Blessed Among Us

St. Oscar Romero
Archbishop and Martyr (1917–1980)

In 2015, following a decree that he had died as a martyr “in hatred of the faith,” Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador was beatified. For an archbishop slain at the altar while saying Mass, this decree might have seemed unremarkable. But for many years Romero’s cause was blocked by powerful prelates who claimed he had not died for his faith but for mixing himself up in politics. This charge was answered by the postulator of Romero’s cause who said his assassination “was not caused by motives that were simply political, but by hatred for a faith that, imbued with charity, would not be silent in the face of the injustices that relentlessly and cruelly slaughtered the poor and their defenders.”

From his installation in 1977 until his death on March 24, 1980, Romero became a tireless defender of justice, peace, and the cause of the poor. His weekly sermons cast the glaring light of the Gospel on the realities of the day. As he said, “A church that does not unite itself to the poor . . . is not truly the Church of Jesus Christ.” In the face of so many brutal deaths, including many of his priests, Romero clearly anticipated his fate. “One who is committed to the poor must risk the same fate as the poor. And in El Salvador we know what the fate of the poor signifies: to disappear, to be tortured, to be captive, and to be found dead.”

He was canonized by Pope Francis in October 2018.

“Martyrdom is a great gift from God that I do not believe I have earned. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life then may my blood be the seed of liberty, and a sign of hope that will soon become a reality. . . . A bishop will die, but the church of God—the people—will never die.”

—St. Oscar Romero
Blessed Among Us

Rutilio Grande
Jesuit Martyr of El Salvador (1928–1977)

Rutilio Grande was born into a poor family in El Salvador and entered the Jesuits at seventeen. His early years as a priest were undistinguished. Only in the mid-1960s did he undergo a second conversion, acquiring a new sense of vocation. Rather than set an example of perfection, he determined, the role of the priest was to offer an example of self-sacrifice and loving service.

Increasingly, he exemplified a new Church in El Salvador, committed to awakening in the poor a sense of their dignity and rights. His reputation as a “radical,” an enemy of the system, took root. Under pressure, he resigned as director of social action projects for the seminary and took up a post as pastor of the small town of Aguilares. There he established a vigorous social ministry. Once again, his sermons became infamous among the town’s elite. In one he proclaimed that if Jesus Christ were to come to El Salvador he would be condemned as a dangerous rabble-rouser and crucified again. “God forbid,” he proclaimed, “that I be one of the crucifiers.”

On March 12, 1977, his van was sprayed with gunfire, killing him as well as an old peasant and a teenage boy traveling with him. His death marked a turning point for El Salvador—the first but not the last time a priest would face violence. In particular, Grande’s death touched the new archbishop, Oscar Romero, prompting his own journey on the road to Calvary.

“Very soon the Bible won’t be allowed to cross our borders. We’ll get only the bindings, because all the pages are subversive.”

—Fr. Rutilio Grande
Revelation 4

• **Welcome & Announcements**
  a. Both retreats
  b. This is our fourth session and we have one left next week.

• **Opening Prayer**
  a. Rev. 12:7-11 – read it and stress 12:11
    1. Notice that the Archangel Michael does defeat Satan; rather, Michael throws the devil out of heaven.
    2. Jesus on the cross and his followers by embracing his cross defeat the devil: “They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death.”
  b. Romero handout
  c. Romero film

