

Homily of Archbishop Thomas Collins
Installation Mass as 10th Archbishop of Toronto - January 30, 2007

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL DELIVERED - JANUARY 30, 2007

I: The Real World outside the Door

Only a short distance from this cathedral there are many theaters. The performers and the audience spend a relatively brief time within them, and then at the end of the performance leave the world of illusion and go through the exit doors into the world in which they really live: Toronto. That primary, external world is the governing context for what takes place within the secondary world of the theater, for the performances on stage are an artificial construct, designed to reflect some aspect of the life which occurs in the real world outside.

That primary world - of Toronto, of Ontario and Canada, and of this planet - which gives meaning to all that happens on a theatrical stage, is in turn itself dependent upon a greater reality, which is its governing context. Eventually we all exit from this life, as we do from any theater, and we do so through the doorway marked death. What we find beyond that doorway is the real world which is the essential reference point for our brief life on earth. John Henry Newman expressed this fact through his epitaph: it is at the end of our life that we move from shadows and illusion into the truth.

It would be foolish for actors or audience to think that the props and costumes of the artificial world are what ultimately matters. It would be even more foolish for us to live unaware of the greater world from which this earthly one derives its meaning. Throughout the Bible the inspired authors use the image of the New Jerusalem, the City of God, to give us insight into that greater world.

In a sense the New Jerusalem lies ahead of us in time. It is the destination of our earthly journey, the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. As we reflect on the profound question asked by children on any long trip – “Are we there yet?” – it is clear that the answer must be “No.” Even a quick glance at the daily news reveals that we are far from experiencing life as it is meant to be. The symphony of God’s creation has been disrupted by human pride. We do not yet share fully in the community of shalom where people live as they are meant to, in peace with God and one another. We will experience that in the New Jerusalem, the destination of our journey, but we clearly are not there yet.

As we disciples of Jesus confront this world of violence and of all too frequent disregard for the dignity of the human person, the New Jerusalem is not, however, simply a future goal.

To the degree that we love God and love neighbour, and act with integrity as disciples of Jesus, to that degree the New Jerusalem is already present, as it will be in its fullness at the end of time. Heaven begins on earth, in our daily lives, when we live in generous love, in the image of the Blessed Trinity, in the imitation of Christ.

We are, of course, always free to choose another path, one that does not lead to the heavenly Jerusalem. An early Christian writing, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, opens with the challenge of that choice: “There are two ways: the way to life, and the way to death, and there is a great difference between them.” This is the drama of the moral life for a disciple of Jesus: we are free to disregard the City of God, as if this transient life were everything. We can act not in love but in selfishness, or we can begin heaven on earth.

That is why there are few things more immediately practical than a meditation on our destination, the heavenly Jerusalem, which gives us the reference point which we need if we are to choose rightly, and live in generous love during our brief passage through this world.

II: The Scriptural Vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem

The readings of today's Mass guide us in that meditation, as we seek to find our path on our daily journey to Jerusalem.

First Reading: *Isaiah 62: 1-7* *Psalms 87*

In the first reading and in the psalm we recognize the hope that the people of God experienced in contemplating the glorious future of the earthly Jerusalem.

We draw even greater hope, and attain more profound insight into the human condition, by contemplating the reality foreshadowed in Isaiah: the glorious City of God, which is the real world of divine providence that sets the standard for our human world. The point of contemplating the heavenly Jerusalem is not simply that we might experience delight, but that we be brought to conversion. Our daily lives need to be conformed to the vision of the city of God. That is not easy for any of us. Who we are falls far short of who we are meant to be. We resist the challenge of conversion.

Second Reading: *Apocalypse 21: 1-14*

In the Apocalypse we find a vision of hope addressed originally to people living, like us, in a world of violence and materialism, often a world of illusion, in which the reality of the divine order of creation does not always shape the human agenda. So that the disciples of Jesus might maintain their integrity as they journey through such an environment, John was inspired to reveal to them the radiant vision of the New Jerusalem. After all, when we know where we are going, we are more likely to get there. We will know how to get there.

There are transient things in this life that we can wrongly make into absolutes – such as wealth, power, health, success, prestige, popularity, and self-indulgence. When we do so, we confuse our priorities, and begin to move down the wrong path. By giving a hint of the glory of our true destination, and of the primary world which is the context for our present life on earth, the Apocalypse reveals the insufficiency of those false standards.

We are called to live as citizens of the New Jerusalem, long before we finally enter the heavenly city.

