



The Second Sunday of Lent (C)
February 28, 2010
Luke 13:31-35
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato

+May we wake from slumber and arise for the new day dawning. May we open our hearts to you O God, our strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Many years ago, I conducted the choir for which a contemporary folk hymn had been written. That hymn is still in use in several traditions and is called, "The City of God." It was written by Dan Schutte. It's a very upbeat hymn and is often the recessional or song of sending forth.

It came to my mind this past week as I was praying with the Gospel for today. I must say that as a piece of sacred music, it is not one of my favorites but the text is powerful. The refrain of the hymn is:

"Let us build the city of God
May our tears be turned into dancing.
For the Lord, our light and our love
Has turned the night into day." – Dan Schutte

The reference to building a city is one that all of us can relate to. Most if not all of us live in a city or a town where many people live, pay taxes, buy houses or condos, rent apartments, grocery shop, go to the bank and the post office, and the list goes on.

Today's Gospel is about a city, the City of Jerusalem, and its long and controversial political, economic and spiritual history. Perhaps, it's about much more than the City of Jerusalem and Jesus weeping over it. The Gospel tells us that Jerusalem was notorious for killing prophets and stoning those who were sent to it.

As tough as this language is from Jesus, the text goes on to one of my favorite passages in all of scripture: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..." This tender and motherly image of God is beautifully descriptive as well as a powerful example of the love that Jesus so longed to share in Jerusalem.

Here we have two contrasting pictures of religious zeal--Jerusalem and Jesus. Religious passion drove Jerusalem to murderous ends. Religious passion moved prophets and Jesus to fulfill God's mission at the cost of their lives in the City of Jerusalem. Jerusalem may have killed one prophet after another, but God continued to send others.

God is a gracious God who is like a mother hen making repeated attempts to gather her chicks under her wings. Even when the chicks go their own way, God still coaxes and pleads but does not coerce.

A question for us might be whether or not the church today will follow the example of Jerusalem or Jesus. Will we raise our voices in this world to assert our power to defend our turf? Or will we adopt the model of faithfulness to God's purposes even if it means vulnerability and rejection by others? We who are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus are faced with a challenge.

You and I know that we can reject God's gracious invitation. Yet, God still calls us to relationship while still allowing us to go our way. Our Tradition tells us that God's final judgment will eventually come and that it has a redemptive purpose here and now.

God's judgment is always tempered with grace, mercy, and hope. A mother hen persuades, coaxes, warns and pronounces judgment in hopes of protecting her chicks. So too does God continue to hope that we will respond to God in humility, repent and be saved. God patiently invites and waits, hoping that we will say "yes" to the invitation to relationship, "yes" to being disciples, "yes" to following in the footsteps of Jesus who loved, taught, healed, died and rose from the dead.

We know that Jesus was rejected in Jerusalem and ultimately put to death there, unable to build a new city, a new way of life, a new Jerusalem on earth. He longed for the people of Jerusalem to understand what the ultimate city created by God could look like.

What would that city look like for each of us? If given the chance, what kind of dwelling place would we build?

A Parish is a kind of mini city. We have property and buildings. We have governance through leadership. We vote. We pay our pledges and/or give of our monetary gifts and talents in support of our mission. We invite people to come to our city, to pitch their tent with us, to walk the spiritual journey we walk, to talk the language of love we speak and to build their spiritual home with us at All Saints.

Lent gives us a time in which we can step back and assess our spiritual life as a community of faith. Are we genuinely inviting, warm and hospitable? Are we loving and kind especially to young families with little children running around? Are we a place where diversity and the diversity of ideas, beliefs, backgrounds, orientations, and biases can find a place for dialogue and acceptance? Are we a Parish that truly understands that those ravaged by earthquakes in Haiti and Chili are our sisters and brothers because we are all part of the Body of Christ?

Lent offers us an opportunity to reflect on God's many gifts to us as a community but it also challenges us to look at our life together and our individual lives as we respond to the Word and the Eucharist we share.

You have already heard me suggest that during Lent we consider praying more, reading and reflecting on the scriptures more and being even more generous to those in need during Lent. I have to confess that I'm working at it but it's still a work in progress.

I long to build a city, a dwelling place, in my heart for God to live comfortably there, to thrive there, so that I can be nourished from deep down inside. I long to build a place where light and love reign supreme. I long to lay a foundation, so that as Paul says today, I can be transformed and conformed to the body of Christ. As a community of faith, we long to be transformed by God so that we can go and help others to be transformed as well.

Why not think about the spiritual life as building a city for God, a dwelling place for God in our hearts? When we accomplish that, then, we have laid a rock solid foundation for God deep within our hearts. We can experience healing, wholeness and forgiveness as transformed followers of Jesus who go into the world to make it the best place it can possibly be. Amen.