• **Rev 14**
  a. **Rev. 14:1-5  The Faithful (Undefiled) Followers of the Lamb**
    1. This passage uses highly symbolic language that has nothing to do with sex.
    2. Rather, “being undefiled with women” and “virgins” are images of sexuality and adultery that refer to idolatry.
    3. This has everything to do with the symbolic number of 144,000 followers of the Lamb who have been faithful.
    4. They have not defiled themselves by trusting the Beast and committing sins in following the Beast.
    5. Thus, they are victorious and receive the title that Jesus said the victors would get in Rev. 3:12 – in the letters to the seven churches – “the name of the Lamb and name of his Father written on their foreheads.
    6. This passage is about faithful discipleship, even unto death, much like St. Oscar Romero.
  b. **Rev. 14:6-13 - A Description of What is To Come for the Unfaithful & the Faithful**
    1. This is a proleptic section of Revelation: the author anticipates what is to come through the proclamations of three angels.
    2. Why? The hope is to show Christians how Babylon the great will suffer greatly in her “fornication” or “harlotry” which again has nothing to do with sex but everything to do with worshipping the beast.
3. 14:6, “I saw another angel flying...with an eternal gospel to proclaim to the inhabitants of the earth, to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.
   1. God wills that all people be saved.
4. What is this proclamation of the gospel, the good news: 14:7, “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of judgment has come. Worship him who made heaven and earth and earth...”
   a. In other words, if you are worshipping anything or anyone other than God who created all things, you are in trouble because the hour of judgment is upon us.
   (a) Babylon is any entity – in this case, the Roman Empire – that makes itself God and demands that others worship this God by being faithful to it. This is “fornication” – trusting and following the Beast.
   (b) All nations drink of her wine of wrath that is the deadly rot of sin, not God’s vengeance.
   (c) This gospel is worship God and nothing else for if you worship anyone other than God, you will burn in your sin, for the fruit of sin is misery and death.
6. 14:9, “Whoever worships the beast and its image...shall also drink the wine of the wrath of God...shall be tormented with fire and brimstone before the holy angels and before the Lamb.”
   (a) Those worshipping the Beast become enslaved to the Beast who can only take life and cannot give life, because the Beast cannot forgive sin.
   (b) The Lamb can forgive sin but the Lamb cannot forgive your sin if you are worshipping the Beast.
   (c) The Lamb can only forgive your sin if you give your heart to the Lamb. You cannot worship two Masters for you will love one and hate the other.
   (d) Thus, as 14:11 announces, if you give your heart to the Beast, you will be tormented day and night until you turn to the Lamb.
   (e) Wrath is the ongoing effect of human sin, not a punishment from God, for sin is punishment in itself.
7. John is going after Christians here who think that they can co-exist by being good members of the empire and faithful followers of the Lamb.
   (a) John’s response: this is madness and it will torment you, because you will think that you are following the Lamb but you are not.
   (b) Worship of the Beast or anything other than God leads to enslavement in sin and death.
   (c) What will keep you safe? 14:12, “…the endurance of God’s people, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” In other words, patient endurance, trusting in Christ and his commandments, even unto death, will keep you safe.
8. We then get the second beatitude in the Book of Revelation which are about encouraging the Christians to be faithful: 14:13, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. Yes – says the Spirit – that they may rest from their labors, for their works go with them.”
   (a) The first beatitude in Revelation is 1:3, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud and blessed are those who listen to this prophetic message and heed what is written in it, for the appointed time is near.”
(b) John’s encouragement here is: death in faithfulness to God leads to “rest” in God forever, which is the beginning of eternal life as we hear from the proclamation of the “eternal gospel” in 14:6, for God’s good news is unchanging.

c. **Rev. 14:14-16 – The Harvest Begins – Jesus calls his faithful followers home.**

