

Today's gospel began with some Pharisees warning Jesus that Herod is wanting to kill him. (*Not Herod the Great, that is, the paranoid megalomaniac from the time of Jesus' birth; but one of his sons **Herod Antipas** who ruled over the territory to the north where Jesus presently was.*) We don't know whether these Pharisees were genuinely sympathetic to Jesus, or even acting for Herod in seeking to frighten Jesus away from his domain. Whatever their motivation Jesus' response is uncompromising, referring to Herod as '*that fox*', and saying 'I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish my work' - referring prophetically, although no one else will have understood it at the time, to his three days in the tomb and the resurrection.

We've no idea whether this reply was in fact ever relayed back, but if it was he would probably have thought Jesus was saying he'd do as he pleased for now and then be moving on in three day's time, for he'd also said he must be '*on his way*'.

Here, and in his saying '*it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside Jerusalem*' we touch on the theme of Jesus sensing at least something of his own destiny, aware that his fate lies in the great city of Jerusalem, where David his forbear as 'shepherd king' was crowned 1000 years before, and where his son Solomon built the temple to house the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of the presence of God with his people. Even more so, some 500 years later after the exile and its rebuilding and rededication (having been destroyed by the invaders), in how the Temple was again supremely revered as the home of God on earth, and re-established as a place of regular pilgrimage and ritual worship.

Yet the darker side of Jerusalem's story reveals a people who had forgotten that their special relationship with God was not unconditional. Who had forgotten their responsibility was to show the world how life should be lived in the holiest of places. When God's messengers point out the error of their ways - that is... the likes of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Micah - they were ignored and persecuted: hence the words of Jesus, '*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it*'.

And yet there is still the dream, of a 'new Jerusalem' - a place that is truly, gloriously heavenly, even though still on earth. Where God is truly to be encountered. Jesus knows all of this, and he weeps over the city because of what it is, in contrast to what it should be. And this is where he is heading in the course of his ministry, to confront the ruling powers who have got things so disastrously wrong, resulting in oppression not freedom. His mission is to bring release and joy; he will force access to God's temple for all, the veil

separating the Holy of Holies from God's people will be torn asunder, the yoke that has so long burdened God's people will be lifted; but to make this release a reality the price will be his death, and he knows it. For a people who have so flagrantly rejected God and abused their privileged position Jesus will shortly weep bitter tears (in this same gospel, ch 19) as he beholds the city that he is about to enter. He weeps not for himself or his fate, but for Jerusalem, as the lament we heard '*How long have I desired to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing*'. The 'hen' image reminding us of the outstretched wings mounted on the Ark of the Covenant symbolising 'God's sheltering presence' among his people.

On the Mount of Olives where Jesus would have walked, overlooking the city, is a most beautiful tear-shaped church known as Dominus Fleuit (meaning the Lord wept) - it's on the card given out for you to keep. As you sit in this church looking out towards the city in the distance, beneath the altar in front of you is the mosaic you can see on the card, depicting this most poignant verse of lament - the hen and her brood as they should be, safely sheltering. In the foreground the golden Dome of the Rock marks the site of the former Temple; in far distance just above the central cross (you can just about pick them out - being $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away) are two more domes - of the Church of the Resurrection and the Holy Sepulchre celebrating **new life and hope** born out of conflict and failure. You may ponder how stark the contrast between Jesus who fulfils his destiny, and the people of Jerusalem who *do not* - and the place which still today is sadly remains a place of enmity and division and NOT a place not of peace (the opposite of its name Jeru-salem - which means 'city of peace' - Salem as is, Salaam in Arabic, and Shalom in Hebrew: peace). On the photo look once more at the cross, and the place to which it points... Notwithstanding all the turmoil - in Jerusalem, and elsewhere throughout the world so very much on our minds at present - and the turmoil perhaps within ourselves, and those we know, and in our day-to-day situations - we hold on to **the promise of hope and new life** we have in Jesus Christ: however much, as our forbears, we fall short.

Lent, as we know, is a time to reflect on how we are with God, and also to remember that, even though we fall short, as Jerusalem, **God's love prevails** - in the past, the present, & the future (Jesus the same: yesterday, today & forever). May we never lose sight of **the dream...** that one day WILL find its fulfilment. It may not be an earthly Jerusalem, but as promised a new Jerusalem where God is fully to be encountered and where our joy in him, in Jesus Christ, is complete.

Let us, with Jesus, fulfil OUR destiny;

Let us be gathered under the wings of HIS protection;

And pray he may he not be weeping over our resisting his calling. Amen.