

The New Jerusalem

Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year C

Acts of the Apostles 14:21-27
Psalm 145:8-9, 10-11, 12-13

Revelation 21:1-5a
John 13:31-33a, 34-35

Many see the Book of Revelation as a fearsome prophecy of the catastrophic end of the world preceding the Second Coming of Christ. Some even use the details presented



to calculate the exact moment when the end will come. Others seek to interpret present occurrences as signs of the future Parousia. But how many think of reading and interpreting the Book of Revelation, not in terms of the future end of the world, but as an expression of present reality; a goal and an end already achieved? From that angle, Revelation is not fearsome, but rather one of the most triumphant and uplifting books of the Bible.

Consider the New Jerusalem. The author of Revelation makes use of the image of a bride. Arguably the most endearing image in any wedding is that of the bride processing down the aisle to meet her groom, who sees her in the beauty of her gown for the first time. Everyone gathered stands and looks with anticipation at the doors of the church, waiting for them to open, eager to see how breathtaking the bride looks as she enters in procession to the sound of a rousing anthem, and proceeds to the sanctuary. Usually expressions of awe accompany her appearance and all present

are moved by her radiance and happiness.

In the Book of Revelation a wedding is the metaphor used to describe the bond between Christ and the Church. It is

used three times toward the end of the book, closely linked to the Lamb that was Slain (symbolic of Christ crucified) and directly identified in the last two bridal visions as the New Jerusalem.

It is first used in the image of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-8), in which the Bride is clothed with a white linen dress, made up of “*the virtuous deeds of God’s saints.*” This identifies the Bride of the Lamb with the Church, made up of the Lamb’s faithful followers. Hence the wedding of the Lamb is nothing less than the covenant union between Christ and the Church – a present reality.

The Book of Revelation further describes the New Jerusalem as a radiant bride prepared to meet her husband. The author will again observe the bride, the New Jerusalem, descending, as if in procession, to be present in the New Creation (Rev 21:9-10).

As we interpret Revelation in terms of present reality, we understand the New Creation and the New Jerusalem as symbolic

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of something very relevant to all time, as much as it was to the Church at the time Revelation was written. That something is the redemption won by Christ, celebrated by the Church particularly during the Easter season. Christ's Death and Resurrection opened the gates of Heaven to God's faithful people, made the world a New Creation washed clean by the blood of the Lamb, and blessed that New Creation with the Church. The Church, commissioned by the Lamb and inspired by the Holy Spirit, continues the sanctifying work of the risen Christ, its loving spouse. Therefore, for the reader of Revelation, both then, now and for all time, the New Creation and with it the New Jerusalem are symbolic expressions of the reality that is the Church and of a world redeemed by God. The New Jerusalem symbolizes the Church itself, descending upon the earth in conjunction with the triumph of Christ.

The Book of Revelation describes the New Jerusalem in great detail (Rev 21:11-27), all of which could be metaphorically understood as spiritually descriptive of the Church. It is a city of great richness, far surpassing any city. It is a city that is new, but built upon the foundation of the old covenant with Israel. The city is a manifestation of God's presence on earth and is a place of great intimacy with God. The city does not have a temple, for the glory of the Lord is its temple. No longer centralized in one building, God is fully present and fully accessible to all the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem as Christ is present throughout the church – the People of God.

The New Jerusalem is a universal city where all people of good will are welcome to walk in the light of God.

Finally, the New Jerusalem is a return to the grace lost through sin, symbolized in the great river that flows from its center, giving purification wherever it flows, giving rise to multiple Trees of Life that provide nourishment and healing.

So if we are looking for a futuristic New Creation and the grand, bridal appearance of the New Jerusalem, we need look no further than our own community of faith, and the Church that gathers us together, sanctifying us through the grace of the sacraments and through which Christ, ever present, diligently works for the purification and sanctification of the world. One need also look no further than a celebration of the great sacrament of matrimony, which is for us a grand witness

to the covenant between Christ and his Bride, the Church, symbolized in the love shared between husband and wife.

As we continue to celebrate the event and mystery of Easter (and welcome our new brothers and sisters entered during the Easter Vigil Mass) we celebrate the very reality

symbolized in the New Creation and the New Jerusalem. We celebrate a world that God has visited, redeemed and sanctified through the sacrifice of the Lamb that was Slain. We joyfully proclaim the Gospel that continues to flow to all corners of the world, drawing people into the loving embrace of the Lamb, calling all to share in the community of faith that is the Church throughout the world – the New Jerusalem present in our midst.

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