An example of such a life is that of Michael Power, first bishop of Toronto, buried under the altar of this cathedral, whose earthly journey lasted only 43 years. But he knew where he was going, and he knew how to get there. In 1847, the last year of his life, he selflessly devoted himself to serving the immigrants who had been dumped on the Toronto waterfront, the most vulnerable people in the community. Day after day he heroically ministered to the sick and the dying in Toronto, but always aware of the New Jerusalem that is the destination of both flock and shepherd, and he himself became infected and died. In his saintly death, he finally journeyed home to Jerusalem with his suffering people. He was the first bishop of Toronto, but he saw through and beyond the earthly context in which he operated. He acted as a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Gospel: *John 1:1-14*

The prologue of John's Gospel is so fundamental to our Christian life that for years it was read at every Mass. In a few words, John shows us the basic fact of God's loving entry into this broken world: "The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, full of grace and truth." Sadly, too often we still do not receive Him. But the Word did become flesh, and dwell among us, to show us how to live, and to give Himself for us through His suffering, death, and resurrection. In the Prologue, as in the opening words of the First Letter of John that formed the text for the song of the Toronto World Youth Day, we experience the freshness of the wonder that overcame the first disciples, as they realized what Jesus did, and who Jesus is. That excitement banishes the routine of a shallow Christian life: we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

If we really have seen that glory, which is reflected in the glory of the City of God that is both our goal and our standard of behaviour, then we must not live as if we had not, as if we were caught in the rut of mediocrity. We are citizens of the New Jerusalem, disciples of the Risen Lord, and we need to act accordingly.

Here are a few ways to do that:

III: Practical Implications: A life guided by a Vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem

- 1) Insofar as our present society does not, in fact, reflect the community of love that is the heavenly Jerusalem, we must be attentive to the standard of social justice and of the culture of life. See, judge according to that standard, and act. Note that it was in the context of the apocalyptic Last Judgment that at the end of the Gospel of Matthew Jesus said: I was hungry, and you did not feed me. It is not for us to build heaven on earth, and attempts to do that have often produced more hell than heaven, but we know the standard that must guide us during our brief earthly journey, one rooted in the order established by God and found not only in divine revelation but also in the very structure and texture of nature.
- 2) Life within the Church, in the community of the disciples, should reflect the heavenly city. We are meant to die to self in Baptism, and the symbolic white robes of the newly baptized are the robes of a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem. Once it was said, and it must be said in these days: "See how these Christians love one another". Within the community of the disciples the shalom of the heavenly city should reign. This is the vision of a stewardship parish community: each disciple, realizing the gifts he or she has received, is profoundly grateful, and participates in making of the community a generous place of mutual love. Then life floods into the parish community, and the gathered can reach out to the scattered, because the community of parish and diocese is a more perfect epiphany on earth of the life of the New Jerusalem.
- 3) The disciples of Jesus have served loyally as citizens of the various earthly states that come and go throughout history, but the vision of the New Jerusalem makes them acutely conscious that no earthly state can claim absolute authority. The model of the Christian citizen is Thomas More, the king's good servant, but God's first.
- 4) The vision of Jerusalem challenges each of us to live rightly, loving God and neighbour. Our behaviour matters, for religion is more than the aesthetic experience of feeling spiritual. We must live rightly, as citizens of Jerusalem, in accord with the will of God. The first thing that both John the Baptist and Jesus said as they began their ministry was: "Repent." For each of us, the pathway to Jerusalem lies through the confessional.

- 5) Because we can so easily miss the many splendoured reality that guides us, we need regularly to be refreshed with the vision and the experience of the realm of glory. That is the divine gift of the liturgy, in which the glory shines here below, and we are allowed to see the stars we steer by, and to be strengthened for our earthly journey. In our present life, until we see the Lord face to face, the doorway to the New Jerusalem is the Liturgy, especially the Eucharistic Liturgy, in which we experience the real world in this transient world. Fruitful apostolic action can only rise out of contemplation. That is one reason why Eucharistic adoration is so important.

IV: We have seen His Glory, and that Vision impels us to Action

Many years ago, in Victorian England, there was a man, Francis Thompson, poor and marginalized, who lived on the streets of the great city, never able to overcome his addiction, a holy man who saw what was not seen by the bustling citizens around him. He saw the divine reality that was masked by the familiar sights of his city – the Thames river, and Charing Cross - and wrote a poem on the Kingdom of God. He wrote:

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air –
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars! –
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places; -
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry; - and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry, - clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

That is the point. With the clarity of faith we can see the divine reality of the governing context of life on earth: the New Jerusalem, the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. We can recognize the fact that Jacob's ladder is pitched betwixt heaven and Yonge Street. That realization arising from faith fills us with hope, which gives us the irresistible energy to be effective witnesses on earth to the God who is love.