1. This vision is about what is to come, that is, it is proleptic.
2. 14:14, “…sitting on the cloud one like a son of man, with a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.”
   (a) This sounds like Daniel 7:13, “As the visions during the night continued, I saw coming with the clouds of heaven One like a son of man. When he reached the Ancient of Days and was presented before him” and Rev. 1:13, “and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest”, so this is probably Jesus Christ coming with a sickle in his hand to reap the harvest.
   (b) The gold crown means victory and how does Jesus win the victory? He became the victim on the cross.
3. 14:15, “Another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud: put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.”
   (a) From Mark 13:23-32, “Be watchful! I have told it all to you beforehand. 24 But in those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory, 27 and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky. 28 “Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates. 30 Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 32 "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”
   (b) Rev. 14:15 is striking for it fulfills what Jesus said in his lifetime, in that, no one, not even Jesus himself knows the hour of the Second Coming but only the Father, the One who sits on the throne. We learn this is the case because an angel comes from the heavenly temple where the One who sits on the throne abides.
4. 14:16, “So the one who was sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.”
   (a) This is not judgment but a harvesting by Jesus with the golden crown of the faithful followers of the Lamb.
   (b) Jesus is coming to call his faithful followers home, especially those who have been faithful unto death, the martyrs who have witnessed faithfully unto death.
   (c) What does this mean? It could be the Second Coming or it could be the death of his faithful followers who pass out of this life into the full life of God, reaping their heavenly reward as we saw in Rev. 14:1-5, a vision of what is to come.
1. This is another proleptic passage, foreshadowing what is to come, especially in 19:11-21.
2. Now is the time for God’s judgment on the persecutors of God’s peoples, upon the destroyers as we will see in a few chapters in Revelation.
3. In this passage, the sickle is a symbol for God's wrath that is the fruit of human sin, the consequences of human sin.
4. 14:18, Then another angel came from the altar, who was in charge of the fire, and cried out in a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Use your sharp sickle and cut the clusters from the earth's vines, for its grapes are ripe.”
   (a) This angel is the same one from 6:9-10 and 8:3-5 who has the gold censor that contains the prayers of the martyrs who ask in 6:10, “How long will it be, holy and true master, before you sit in judgment and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?”
   (b) This part of Revelation foreshadows that God is now acting, responding to the prayers of the martyrs as we will see in 19:11-21.
   (c) Essentially, this is the fruit of the final battle that is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who follow Jesus faithfully find life, even if they experience death. Those who stray from Jesus find misery and death without redemption.
5. 14:19, “So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and cut the earth's vintage. He threw it into the great wine press of God's fury.”
   (a) The background for this is Isaiah 63:1-6, “1 Who is this that comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments, from Bozrah? Who is this, glorious in his apparel, striding in the greatness of his strength? “It is I, I who announce vindication, mighty to save.” 2 Why is your apparel red, and your garments like one who treads the wine press? 3 “The wine press I have trodden alone, and from the peoples no one was with me. I trod them in my anger and trampled them down in my wrath; Their blood spurted on my garments, all my apparel I stained. 4 For a day of vindication was in my heart, my year for redeeming had come. 5 I looked about, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that there was no one to lend support; so my own arm brought me victory and my own wrath lent me support. 6 I trampled down the peoples in my anger, I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their blood upon the ground.”
   (b) Again, this is the fruit of human sin and not God’s vengeance on sinners. Sin is punishment in itself.
6. 14:20, “The wine press was trodden outside the city and blood poured out of the wine press to the height of a horse's bridle for two hundred miles.”
   (a) The actual text says, “...and blood flowed from the winepress...for a distance of sixteen hundred stadia” that is equivalent to about 200 miles.
   (b) Jesus was crucified on Calvary which is outside of the city of Jerusalem.
(c) John, the author of Revelation, sees that the winepress was trodden outside the city, suggesting both the place of the shedding of Jesus’ blood at the crucifixion, an element of the Passion and death of Jesus on the cross that is quite traditional, and the suffering of Christians with Christ when they embrace his cross.

(d) See Rev. 12:11, “They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death.”

(e) We remember this each time we celebrate Eucharist, which is the focal point of Revelation and the focal point of Mass: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(f) John is symbolically stating – loud and clear – that the judgment of the world was achieved on Christ's cross.

(g) We must keep in mind John’s pastoral intent of summoning his readers/hearers to what he firmly believes is a life or death decision: am I following the slain Lamb or the Beast?

(h) John uses this violent imagery, flowing from Isaiah 63:1-6, to vehemently counter the seduction of the beast, the glamour of evil.

7. God is patient but God cannot ignore evil and is totally incompatible with the evil of the Beast that seeks to blind people, getting them to worship the Beast rather than the Creator of all things and the Father of the slain Lamb.

(a) There is a place for God’s “wrath,” his radical incompatibility with evil.

(b) God copes with evil in God’s way.

(c) God’s answer to the worst that humankind can perpetrate is the answer of the Cross.

(d) The wrath of God is the Cross of Christ.

