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New Jerusalem and Kingdom of God

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New Jerusalem and Kingdom of God

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Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 7, 2013 Sunday Readings for Cycle C:

Is 66:10-14; Ps 66; Gal 6:14-18; Lk 10:1-12, 17-20

NEW JERUSALEM AND KINGDOM OF GOD

Lawrence E. Frizzell

In some cultures devotion to one's nation is compared to filial piety towards a father. Thus we speak of patriotism and of our "fatherland". In Hebrew however, the words for "land" and "city" are feminine, so the prophets and psalmists developed the imagery of maternal-filial affection in speaking of Zion. "Can a country be brought forth in one day? Can a nation be born in a single moment? Yet Zion is scarcely in labor when she gives birth to her children" (Is 66:8-9).

In listening to the songs of refugees in our time, we find that the constant theme is the beauty and goodness of their lost homeland. Some Jews in exile recorded the same poignant longing. "By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion" (Ps 137:1). The last chapters of Isaiah record the marvelous experience of return to the land of Judah, either in anticipation or in actuality. The selection for this Sunday expresses this intimacy.

"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her, all you who love her. Exult, exult with her all you who were mourning over her" (Isa 66:10). The returning exiles are like unweaned children restored to their mother, carried in her arms and fondled on her lap (66:11). God is the source of this renewal and this is ultimately a show of *divine* maternal affection. "As a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you; in Jerusalem you shall find your comfort" (66:13).

The joy experienced by the people when they returned to the promised land is celebrated by the prophet Zechariah, who encouraged the people to rebuild the Temple. "Sing and rejoice, O daughter Zion! See, I am coming to dwell among you, says the LORD" (Zec 2:4). Then he taught that the renewed covenant would one day be open to the nations. "Many nations shall join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they shall be his people and he will dwell among you..." (2:15; see 8:20-23; 14:16-19).

The Gospel quite logically records the fact that Jesus' ministry primarily reached the Jewish people, and only after the Paschal Mystery established the New Covenant did he commission the Apostles to go to the nations. However, in the Gospel there are a number of hints of the Master's intention to offer God's blessings to the nations through his work. Just as Jesus began his own mission by proclaiming the Kingship (authority) and the Kingdom (domain) of God, so he sent the Twelve "to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal" (Lk 9:2). Luke alone tells of another mission to prepare the people for his coming into their villages. Just as Moses chose seventy elders to participate in the governing of the people under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Num 11:16-30), so Jesus sent ambassadors to teach and heal in his Name (with his authority).

A spiritual joy permeates the third Gospel, so we are not surprised that Luke notes: "The seventy

returned rejoicing" (10:17). They were proud to be vehicles of divine instruction and mercy. Jesus interprets their success to be linked with his own triumph over the forces of evil. "I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the heaven" (10:18, see Isa 14:12-15, applied to the devil). Opening human hearts to God's service they contribute to the downfall of the divisive, perverse power of Satan.

Then Jesus offers the lesson that Christian activists in all generations should take to heart: "Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (10:20). The capacity to do God's work is rooted in the gifts that make us God's children. Appreciation of blessings we have received makes us truly servants of God in all that we do. These gifts are the source of the joy that will endure. "When you see this, your heart shall rejoice and your bodies flourish like the grass" (Isa 66:14). This text was understood to hint at the mystery of the resurrection (see 1 Cor 15:26-49), when the joy of the faithful will echo through the new Jerusalem, which is our mother (Gal 4:26).