

Trinity 5 *Matthew 13.1–9 & 18–23 or another parable*

A long time ago in a country far away, there was a series of severe earthquakes. The City, which was worst effected, had a long-established reputation for its learning and culture, its civilisation, and its arts. The range of its buildings was both contemporary and historic with note-worthy palaces, government buildings and places of worship. Its domestic architecture was gracious and well-proportioned even down to the smallest flats occupied by those who cared for the ill and the elderly.

The earthquakes struck during the day, and a warm day at that, so that most people were either at work, or outside taking their leisure in the generously-spaced public gardens or besides the gently-flowing streams and lakes of the City. Human casualties were few, and fatalities fewer, but that did not mean that the earthquakes had no effect: on the contrary whole streets began to wobble and totter, towers that had stood elegantly for hundreds of years crumbled in a moment, and the centre of government, at least in terms of bricks and mortar, was (to put not too fine a point on it) reduced to rubble.

Emotions ran high, for much store had been placed on this urban landscape as representing the central character of the City and the spirit, as it were, of the people. But the people were also resourceful. They found alternative ways of doing business, and maintaining shelter, and quite quickly as well, they began to invest fresh meanings in their new surroundings, and to re-discover old meanings which had become hidden or lost.

When the dust began to settle, literally and metaphorically, the High Council decided to set up a Committee. Its first task was to take soundings about which buildings to replace and in what kind of order, for while the Treasury had set some limits on expenditure, a vision for the City was more important initially. Pushing to the head of the queue to make their arguments were the Preservationists. "This City", they argued, "is founded on the beauty of its buildings, its spirit rests in the stones, so we must replace everything that was lost, just as it was before. And we know best." Next came the Iconoclasts, "This is the opportunity we have been waiting for, what we had planned to knock down for the next twenty years, we can enact in twenty days, and the City will be re-built to reflect our contemporary habits. And we know best."

The Committee felt rather browbeaten at this stage, and those using the new video communications system called Blather were exhausted. Finally a small group asked to speak. They didn't give themselves a name. "Why don't we ask the people who live in the City what they find helpful, what hopes and fears they have, where they are able to contribute, and what our leaders are actually able to do. Why don't we try to discover what the Heavenly Kingdom means now, after these disasters? Then we may go out in joy, and the mountains will burst into song."

Let those who have ears to hear, hear. Let those who have eyes to see, see.

Fr David