(e) The challenge for we humans – and it is an insoluble problem and why we, perhaps, turn so readily to violence in response to violence – is to maintain faith in the long-suffering of God, faith in the infinitely forgiving love of God and, at the same time, to grasp, and find some way to express God’s abhorrence of evil.

(f) This expression reaches its climax in the cross of Jesus Christ, the crucifixion of God’s Son.

(g) Thus, according to the Book of Revelation and the entire New Testament, the only response to any and all violence for followers of Jesus Christ is the cross.

(h) Any other response is embracing the seduction of the Beast, for it is not trusting the teachings and witness of Jesus on the cross and it assumes that we know better than God does about how to deal with evil.

- Rev. 15 & 16

 a. Rev. 15:1-4 - The Song of Moses & the Lamb
1. This section of Revelation, again, with a series of seven Mosaic plagues, foreshadows what will happen in chapters 18-20 where, in great detail, we find a development of what starts in chapters 14-17. Thus, this section is proleptic: the representation or assumption of a future act or development as if presently existing or accomplished.

2. 15:2, “…a sea of glass…” is the same sea of glass in 4:6 that is front of the throne where the One sits. But here, the sea is mingled with fire, a symbol of God’s judgment.

3. 15:2, “…holding harps of God, were those who had been victorious against the beast and its image and the number of its name.”

   (a) **The victorious ones against the beast are the sealed 144,000 of 7:1-8 and 14:1-5, and the infinite number whom John could not count in 7:9-10.**

   (b) They are wearing white robes and they are victorious, as 7:14 describes, “These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; **they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**”

   (c) Notice that they are victorious over the beast – the Roman Emperor and the Roman Empire, and the image of the beast that is the cult of worship of the emperor. These are the two beasts of Revelation chapter 13: the emperor coupled with the empire and the cult of worship of the emperor.

4. 15:3, “They were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb…”

   (a) After God destroys Pharaoh and his armies who are pursuing the Israelites through the Red Sea, Moses and the people sing a song of victory on the other side of the sea in Exodus 15:1-21.

   (b) Here is Exodus 15:1-6, “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant; horse and chariot he has cast into the sea. 2 My strength and my refuge is the LORD, and he has become my savior. This is my God, I praise him; the God of my father, I extol him. 3 The LORD is a warrior, LORD is his name! 4 Pharaoh's chariots and army he hurled into the sea; the elite of his officers were drowned in the Red Sea. 5 The flood waters covered them, they sank into the depths like a stone. 6 Your right hand, O LORD, magnificent in power, your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.”

   (c) Notice that God wins the victory and the people praise God for doing this, which is exactly what God told Moses to tell the people when they arrived at the Red Sea and seemed trapped while Pharaoh and his armies were pursuing them in Ex 14:11-14, 11 To Moses they said, "Were there no burial places in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Did we not tell you this in Egypt, when we said, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? Far better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses answered the people, "Do not fear! Stand your ground and see the victory the LORD will win for you today. For these Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. 14 The LORD will fight for you; you have only to keep still.”

5. 15:3-4, the song that they sing in Revelation here is a compilation of the following OT verses: Psalms 86:9, 98:2, 111:2, 139:14, 145:17; Amos 4:13; Deut 32:4; Jer 10:7; Mal 1:11.

6. Unlike the song of Moses in Exodus 15 that is praise of God and triumph over their enemies, the song in Revelation is solely praise of God.

7. **This stresses, again, the Book of Revelation’s lack of vindictiveness on the part of God.** Further in 15:4, the book holds out hope that all nations will experience conversion and worship before the Lord. **This is God’s goal: that all nations and**
all peoples will be converted and that is what makes the Book of Revelation one of the most hopeful in the Bible.

