to do only what God wanted, and followed God's commandments as He wanted. Whereas disobedience, and disregard for God's commandments, by the priests and kings existed in the old Daughter Zion, the city of Jerusalem, justice and obedience flourished in the soul of the Virgin Mary. Whereas the old Daughter Zion had trouble maintaining her peace, and was subjected to infighting and foreign invaders, the Virgin Mary had peace in her soul because of her faith.

What about us? Perhaps we feel at times like the people to whom the prophet Isaiah spoke. We feel at times like we are left to fend for ourselves, or that somehow, we are better off trusting in ourselves rather than God. There are two things we should consider. The first is that maybe we have committed some serious sin, and we are dealing with the consequences of that sin. We cannot blame God for punishing us when we sin.

Another consideration is that the Lord is testing us. There are lessons in life that we need to learn, and some spiritual growth only happens when we are tested. The Virgin Mary suffered in her life, and she grew in her devotion to her Son rather than grew bitter or angry at God because of the injustice done to her Son. She maintained an inner peace and calm at the foot of the Cross despite everything that was happening.

Whenever we think about comfort and joy in the Church, the Church is a place where people feel that justice should prevail, and there should be a certain peace. This is true, and there is a certain fulfillment of Isaiah's vision in the Church. The principles are present in the Church, and yet there is the human element, and the principles are not always lived the way that they should be. We can be disappointed and discouraged whenever fairness, accountability, and justice are not taking place in the Church. Yet, we do not have to despair.

The prophet Isaiah's visions of perfect peace will come to fulfillment in Heaven. In Heaven, perfect peace will reside, and in Heaven, we will find our comfort. We will find comfort in God, and we will find a home there. However, Isaiah's vision of comfort can be found now in the Virgin Mary, who is the true Daughter Zion, and the Church at its personal best. What is true in Heaven is present in her soul now. Whenever we find disappointment in this world or in the Church, we can realize there is an even greater spiritual mother who will not disappoint.

As we approach the altar, we recognize our need for justice and fairness in society, and even within our own lives. We recognize our need for validation and comfort. The Lord gives us the comfort we need with an understanding Heart. The Lord is our refuge. He also gives us a refuge in our spiritual mother whenever we need her. We pray for the Church, for each other, and we ask the Lord to bring justice and peace to our world.