



Sermon 14 Sunday of the Year

Years ago I well remember a pilgrimage to the Holy Land which we made from my last parish. As those of you who have been there know, it's a longish and tiring haul from London. A three hours' check in, a four and a half hour flight, a wait around to collect bags and then a shortish coach ride to Jerusalem. By then, of course, night has fallen. As you approach Jerusalem by night, you notice very much how it is a city 'set on a hill top', winding its way around the summit. It doesn't matter how often you make this journey: you would have to be made of stone not to feel moved by the sight. Not only are you treading the route that has been trod by countless pilgrims; you are approach the place where Jesus was rejected and crucified. How painful he must have felt that rejection and how smovingly he reacted: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those that are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you refused! I'm that at some time in our lives, we have experienced something of the pain and hurt of rejection: whether it be at the hands of someone we love very much, or a member of a family or a marriage partner. If so, then we can have some inkling of what it means to be the saviour of the world and to be rejected in the Holy City itself. The hurt must have been immense.

But perhaps he found it even harder in his own home town of Nazareth. Here, he was not only rejected by the Holy City, but by his own people: the locals. Here again, it must have cut deeply. To be rejected by those who know you best will wound to the heart: 'A prophet is only despised in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house.

Well, this can happen, I'm sure we have seen something of the kind in our own lives. The local boy made good sometimes is a souce of pride; quite often, however, we want to come him or her down to size: 'Who does he think he is? We know what he used to be like. Remember his mum and dad?' Sometimes this attitude can grow out of jealousy or resentment. It's not very worthy or charitable, but, as the reading from the prophet Ezekiel shows, there's nothing new about it. Sometimes, of course, we do need to cut down to size; perhaps we need to keep ourselves in perspective. In the case of today's Gospel, however, this attitude arises out of a terrible blindness to who it is standing in their midst. Even Jesus himself was taken aback by just how blind: He was amazed at their lack of faith.'

A little warning to us. We might well think – how stupid the people of Jerusalem and Nazareth were. How could they be so stubborn, so boneheaded, so stupid as to reject the saviour of the world. Wasn't it glaringly obvious that this was who we was? But that should make us think. The message of Christ has been travelling through time and around the world for two thousand years now. But there are many who will not accept him, many who reject him. They have turned their back on him; they may not want to know him; they may not

believe that he is who he is says he is; they may want to follow other gods, or no gods at all. Some of them are good people no doubt. Today's Gospel reminds us that to reject Christ is nothing new, and it continues to happen.

So, if nothing else, let us make sure that we continue to accept Christ and proclaim Christ. As members of his Church, we are those whom he has gathered together, under his wings, in the New Jerusalem, the heavenly City. Let us pray that more and more people will be part of that gathering. Let us renew our own commitment and pray for a greater faith and a deeper discipleship. Let us never, ever, reject or desert him. Amen.