

The Revelation to St. John

Collect Prayer - The First Sunday after Trinity.

O GOD, the strength of all those who put their trust in thee; Mercifully accept our prayers; and because, through the weakness of our mortal nature, we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping thy commandments we may please thee, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our 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 13:11-18

¹¹Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. ¹²It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. ¹³It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; ¹⁴and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived; ¹⁵and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast should even speak, and to cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. ¹⁶Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. ¹⁸This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six

I. What of 666 - the number of the Beast

A. Greatest confusion or greater clarity of the message of Revelation

originally does it

1. **Exegesis** - revealing what is written in the text - what was meant - what was the social and cultural condition - how connect tot he totality of Sacred Scripture

those

2. **Isagesis** - reading into the Text - proof texting - finding passages or words which support your priori assumptions

B. People who are looking for a message in their day look to interpret the number to mean what ever they want to prove - good game and lots of fun

1. **Nero Caesar** - Latin becomes - *Neron Kaisar* in Greek into Hebrew it is *nrwn qsr* transliterated into numeric form from the Hebrew gives 666 - the Latin transliteration into a numeric form gives 616 another common understanding of the number of the beast.

2. Another clear understanding has to do the perfect number 7

If seven is the perfect number then 6 is short of being perfect, incomplete and 666 would mean emphatically imperfect, the emphatic negation of perfect

II. The Second beast - Nero an agent of evil

A. The false prophet - speaks for the beast - an agent

B. Operates, but only under the Divine Plan - allowed to function

III. The mark of the beast - the imperial mark of coins and the seal on official documents - taking the mark is engaging in commerce with Rome

A. Contrasting with the Mark of God - the Seal of the Living God

B. We have again returned to the of avoiding emperor worship

Revelation 14

¹Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ²And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, ³and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the

elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁴It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, ⁵and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless.

I. The Companions of the Lamb

A. In stark contrast to those who engage in emperor worship are the companions of the Lamb

B. Mount Zion is the counterpart of the earthly Jerusalem

C. We are told they sing the Song of Moses, but it is a new song. We are not told the words, but they celebrate the deliverance of God's People

D. This is the new thing that God chose to do! Contrast this with the "New Thing" of the Episcopal Church

II. How are those who are companions of the Lamb characterized?

A. Not defiled with women - What does this mean?

The 144,000 are both men and women, not defiled with women means being chaste for the sake of the Kingdom. John imagery is of an army of God - like the soldiers of an army they are to be focused only on the purpose of their work, their struggle.

Another example of this type of imagery in the early church which has been carried to this day is the definition of Mary, ever virgin. Does this mean physically, or is it an image of the fact that she lived her entire life focused on the ministry she was called to fulfill, as mother of the Christ? Her resounding yes to God was never changed to a no even though it meant she stood at the foot of the Cross.

B. This also continues the imagery of the church as the bride of Christ

C. St. Paul also refers to the church as the pure bride betrothed to Christ II Corinthians 11:2

D. We are also to remember the link of being pure and the nature of the unblemished sacrifice of the Temple Worship and the perfect Sacrifice of Christ

E. This is no more than what Jesus taught - Mark 8:34-38

34And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? 37For what can a man give in return for his life? 38For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Revelation 14:6-13

6Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water."

8Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion."

9And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

12Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

¹³And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

I. First Angel in mid-heaven - in the middle of Heaven

A. Notes the importance of his message - the "Good News"

B. Tells us to fear God and give Him glory

C. This angel announces that salvation is at hand - he proclaims to all people

II. The Second Angel - proclaims the fall of Babylon (Rome)

A. Babylon is condemned not by God, but by her own actions

(Important to Note) - this is the result of free will - more later

B. Rome is the instrument of the dragon - emperor worship leads people away from the true and living God.

C. Note that Rome is the beast not satan

III. The Third Angel proclaims that God's wrath for those who worship the beast and they will be tormented forever

IV. How do we understand this language?

A. John is writing to Christians - his purpose is to invigorate their faith

B. He wants them to realize the deadly effect of being lukewarm

C. John is not concerned with the actual punishment of nonbelievers, only that they will be punished so that the faithful will be encouraged

This is a contrast between the tent preacher who wishes to scare people into faith - this is not John's purpose.

