

The Revelation to St. John

Collect Prayer - The Prayer of the Society of the Holy Cross

We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection, through him we are saved and made free.

Let us pray.

Father, your Son showed the depth of his love when, for our sake, he opened his arms on the Cross; and he has commanded us to love one another. Keep the brothers of our Society united in love and in faith. Through the saving power of the Cross, + impressed inwardly upon our lives and revealed outwardly in our work, may others come to know your love and your truth; through Christ the Lord.

Amen

Are there questions or comments from the last session? For those of you following online you may email Fr. Bart at frryanssc@frontiernet.net

Revelation 6

¹Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" ²And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. ³When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" ⁴And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.

⁵When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I saw, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a balance in his hand; ⁶and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; but do not harm oil and wine!" ⁷When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" ⁸And I saw, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him; and they were given

power over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

I. The Power of the Cross - The Sacrificed One opens the seals

A. New Testament Images - Gospel images

1. Pestilence and distress of the nations Luke 21:25
2. Sings in the sun, moon and stars Matthew 24:29 - Mark 13:24

B. Old Testament Images

1. The Four Horsemen - Zechariah 8:1-11
2. Four Chariots precede the destruction of Babylon - Zech 6:1-

8

- a. The chariots are sent to the four winds - 6:5
- b. Colors are mentioned but changed by John - adapting traditions - typical of John

the two

II. The Heavenly Liturgy

A. Breaking the seals is a symbolic Act

B. The fourfold command to come is a reminder of the Lord response - "I am coming soon"

C. With a sense of liturgy this response is the calling forth and making real the reality of the seal judgments, the trumpets and the bowls - we should think of Sacraments - the outward signs that make real the invisible grace, but here we see both the outward and the inward

D. We should understand that all the judgments are inter connected - revealed to John as a sequence but not necessarily occurring in the same fashion

1. If all these events are actually occurring simultaneously the violence is both amplified and tempered.

(Nuclear explosion) - death by being blown apart - burned to death - every atom of our bodies being torn apart by the action of atomic reduction (ionization of our elements)- the radioactive particles that are released poisoning our biological systems

Each part of this description will kill us, but they all happen simultaneously and within milliseconds

2. The interconnected nature of the judgments looks back towards events that have happened and are happening and will happen, but it is all not in the future if we hold to our understanding of the nature of this book. Remember the first session when we talked about how we interpret the Revelation to John - **More about this later**

III. The Horses and Riders - Imagery from the Synoptic Gospels - the liturgy continues as these images are revealed in response to the command to come

A. The White horse - (The Victor) - Is this the same horse as Rev. 19:11?

B. Red Horse - the opposite of the victor in war to lose means death - we are to understand that God will use even the negative parts of our nature to achieve His Final Purpose

C. The Black Horse - War carries with it famine - this is the protest of the created order against the effects of man sin against one another - not only the combatants suffer in war, but all of the creation, the innocent as well as the guilty

D. The Pale Horse - death and hades - what else could be the result of man's prideful ambitions?

What is revealed in this passage is not God's plan for human beings, but the result of free will, when we make bad choices - realizing this is a liturgy which demonstrates our foolishness and God's Ultimate power allows us to understand the images for what they are - the effect of our sin

The hopeful message:

John has revealed not the glory of war, but the truth of the sin and ugliness - It is God who takes this ugly reality and from it comes the Kingdom. God is with us throughout the difficulty and no matter what horrors we suffer God is with us - His Will is supreme, His kingdom will come!

Read 6:9-11

⁹When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; ¹⁰they cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” ¹¹Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

I. The Appearance of the Martyrs

A. Old Testament - Wisdom 3:1-5, 9 - The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God - currently Jewish thought - (From the 1st century A.D.)

B. New Testament - Matt 24:9-14, Mark 13:9-13, Luke 21:12-19

II. The call for Vengeance - What about the sin of anger?

A. God's Vengeance - brought by the Lamb -

B. The martyrs are seeking vindication not vengeance as we consider vengeance - See Paul Romans 12:19

¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰No, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

C. The vindication is revealed when we see that evil has not won - it is seen not in the destruction but in the place of the martyrs in the heavenly liturgy - the imitation of Christ is witnessed here by the martyrs

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1. The Lamb was on the Altar - they are under the altar
2. They were like Jesus, the helpless victims

III. Another clue that our understanding of the Revelation is accurate - Not something to happen on in the future, but has is and will happen until God Will is revealed.