b. Rev. 15:5-16:1 The Angels of the Bowls
   1. This is a new vision of special importance.
   2. 15:5, “…the heavenly Tent of Testimony was opened…” is an odd designation. What John implies here is probably the heavenly tabernacle, archetype of the earthly tent of witnesses in Rev. 11:19.
   3. The seven angels in priestly robes (Levitical temple priesthood) bearing the last seven plagues come forth in procession from the divine presence.
   4. They are assisted by one of the living creatures who gives them the bowls full of God’s wrath. The living creatures functioned in the same way in 6:1-8.
   5. John is stressing the life and death choice here: one can choose to follow the slain Lamb and find rest and eternal life, even though it means suffering and possibly death, or one can choose to follow and worship the Beast and its image, falling out of the hands of the Living God, being left to fend for oneself in a world where the choice of evil brings its own moral retribution. It is this moral retribution that is God’s wrath, for I am no longer trusting in the goodness of God but rather what I perceive to be the goodness of the Beast which is a lie that traps me in slavery.
   6. King David when faced with a similar choice between trusting God or the world responds in 2 Sam 24:14, David answered Gad: “I am greatly distressed. But let us fall into the hand of God, whose mercy is great, rather than into human hands.”
   7. John perceives that the Christians in Asia Minor, the seven churches in Revelation listed in chapters 2-3, are out of step with the slain Lamb and in too close a step with the Roman Empire.
   8. Thus, John puts forth his view, that is the view or revelation of Jesus Christ, without apology. Hence, he uses language and imagery that is quite exaggerated to get their attention, almost shouting, saying, “This is a life and death decision!”
c. **Rev. 16:2-9 The Pouring of the First Four Bowls**

1. The bowls, like the trumpets, are modeled on the first and sixth plagues of Egypt found in Exodus.
2. This time, however, they are poured on all those who have the mark of the beast and worship its image, and upon those who persecute Christians.
3. The plague of the fourth trumpet in 8:2 struck the sun, creating darkness. Yet, here in 16:8, it causes the sun to scorch those who worship the Beast and persecute Christians.
4. Contrast that to 7:16, “…never again shall the sun strike them, nor any scorching heat” for Christians.
5. These bowls are not God’s vengeance but the fruit of sin, as we find in Wisdom 11:16, “…that they might learn that one is punished by the very things by which one sins.” So, if I am not sinning, as hopefully the Christians are encouraged not be, they cannot be affected by the plagues.

d. **Rev. 16:10-11 The Pouring of the Fifth Bowl upon the Beast’s Throne**

1. The bowl plagues five through seven are aimed directly at the worshippers of the Beast.
2. The throne of the beast is probably Rome. Thus, this plague assails the very heart of the imperial power. It is a grim prelude to definitive judgment.
3. People blaspheming God points to those who have taken on the character of the false god whom they serve.
4. The beast is the great blasphemer. See Rev. 13:1, 5-6; 17:3.
5. While the plagues are meant to get worshippers of the beast to repent, like Pharaoh, their hearts are hardened.

e. **Rev. 16:12-16 The Sixth Bowl: Demonic Spirits are released, gathering at Armageddon.**

1. This plague is poured out on the Euphrates river, drying it up, preparing a way for the kings of the East to march for battle. John may be thinking of a Parthian invasion of the Roman Empire by Rome’s mysterious and dreaded foe.
2. 16:13, we find the satanic trinity: dragon, beast, and false prophet.
3. The kings of the East are marshalled to move not only on Rome, but because they are seduced by the beast and the Dragon, they are ultimately moving against the Lamb.
4. This is the gathering of armies for the great eschatological battle. This is the dawning of the Day of the Lord – see Joel 2:11, 30.
5. Again, the great battle is the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
6. Jesus warns that he is coming like a thief in the night, warning his followers to be prepared for the last days of “Babylon” which is Rome and any empire. Time does not end. Rather, it is eschatological battle of God crushing any empire that makes itself God.

7. Jesus warns that his coming must be discerned, because both the hour of his coming and its manner in the events of history are hidden.

8. Armageddon is code for “mountain of Megiddo” where King Josiah, a great Israeli king, was slain. Armageddon, like the number 666, is code for disaster for all those who go there. See Rev. 19:11-21. It is a highly symbolic term here.

f. **Rev. 16:17-21 The Seventh Bowl**
   1. Like chapters 14-16, this is proleptic: it is foreshadowing events to come as if they have already happened.
   2. This is the last plague for we hear, “It is done.”
   3. The great city and Babylon the great, Rome, is split into three parts, perhaps, mirroring the satanic trinity of the dragon, beast, and the false prophet.
   4. Lightning, thunder, and earthquakes are signs of the divine visitation.
   5. God’s justice will not be flouted. Thus, Rome, who has made all the nations drink the wine of her fornication (idolatry) in 14:8 must now drink the wine of God’s wrath that is the rotten fruit of Rome’s sin.
   6. These seven plagues reveal that God never gives up on humankind and our straying from God.