V. If today we find this language unacceptable - what about in that time?

A. Language of the ancient near-east

B. Understanding of God - generous and loving

Book of Wisdom - both words of comfort and words of condemnation

"For all things are dear to you and you hate nothing you have created..."
11:24

Jesus himself talks about the desire of His Father for our salvation and yet the results of following our own way - wide is the road that leads to destruction

VI. The Good News

A. The Faithful are about to enter their rest - we hear the echo of the words of Jesus

"Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest"

Matthew 11:28

B. God is not giving up on humanity - even to the end they will hear the challenge of the "Good News"

C. John wants those who hear him not to be seduced by the glamour of the Roman Empire - rather he sees the peace that is prepared for those who follow the way of the Lord.

14:14-16

¹⁴Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." ¹⁶So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

I. The Vision of the Harvest is based upon Joel

A. Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in,

tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.
Joel 3:12-13

B. We note that this is a typical free adaptation of Joel by John

II. One like the Son of Man is Jesus

A. This image of Jesus comes from Mark 13:26-27

B. Christ waits for the Father who knows the times and the seasons

III. Good News

While we can not share the understanding of the New Testament era that the end is near - we can recognize that our end is near. The end of all things may be eons in the future - but soon a man dies and each of us will pass from this life into eternal life - The good news is that there is a place for the elect and we can by God's Grace attain to that eternal life

St. Paul - "Blessed from now on are those who die in the Lord"

14:17-20

¹⁷And another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has power over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." ¹⁹So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God; ²⁰and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.

I. This is the fate of those whose name are not written in the Book of Life

A. The Judgment of God will come in the second angel

What is the judgment of God - Breathing Nitrogen? (Elemental composition of Air: Nitrogen 78% Oxygen 21% Argon 1% other trace gases plus water vapor and CO₂) Consider that God is all Good - and evil cannot exist in His presence - it is not that he annihilates evil, but that it can not

exist. We might consider nitrogen. It looks like air, it acts like air, and you can breathe it. When you do it does not bother you like a poison gas, but you can not live while breathing nitrogen. It is simple missing the element in air that allows us to live, oxygen.

B. The scene is set in Jerusalem - the beloved city

C The winepress is set outside the city - we are to remember that crucifixion took place outside the city wall

D. This last point tempers the violence of the events. True they are violent, but we are reminded that Christ Conquered not by force, but by surrendering and submitting and thus becoming worthy

This mixed message is for us to understand in this way - we are to imitate the master and not act with violence. Our role is to be faithful, even when we have to suffer because of it. Our vindication comes when our faithful obedience is rewarded and those who are not faithful suffer. Their suffering is not in the violence of the harvest, but in the eternal separation from the throne of Grace.

This last point returns us to the reason for John's Revelation - to encourage and to remind us of the life and death decision we make in choosing to follow Caesar or the true and living God.

15:1-4

Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended. And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed."

I. We now enter the last of the Judgments

A. Seven Plagues - distinct, but related to the seven trumpets and seals

B. We begin with the liturgical interlude - the lake of glass is back

1. We are remember the Red Sea

2. The fire reminds us of the judgment of God in the Red Sea

C. The redeemed are presented and sing the song of Moses - those who have not engaged in emperor worship

1. New Song

2. Not the song of Exodus, but rather is only a song of praise (Pure Worship)

II. The Good News is this Song: Caird reminds us that the portions of the Revelation that are not cloaked in symbolism should be read as clear text and these passages should direct our interpretation of the entire text.

Read again the Song - the meaning is clear

15:5-16:1

⁵After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, ⁶and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles. ⁷And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever; ⁸and the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended. ¹Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

I. The Sanctuary is open - What of what does that remind us?

A. The moment of the death of Jesus on the Cross

B. The Liturgy continues

1. The four living creatures? the four horsemen?
2. The seven angels are vested like priests
3. Carrying from heaven wrath - do we understand this as the opposite of the Holy Eucharist?

In the Holy Eucharist we understand that our gifts are elevated unto heaven and from the altar in heaven we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. In our faithfulness we gather in response to Jesus command and from that action we are given the grace of the Sacrament.

In this case those who have chosen to ignore God and His commandments receive not blessings and grace, but the result of their own poor choices. It is not the direct action of God, but the result of what they have done.

Example: Jump off a building hit the ground and die. (God's fault, God made gravity?) No! you chose to ignore the reality in which you live. Gravity has many good purposes - you have misused gravity and thus you die