A. Note that the Martyrs have won - received their robes and then they are told to wait - for what?

B. The process is continuing - the number of the martyred to be complete

1. John is teaching the Christian Community that they may suffer and die, but they will be victorious

2. John, like Paul does expect the second coming of Christ to be eminent, but until that time, Christians will suffer

3. The faithful, unlike those who are not faithful will pass from death to life eternal

C. The revenge of God is that evil can not and does not exist in the Kingdom of God, by their actions the evil exclude themselves - this is the Vengeance of the Lamb - the evil do not know Him or accept His gift of Salvation and thus seal their own fate

The Good News in this passage is the reminder that our human nature is to call for vengeance, to use our free will foolishly and to fail to be what God created us to be - It is through the Cross, the Lamb sacrificed for us that we can attain our heavenly homeland. Evil may seem to rule the day, but the victory is already won, they have failed to have any real effect upon the innocent or to effect any change in God's Plan for His faithful Servants- those who accept the Grace He offers us

¹²When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; ¹⁴the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the

caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?”

I. The Cosmic Christ - The End Time

A. Synoptic Gospel description of the End Time

B. The images come from the Old Testament

C. The paradox - "No one escapes the wrath of the Lamb"

1. The victor in this battle is the one who sacrificed himself for us
2. The idea of God being vindictive, punishing then is illogical
3. Our response is to accept His gift of Grace and live according
4. Those that have rejected Him have no hope - their will not His Will is being done for them not to them

The end of all that is created and exists in this world is death to this world. Those who accept the effectiveness of the Cross and the salvation of God survive death to this world and live with God forever. The end of all that has been created is just that - the end of the created, but God is eternal and those who live in God and allow Him to live in Him live forever.

Revelation 7:1-8

¹After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. ²Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.” ⁴And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel, ⁵twelve thousand sealed

out of the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand of the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand of the tribe of Gad, ⁶twelve thousand of the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand of the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand of the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷twelve thousand of the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand of the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand of the tribe of Issachar, ⁸twelve thousand of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand of the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand sealed out of the tribe of Benjamin.

I. The Four Winds - The vision of Zechariah the four chariots and sent to the four winds of Heaven (Zech 6:5)

II. The Sealing of the 144 Thousand

A. This is the great Passover of the Lord - the plagues remind us of those set loose on the Egyptians

B. Unlike the Israelites the protection is not immunity from but the assurance of survival ultimately

C. Clearly this is not the rapture of the elect - there is no statement of protection only sealing

D. The sealing is the fulfilment of the promise from II Timothy " The Lord knows those who are His" 2:19

III. The Good News

A. For John the Faithful are to be faithful unto death (John 12:11)

B. The Sealed are to be as helpless as anyone else during the coming tribulation, but their suffering is linked to the suffering of the Cross. They are as helpless as was our Lord during the Crucifixion

The miracle is not safety from the tribulation to come, rather it is the assurance that God knows us and His Love will abide with us no matter what situations we face. This theology of the Cross - the linking of human suffering to the suffering on the Cross has been many times and places misunderstood.

We are not making up what might be lacking in Christ one Sacrifice, which is unnecessary. Rather the theology of suffering recognizes that it is in the testing that we are proved. The testing may be temptation, physical or mental discomfort or rewards and blessings. The question is how we deal with those trials and how they affect our faith. If we seek God's Help in all things, by the power of the Cross, His death and Resurrection the Grace and Consolation of the Holy Spirit can be with us.

Revelation 7:9-17

⁹After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen."

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" ¹⁴I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

I. The Liturgy Continues

A. This liturgy is the climax to the opening of the seals

B. The vast throng is distinct from the 144,000 - we are seeing through the liturgy those who have survived the great tribulation (Yes, time has shifted)

C. The happiness comes not from survival, but from being before the throne of Grace - This is the heavenly Feast of Tabernacles

II. The Images of this event

A. The Old Testament - The white robes Dan 12:1

Note also the striking paradox "made white in the blood of the lamb" we are again pointed towards the Cross

B. New Testament

1. The tribulation - Matthew 24:21

²¹For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

2. The Victory of the Lamb and leading his sheep - John 10:27-28

²⁷My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; ²⁸and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.

3. The Suffering of the Christ- Luke 24:26 - the Lord Himself explains on the Road to Emmaus

²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

4. The triumph of the vast throng is not by their own efforts, but through Christ John 15:5

5I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

C. The reason for us to understand that these images are from the Sacred Scripture and not a "New Revelation" is precisely that. There is no new truth; rather we are reading the confirmation of all the Books of the Bible that precede The Revelation to John.

The Good news in this section is that if we are faithful unto death we will become one of those who have passed through the tribulation. We may have suffered or died, but we have washed our robes, Our Baptismal Gowns in the Blood of the Lamb. The challenge for us is that in the comfortable existence we live today are we willing to suffer even if the suffering leads to eternal life?