- **Rev. 17:1-18 - God’s Judgment Upon the Harlot & the Beast**
  a. This is the start of the proleptic description of God’s judgment, continuing through chapter 18, upon the Harlot and the Beast that will happen in chapter 19. We have been getting this in pieces since chapter 14. Now, it is the full-blown version of the consequence of idolatry and wanton luxury that kills people and consumes creation.
  b. Because the imagery is so detailed in this chapter, John needs an interpreter and the angel revealing the vision to John is the interpreter.
  c. 17:1, Then one of the seven angels who were holding the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come here. I will show you the judgment on the great harlot who lives near the many waters."
     1. The verdict on the great harlot has been announced in 14:8.
     2. In Ezekiel 16, Jerusalem is harlot and in Ezekiel 23 Jerusalem and Samaria are a pair of harlots.
3. Using harlotry as an image for idolatry is found in the Hebrew tradition. Yet, in the 21st Century, we must be clear that this is an image used for men and women who are committing idolatry. It is meant to convey “unfaithfulness” to God.

4. The harlot enthroned on many waters is an allusion to all the vassal states where Rome is enthroned as the imperial ruler. See Jer 51:13, “O You who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures, your end has come, the thread of your life is cut.”

d. 17:2, “the kings of the earth have committed fornication and the inhabitants of the earth have made themselves drunk on the wine of fornication.”
   1. The kings of the earth are the vassal kings of countries who have allied themselves with Rome by purchasing the favor of Rome. They had a choice when conquered by Rome: either become Rome’s slave or become a vassal state of the Roman Empire where they pay tribute to Caesar. See Rev. 16:14, 17:18, and 18:9-10 who are distinguished from the kings (17:12) who belong to the future. And, both these sets of kings are distinguished from the kings of the sunrise (the East) in 16:12 who muster for the battle at Armageddon.

2. The inhabitants of the earth are the infatuated worshippers of the beast. They are the peoples of the earth who are wooed by the glamour of evil and are seduced by it.

c. 17:3, “Then he carried me away in spirit to a deserted place where I saw a woman seated on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names, with seven heads and ten horns.”
   1. John is carried to the desert that can be the haunt of demons but also a place without distraction. In this case, it is the latter where John is viewing the harlot and the beast from a distance, as Jesus went into the desert to get away from all distractions.

2. The woman sitting (enthroned) on the beast is the antithesis of the woman clothed with the sun in Rev. chapter 12.

3. The beast clothed in scarlet – the color of Roman royalty – is the Roman Empire and Caesar – all in one.

4. The woman, the harlot, is sustained, given life by the beast. The woman is the city of Rome.

d. 17:4, “The woman was wearing purple and scarlet and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls. She held in her hand a gold cup that was filled with the abominable and sordid deeds of her harlotry.”
   1. Decked in imperial colors of purple and scarle, the harlot (the city of Rome) is adorned with wanton luxurious jewels while most of her peasants starve to death. She holds in her hands the abominable deeds of her idolatry and wanton sin (harlotry).

2. See 19:7-8, “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready. 8 She was allowed to wear a bright, clean linen garment.” (The linen represents the righteous deeds of the holy ones.)

3. Notice the contrast: the harlot who is Rome is dressed in idolatrous, abominable, sinful deeds where as the bride of the Lamb, the Body of Christ, is dressed in linen of her righteous deeds, full of grace.

g. 17:5, “On her forehead was written a name, which is a mystery, "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth.”
   1. It is possible that the prostitutes of Rome displayed their names on their foreheads.

