

Prepared Sermon on Sunday 16 March 2025 Lent 2, Year C

by Fr. Paul Kumasaka

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Luke 13:34)

Jesus continues his journey to his final destination—Jerusalem. Knowing that God the Father destined him to the Cross in Jerusalem, he repeatedly speaks about his suffering, death, and resurrection. His disciples followed him, but they expected something else in Jesus. While Jesus proceeds to Calvary, they expect him to defeat all the enemies at Jerusalem by power. Immediately before Transfiguration, Jesus foretold the disciples about his suffering, death, and resurrection on the third day. Witnessed in the Transfiguration, the disciples are convinced that their master is the promised Messiah, destined to rebuild the kingdom of God in Israel. Representing their belief, Peter confessed that Jesus is not just a prophet but the Messiah of God. These are written in Luke chapter 9. From the moment of Transfiguration, the disciple's expectations of Jesus grew bigger and bigger. Let us pay attention to the gap between Jesus' prediction (of his passion, death, and resurrection) and the disciples' expectations of Jesus. To them, Jesus is a strong leader who always wins the battle against the enemies. They witnessed him performing miracles, curing the sick, casting out unclean spirits, and preaching in authority. To them, Jesus must be physically undefeatable.

To Jesus, Jerusalem is all about the city of God's people. It is not just about the great walls and buildings, especially the Holy Temple; the Holy City is there for the people God loves. He knew that there are people who are suffering from rejection and alienation. So he says, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." (Verse 34) In the past, the city was seized, invaded, and ruined. Had God abandoned them? No. He cared for all who suffered, grieved, and shattered. But the people, after they returned from exile, increasingly saw God as the angry one. They thought that all the calamities that fell upon them were his punishment. They stayed away from him to avoid provoking him and ensured they did not commit against the Torah (the law). But God did not wish to see them staying away from him, so he sent his Son into the world. Therefore, Jesus keeps travelling to the Holy City, the city of God's people, to complete his mission, his loving sacrifice for the salvation of all.

Meanwhile, the disciples were more convinced when they saw him talking to a group of Pharisees (perhaps friendly ones, but Luke does not give further description about them). He told them to return to Herod and say that he had no hesitation in diverting his journey but continued heading to Jerusalem. While Jesus indicates his passion in Jerusalem, his disciples might be taken as his confident declaration of victory. Thus, the gap in understanding this journey's purpose between Jesus and the disciples widened.

Lent is a season when we are encouraged to grow in trusting faith in God. When we are high on hope and expect something we have been waiting for to happen, we blow the balloon of expectation. In some cases, the balloon of expectation gets bigger and bigger and eventually bursts. If things happen as we desire, we feel happy, but if something utterly unexpected occurs, we disappoint, and a heartbreaking moment comes to our minds. Have you experienced something that happened differently from what you wished for? A farmer says, 'I've been praying daily about the rain. Yes, it rained, but it was too much. Now our crops are damaged!'

We all have similar experiences, don't we? How difficult is it to accept the fact that something unexpected happens? Do we blame God when things are not going as we desire? What is God's will, then? Does he want to see us disappointed? Are we asking for his guidance or testing him to see whether he can 'fix' the problem for us? Let's recall the third temptation that we heard last week. The tempter told Jesus to jump off from the top of the tower to test God. He clearly replied, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." (Luke 4:12). God may intervene to change our directions and purposes. Abram was not keen to move to the strange land, but in the end, he accepted God's direction and went on his journey. When we say, 'This is not the one I want.' God shows something else that is the best for us and in his eyes. So, as we continue our faith Journey in this Lent, let us remind ourselves again and again that we trust God, who leads and guides us into his kingdom.

I would like to share one more thought on God's will. We need to be enabled to discern the truth of God's will. When we hear someone speak about God's will, we need to distinguish the true will of God from the false ones. When Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!" " He was talking about those who acted violently and killed the faithfuls and said at the same time, 'God wants us to remove them.' They are self-righteous ones who abuse the name of God and his will to justify their thoughts and actions. They never accepted the sacrificing Son of God, in whom the glory of God is fully revealed. To gather all people together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, he continues to walk to Calvary.

Our faith journey continues. As we travel, worldliness and values surround us. It can mislead us into false interpretations of God's words. Let us now be firm in mind, confidently discerning his will. Jesus did not conquer the enemies by force, as the disciples expected. He was physically powerless when he was arrested and put on the Cross. But the will of God was not the death of his Son. The whole process of his passion and death was to give us the glory of his resurrection, by which he redeemed and renewed the life of all people.