

## Lancaster University Chaplaincy – Mass of the Holy Spirit, 5<sup>th</sup> October 2015

(Ezekiel 43:1-7. Matt. 16:13-19)



Ezekiel the prophet lived in exile, in Babylon, together with many of his people who were deported there. In 586 BC the Babylonian army had captured and destroyed Jerusalem and, worst of all in Ezekiel's eyes, had laid waste the Temple, God's holy dwelling place in Israel. The prophet had seen this coming, and in his earlier prophecies had warned the people that their wicked behaviour would result in the Lord God's departure from the city and the Temple, and so leave them at the mercy of the invading Babylonians. In moving fashion he describes the gradual withdrawal of the glory of God (the divine presence) from the holy city and specifically from the Temple. Disaster did indeed follow.

Later in his life Ezekiel imagined in a vision a new and restored Jerusalem, and a purified Temple where God would again come to make his home, which is the background to our first reading. In the words of the prophet, which we have just heard, *'behold, the glory of the Lord filled the Temple.....and I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel for ever.'* This was an ideal vision on the part of Ezekiel never realised in his own lifetime, but his inspired dream of the coming on earth of the glory of God remained, and the Lord God would in time fulfil his prophecy in a manner that not even Ezekiel could have imagined.

In reply to Jesus' question as to what people, and his disciples really thought about him, Peter made a quite astonishing confession: this Jesus the teacher and healer, who proclaimed that God's kingdom had come, was none other than the Christ, the Son of the living God. Such a confession, Jesus remarked, could only come from someone inspired by God himself. So God's very own Son in flesh and blood like theirs was actually present in their midst. God's glory had indeed come to earth, in Jesus Christ the divine presence had taken up his dwelling among men and women. Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the glory of God coming to earth had now come to pass in Jesus Christ. In the prologue to his gospel the Evangelist John expresses it memorably: *'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, glory as the only Son of the Father'* (John 1:14).

Jesus goes on to describe Peter's profession of faith in his divine sonship like a rock, for on the rock of this faith he would build his Church which would stand firm through all adversity. We all need a rock, a firm place on which to stand on life's journey. Jesus Christ is that rock. Whoever builds their house, as it were, on that rock, is building on a very firm foundation. He assured his disciples that he would be with them always, as long as time endured. Keep him before your eyes here in this University in all your studies and endeavours as a new academic year stretches before you, for he is interested in each one of you, wants you to develop and mature, and realise to the full your God-given gifts. To this end he has poured out the promised Holy Spirit into your hearts to guide you in the paths of wisdom, goodness and love, and whom we invoke in our Mass this evening. May Christ's glory, which Ezekiel foresaw, surround you, and all who live and study on this University campus. *Amen.*

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