2. Babylon is the mysterious name for Rome.

3. Babylon in the Old Testament refers to all empires found in the OT: Babylon, Egypt, and Jerusalem, all of whom are called harlots by the prophets where a harlot is an idolater.
h. 17:6, “I saw that the woman was drunk on the blood of the holy ones and on the blood of the witnesses to Jesus. When I saw her I was greatly amazed.”
1. This may be an allusion to the bloody persecution of Nero.
2. Rome is guilty of the double crime of idolatry (17:4) and murder (17:6). Ezekiel accused Jerusalem of both crimes: Ezekiel 16:36-38; 23:37, 45.
3. John is amazed when he stands back and looks at Rome from a distance: he is possibly tempted by the glamour of evil.

i. 17:7, “The angel said to me, "Why are you amazed? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, the beast with the seven heads and the ten horns.”
1. The angel challenges John to not be amazed or seduced by the glamour of evil.
2. Then, the angel becomes John’s interpreter of what he is seeing which is common in an apocalyptic vision.

j. 17:8, “The beast that you saw existed once but now exists no longer. It will come up from the abyss and is headed for destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world shall be amazed when they see the beast, because it existed once but exists no longer, and yet it will come again.”
1. The beast who was and is not and who is to come refers to the legend around Nero. It is a parody of Nero who made himself a god and it is mocking him based on Rev. 1:4, “from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne…” that refers to God.

k. 17:9-10, “Here is a clue for one who has wisdom. The seven heads represent seven hills upon which the woman sits. They also represent seven kings: five have already fallen, one still lives, and the last has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a short while.”
1. The seven hills are well known as the city of Rome.
2. The seven heads are probably seven Roman emperors who persecuted anyone who did worship them, especially Nero who tarred and feathered Christians and then used them as torch lamps at his nighttime parties. This is barbaric.
3. However, evidenced by the angel’s clue about wisdom, this is quite a puzzle to decipher. The best we can do is make guesses here as to who the Roman emperors are.
4. Here are the names of emperors and dates to whom the angel may be referring:
   (a) Julius Caesar (died 44 BC)
   (b) Augustus (31 BC – 14 AD) – Jesus is born when he is Caesar.
   (c) Tiberius (14 – 37) – Jesus is crucified when he is Caesar.
   (d) Gaius (37 – 41)
   (e) Claudius (41-54)
   (f) Nero (54-68) Peter and Paul are probably executed by Nero.
   (g) Galba, Otho, Vitellius (68-69) All three claimed the throne simultaneously.
   (h) Vespasian (69-79) He was the Roman General who lead the battle in the First Jewish War for Rome against Jerusalem in 66 AD. Nero committed suicide in 68 and he was eventually chosen as emperor.
   (i) It is near impossible to determine which seven emperors John speaks about here.

l. 17:11, “The beast that existed once but exists no longer is an eighth king, but really belongs to the seven and is headed for destruction.”
1. By playing on the number seven, John creates a “Nero redux” so he can make the eighth emperor one of the seven who is Nero all over again. Nero is the antichrist.

m. 17:12-14, “The ten horns that you saw represent ten kings who have not yet been crowned; they will receive royal authority along with the beast for one hour. They are of one mind
and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will fight with the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and king of kings, and those with him are called, chosen, and faithful.”

1. These are future kings who will receive authority from the Beast for a short time. They are united in their unfailing support for the Beast.

2. Thus, they will wage war against the Lamb, but the lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of Lords and Kings of Kings – see Deut 10:17; Psalm 136:3; Daniel 2:47; 2 Maccabees 13:4; 1 Tim 6:15; and Rev. 19:16.

3. These kings are distinct from the kings of the sunrise, the East (16:12) who muster for battle at Armageddon. They will feast on Rome and Rome’s allies. God will use them as pawns in God’s plan.

n. 17:15, “Then he said to me, "The waters that you saw where the harlot lives represent large numbers of peoples, nations, and tongues.”

1. The many waters, borrowed from Jeremiah 51:13, refers to mixed and teeming peoples of the empire.

o. 17:16-17, “The ten horns that you saw and the beast will hate the harlot; they will leave her desolate and naked; they will eat her flesh and consume her with fire. For God has put it into their minds to carry out his purpose and to make them come to an agreement to give their kingdom to the beast until the words of God are accomplished.”

