

Readings: Ezekiel 43:1-2, 3-7; Ephesians 2:19-22; Matthew 16:13-19

The special readings for today are assigned for the commemoration of the anniversary of the Dedication of a Church. When this Cathedral opened in 1915, its interior was stark and unadorned. Besides the pews and the travertine floor, what you see with your eyes was added in time: marble, chandeliers, windows, baldachin, statues. It took nearly two generations for the interior to be finished, and it was not until October 14, 1958 that it was formally consecrated, for substantial completion was a prerequisite.

The first reading from Ezekiel is a powerful image of the glory that resides in God's House. Recall, the Temple had been destroyed during a siege to Jerusalem about 587 B.C. It lay in ruins, and the people were sent into exile. This is the backdrop of the prophet's call and this, his vision for rebuilding. In the vision, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord enter into the new temple with the most powerful earthly manifestations.

If I but gaze upwards in the sacristy, each day while preparing for Mass, I can read the words of today's first reading inscribed in Latin all around me. Encompassing the inner ring of the sacristy's dome, the vision of Ezekiel takes its place. The prophet's vision, his theophany as it is called, is the most detailed in the bible. There are several aspects to this vision, encompassing eight chapters.

Four piers support the sacristy's dome, each of which bears a passage from the psalms, appropriate as a priest vests for Mass. They speak of the priests clothing themselves with justice and entering the sanctuary to give praise to the Lord. But on the rim of the dome is the passage that speaks of the glory of the Lord entering the Temple by way of the gate which faces the East. "And I saw that the temple was filled with the glory of the Lord." Today's feast commemorates the glory of the Lord filling the temple, and thus the setting aside of this Cathedral for the worship of God, more so than celebrating even the building itself, as impressive as it is.

Ezekiel's clarion call to repentance and an inner transformation is that which precedes the return of the glory of the Lord to the Temple. "The external image which corresponds to this interior process is the vision of the return of the glory of God to the renewed temple, with the earth reflecting the glory of God."<sup>1</sup>

The Hebrew word used is *kabod*, (**kahvode**) meaning weight.<sup>2</sup> Recall, after the reconstruction of the Temple following the return from Exile the Holy of Holies remained intact, but without the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was gone, and that emptiness itself served as a symbol of messianic hope for a restored future.

So, when Jesus spoke of "the temple of his body," and that "something greater than the temple is here" (Matt. 12:6), the Jews understood exactly to what he was referring. In commenting on the words of St. John's Gospel, "the Word became flesh...and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14)- the late Swiss theologian Cardinal Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote: "The 'dwelling (as in a tent) among us'...is not only the coming down of the divine presence (in the cloud of the *kabod* [**kahvode**] ) above our earth....but a shining in the earth and out from within it."<sup>3</sup>

He added that "Christ's body is Ezekiel's new temple, from which the spring of life streams forth."<sup>4</sup> It is in the sacrifice of the Mass, a representation of the sacrifice of the Cross, we find the fulfillment of the vision of the temple from Ezekiel.

For Ezekiel, God becomes the just shepherd under whose authority a renewed and restored people enjoy prosperity in a restored land. The defeat of the enemies of Israel "is prelude to Ezekiel's vision of a new

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Glory of the Lord VI: The Old Covenant, page 275-276. Einsiedeln 1967, published in English by Ignatius Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Jensen, *Ezekiel* (Grand rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), page 20.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Glory of the Lord VII: The New Covenant, page 375. Einsiedeln 1969, published in English by Ignatius Press, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, page 226.

Israel whose source of life and prosperity is a well-ordered cult in a new Temple, where the divine glory again dwells.”<sup>5</sup>

My brothers and sisters, what does this mean for us today? In this theologically rich celebration of the Eucharist on the anniversary of the dedication of this Cathedral, we fervently pray that the glory of the Lord will be made manifest through the lives of holiness we lead. We pray for renewal through the richness of the lives of virtue that we lead.

And where necessary, may the Church be purified of any and all elements that would obscure the glory of the Lord, those that would prevent the fullness of the light of truth from entering here. Whether from our own sin or the darkness of doctrinal error, may this sacred place be filled with the light of Christ and resplendent with God’s glory.<sup>6</sup>

I close today with words from St. John Henry Newman, canonized a saint just this morning in Rome. This is from his poem “The Pillar of the Cloud,” written while at sea on June 16, 1833:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom  
Lead thou me on;  
The night is dark, and I am far from home,  
Lead thou me on.  
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not for ever thus, nor prayed that thou  
Shouldst lead me on;  
I loved to choose and see my path; but now  
Lead thou me on,  
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

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<sup>5</sup> See New American Bible introduction to the Book of Ezekiel.

<sup>6</sup> Further background for this homily was gleaned from an article by Br. Peter Gruber, C.O. “The Return of the Glory of the Lord: An Exegesis of Ezekiel 43:1-7. November 7, 2014 [www.academia.edu/18174224](http://www.academia.edu/18174224)

So long thy power hath blessed me, sure it still  
Will lead me on,  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
The night is gone;  
And with the morn those angel faces smile,  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Henry, Cardinal Newman (1801–1890). This well-known and beautiful hymn was written by Cardinal Newman while crossing the Mediterranean, June 16, 1833, long before his secession from the English Church.