



May 19, 2019

The 5th Sunday of Easter

I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with the human race." —Revelation 21:2-3

Dear Friends;

Christ is risen!

Last month at the beginning of Holy Week, I looked on with horror as I watched the images of fire in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris. I felt sick as the roof of the 800 year old cathedral was consumed by the flames. I prayed for the hundreds of firefighters battling the blaze. I hoped the cathedral would survive.

The fire was a shock because the cathedral is more than just an assemblage of stone and wood and glass. But it is what the cathedral represents not only for France but as a world heritage site. Begun in the 12th century and completed in the 14th century, Notre Dame is a symbol of the history, culture and faith that has stood for centuries. It also reminds modern secular France and other western cultures that modern culture and its values have its roots in the middle ages and in Christianity.

Fr. Grégoire Catta, SJ the director for the National Service for Family and Society of the French Conference of Bishops said of Notre-Dame, "It is both a place of history and a spot that connects our personal stories because we have lived big events there." Before the fire some 30,000 visitors from all over the world passed through the cathedral. Many were moved after many years to go to confession inside its walls. One priest confessor said he would ask those who had never spoken to a priest before why they had chosen that moment, and people would often answer, "I don't know it just seemed right."

We are fortunate that Notre-Dame was not completely destroyed. It will take years but it will eventually be restored. Can you imagine the psychic pain people would have felt had the whole building collapsed? That was the kind of pain the people of God felt not once but twice.

The first Temple in Jerusalem was built by King Solomon in the 10th century BC. It stood for hundreds of years as a sign of the presence of God in the midst of his people. It was a symbol of unity between God and the people. It represented their faith and culture. Then in the summer of 587 BC the Babylonians lay siege to the city and then destroy it and the Temple. The people become refugees to other countries or are deported to Babylon.

This experience will give birth to a new insight into God. That God is not just God of the Jewish people but the God of all nations. Isaiah will have a vision of a new city on the Mount Zion. It will be a place of hope for the entire world. "*On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of feast of rich foods and choice wines...he will destroy death for ever. The Lord God will wipe the tears from all faces...*" (Isaiah 25:6-8).

But not only did the people of God have to endure the first destruction of Jerusalem. They had to endure a second destruction. In 70 AD the Romans lay siege to the city and eventually destroy it, the Temple, and many of the inhabitants. The survivors are made slaves. The Temple which was remodeled and expanded by King Herod the Great was one of the wonders of the ancient world. The conquerors will level it and the city. They rebuild the city as a Roman and pagan. It was dedicated to the "Divine Emperor of Rome." No Jew or Christian will be allowed within a hundred miles of this city.

The seer John in the Book of Revelation will have a vision of hope. He sees a new and eternal Jerusalem that will come out of heaven from God. This city is not identified by buildings. It is a city identified by a people who are enlivened by the Spirit of God. God and they are one. "*Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race!*" (Rv. 21:3) There will be no need for a Temple made of stone, a symbol of God's presence. In this new city the people are the living stones of the Temple of God's presence. This city is a city built out of a love that endures. Let us then together build the City of God!

Peace,

Fr Ron