

Rev. Derek Fairman

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time A (Temple: Jewel of the Kingdom)

In the Gospel, the Lord gives us the parable of the merchant searching for fine pearls. The Lord sold all that He had, meaning He gave Himself entirely on the Cross, to purchase pearls of great price, meaning our souls. In a way, this could describe the Mother of God. Describing the Mother of God as a precious pearl relates to her role as the Lord's Temple

The Temple that Solomon built was known for its beauty. It was solidly built, made from the best wood, and some of it overlaid with gold inside. The outside was impressive in terms of its majesty, and how it dominated the top of Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The inside was finely decorated, with palm trees and other vegetation carved into the walls. It was beautifully illuminated by the candelabra lined with gold, which gave the sanctuary a warm glow.

The Temple was the great joy of the people, and its jewel. The Lord spoke to the prophet Ezekiel, that before the Temple was destroyed, there would be a sign. One sign was that his wife, the light of his eyes, died before he did. "The word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, with a sudden blow I am taking away from you the delight of your eyes, but do not mourn or weep or shed any tears" (Ezekiel 24:15-16). The Lord then spoke to the people, "I said to them, the word of the Lord came to me: Say to the house of Israel: Thus says the Lord God: I will now desecrate my sanctuary, the pride of your strength, the delight of your eyes, the concern of your soul" (Ezekiel 24:20-21a).

In time, the Jewish people would rebuild the Temple. It did not quite have the same beauty. The prophet Haggai asked, "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem like nothing in your eyes?" In time, however, the prophet explained, "Greater will be the glory of this house, the latter more than the former, says the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:3, 9). The glory of the Second Temple was greater, because the Lord Jesus visited the Second Temple many times.

Although the Second Temple had humble beginnings, and was desecrated by the invading Greek armies at the time of Judah Maccabee and his brothers, in time the people brought it to great beauty and honor. There were those who spoke to the Lord Jesus about the Second Temple, "While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings..." (Luke 21:5). Even in its modesty, the Temple was the heart of the people and the land, and their great joy.

In the Book of Revelation, the New Jerusalem which came down out of Heaven from God did not have a Temple, but it is described as gleaming with radiance, and includes many precious stones. The twelve gates of the city are described as twelve pearls, “each of the gates made from a single pearl...” (Revelation 21:21).

The Mother of God, the Temple who carried the Word of God within her for nine months, surpasses the two temples in Jerusalem. The Mother of God embodies the radiance of the New Jerusalem within her. Like the temples in Jerusalem, she was solidly built. She was finely and beautifully decorated within her soul, in the fullness of grace which she possessed, the virtues she possessed, and the way in which all these things came together and worked together in harmony within her. She was not adorned with costly stones, but with the different gifts which God had given her. St. Bonaventure once described each virtue in the soul of the Virgin Mary, comparing them to the various décor that adorned the temples in Jerusalem.

Rather than the warm glow of the candles that illuminated the sanctuary in the temples in Jerusalem, the flame of faith, which came from the Holy Spirit, illuminated the Virgin Mary’s heart. She possessed the beauty of motherhood, and the bond with her Son. She possessed the beauty of virginity. Now in Heaven, her soul, her body shine with radiance.

What about us? The Lord has given His life for ours. He has poured Himself out upon the Cross, so that we could have spiritual life. We can understand that the Lord did not give all He had for something trifling. He sought our souls, and give His life, because He found in each one of us, something of great price. There is no price that can be put upon the Lord’s Sacrifice for us, and how can we put a price on anyone?

We can forget just how precious we are to the Lord. Rather than appreciating that dignity which God has given us, we can be tempted to go down the path of impurity and indecency. The temples in Jerusalem, despite their splendor, were destroyed and desecrated. The Mother of God never was destroyed or desecrated by sin or impurity, but we can travel down that road.

As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord for providing us with a spiritual mother, who is a pearl that is beyond price, beyond this world. We thank the Lord for the beauty of the church in which we come to worship Him, and which reminds us of Heaven, whose beauty is beyond what we can imagine. We thank the Lord for all the ways that He brings peace and beauty and dignity to our souls. We ask the Lord to keep us faithful to Him, so that the radiance that shines in our souls will never dim, but grow more radiant.