



EASTER 6—C
9 May AD 2010 (Mothers' Day)

The reading: Revelation 21:9—14, 21-27

We are nearing the end of the six-week series of readings from the visions given to blessed John the Apostle. Last Sunday we beheld the new heaven and earth. And in particular this morning we see the new center of creation, Jerusalem the golden, a city of jewels, with gates of pearl. From the new creation the dark and foreboding sea is gone. Some have suggested the sea is a reference to the instability of human government. That it is gone in the new creation makes sense. (In Romans 13 Paul counsels respect for governing authority. By the time of John that government had begun to persecute Christians and we have no need of abusive government. The times had changed.)

This morning we are given a vision of *New Jerusalem*: she is arrayed as a bride ready for her husband; she is the wife of the Lamb; she is the Church in glory. We see some interesting parallels here. At the end of the fourth Gospel John takes Mary as his own mother; among Jesus' final words from the cross are those which entrust his mother to John. Here John would urge us to take Jerusalem, not as our mother, but as our bride, our love.

She is a beauty without equal. Unlike our cities, her gates are open continually, and there is no night. Gone are the heavenly lights of Genesis, here God and the Lamb are her light. Fulfilled are the words of the Psalm, "... *in your light do we see light.*" (36:9) And through her storied gates the saved of every nation on earth come and go—they are your spiritual brothers and sisters—and they will be carrying with them the wealth of the nations with which to honor the Lamb.

But within *New Jerusalem*, the perfect city there is no temple.

There is no doubt in my mind that THE REVELATION was written after the sack of Jerusalem but sometime before its final destruction. After the days of Paul, the Jews revolted against increasingly oppressive Roman rule (AD 66), and they managed to hold on to Jerusalem in the face of siege until AD 70. That's when Titus retook the city. Titus is son of emperor Vespasian, and future Caesar. Titus destroyed the Temple and sent its treasures to his father. The city would suffer almost complete destruction during the rebellion 132-135 led by Simon Bar Kokhba. Then the Jews would be sent into exile (again) from their beloved city.

The Apostle John and his readers are living through difficult times—times of great cultural change. But not all John's flock experienced the fall of Jerusalem as a personal tragedy. But they would hear of what happened to the Jewish capital and its Temple. They lived at a time when the emperor was worshiped as the embodiment of the empire; he was god; he was their spiritual father. Citizens were expected to burn token incense before the Emperor's image as an act of loyalty like we salute the flag. Christians who could not call Caesar *LORD* stayed out of public places. This is the root of the persecutions.

But the Temple is gone! Jerusalem's Temple is no more.

You have lived without a temple in Jerusalem all your lives. So have your parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. The world has gone on turning for nineteen hundred years without a temple in Jerusalem. But imagine what the loss of that great building meant for first century Jews and Jewish-Christians. That sacred building was the center of their world. It was to them what the capitol dome represents to Washington; what the twin towers were to Manhattan—more. The Temple was a cultural and spiritual anchor. It was how they viewed God.

Remember Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well? They spoke about the one true place of worship, Jerusalem. Sure there were synagogues all over the place; they are houses of study and prayer. But the Temple was *the* place of worship. It was the sign of God's presence, His dwelling among his people.

Jewish Christians will especially be shaken by the news and will struggle with the meaning of such an event. What I said last week holds true still; God is in the contradictions. All things are in his hands. And, though there is no Temple, God is there still. For, "*the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb have become its temple.*" (v. 22)

There is message here. The death and resurrection of Christ Jesus make sacrifices and temples obsolete. "The Lamb who was slain has begun his reign." The holy place could (in the new age) be at best only a symbol, a mere reminder of what was; a monument to God's covenants, and how he provided for his people in the Old Testament era. But it was *and is* no longer necessary. In the Cross God dealt the final blow to sin and death. There is a sense in which we might say the destruction of the Temple was God's will. That age was over. God had used Roman brute force for his own purposes.

The buck stops at Christ. The passage of time has helped us understand this. It would take those in the first century a little time to understand, to readjust. Eventually they will see that Jesus is the epitome and embodiment of every sacrifice—every sin and guilt offering, every thank offering, every morning and evening sacrifice. Jesus is the end of it all, he comes to fulfill the law and the prophets. (Mt. 5:17)

Yes, Jesus is our paschal Lamb, the once and for all time perfect sacrifice put forward by God himself. The old system came to an end in theory Easter morning. It came to an end practically speaking, that day in the year 70. Its fate was sealed in the seventh century (?) when he allowed Islam to build their shrine on the sight, over the holy of holies.

And so for us, it's all about Jesus, and it has very little to do with buildings. In case you haven't gotten the message yet, it's not what you do that matters one iota. But it's always about what Jesus has done—what God has done for us in Jesus his Son. He has conquered Satan and won for you a home beyond all earthly beauty and perfection.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia

May he reign forever. Amen

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