1. These are the ten kings in 17:12 who initially ally themselves with the Beast but God turns them against the beast and they will devour her.

2. The ten kings who initially wholeheartedly supported the beast now turn on the harlot, which is good example of the self-destroying power of evil, which the Book of Revelation seeks to reveal: evil will destroy itself. All these plagues and bowls are the fruit of evil’s sinister intentions.

p. 17:18, “The woman whom you saw represents the great city that has sovereignty over the kings of the earth.”

1. John’s final comment of this chapter is like the first two verses, aiming God’s judgment at the woman (an image) who has seduced the kings of the earth with her idolatry (harlotry).

• Rev. 18 - Dirges over or a Taunt of Babylon (Rome)

a. An angel of great authority comes from heaven and announces the fall of Babylon (Rome) that is really a taunt of Rome for its arrogance, murder, and greed that includes all those who benefited from Rome’s imperial wealth: kings of the earth, merchants, and seafarers.
b. Put in street language, chapter 18 of Revelation is a liturgy of trash talk from Jesus to the imperial power of Rome.

c. **18:1-8 Oracle of Doom for Rome (called Babylon)**
   1. The reason for the punishment of Rome is first, her idolatry, making herself god over the living God. What does God do with idols? God destroys them. Basically, God destroys the destroyers of God’s people and especially the poor and the oppressed.
   2. The second reason is the wanton luxury that the Roman Empire lives in that puts so much of their own people and their conquered peoples in destitution and misery.
   3. 18:8, we hear: “Come out of her my people that you have no part in her sins, and that you do not suffer her plagues…”
      (a) This is not a call for the Christians or non-Christians living in Rome to leave town.
      (b) Rather, it is a metaphorical call for them to “come out” of Rome by resisting the culture and values of the empire that seduce people into becoming as self-seeking and greedy as the empire is.
      (c) Thus, the way to do this is through prayer, living sacrificially, embracing the Gospel call of Jesus to care for the poor and suffering by placing ourselves amidst them, fasting, and penitential practices.
      (d) It is a call to consider how much of the world’s available resources that I consume and to not only cut back and share with those who have so little, but rather a call to evaluate the unjust systems of my country and world that favor the privileged and oppress the poor and marginalized.
   4. To the bitter end, God’s invitation for all those in Rome is to change their ways and turn back to God. God never gives up.
   5. That is the goal of this taunt: not to gloat over Rome’s demise but to get them to change their ways.

d. **18:9-19 Taunting & Lament of the Kings, Merchants, and Seafarers**
   1. This section is broken up into three parts, lamenting and taunting these three groups for putting their trust in making their livelihood off of Rome’s imperial wealth.
   2. This passage is inspired by Ezekiel’s dirge over Tyre in Ezekiel 27-28.

3. **18:9-10 The King’s Lament**
   (a) These vassal kings deplore the fate of the city whose luxury as well as whose idolatry they had shared.
   (b) John, ironically, underlines their self-interest by stressing their care to not be involved in the fate of the “mighty city.”

4. **18:11-13, 15-17 The Merchant’s Lament**
   (a) The self-interest of the merchants is even more pronounced, because they mourn for their vanished trade and not for Rome whose commerce was vast as listed in these verses.
(b) They describe the wealth and splendor in terms reminiscent of the woman/harlot of 17:4. Contrast this to the terms used to describe the woman and city (bride and New Jerusalem) in 21:9-10. The latter, like the slain Lamb, live out of self-sacrificing love.

(e) It is this commerce that keeps the majority of peoples in grinding poverty, fighting for what is left.

(d) Notice the last two commercial items listed in 18:13: **slaves and human livestock.** This is sickening and deplorable. They traded in human lives and this is a grave affront to God who created all human beings and wants them all to flourish. It is totally unacceptable to God and the slain Lamb. Slaves were bought and sold. Human livestock were meant for the games in the amphitheater or prostitution.

5. **18:17-19 The Seafarer's Lament**
   (a) Like the previous two groups, the sailors find their self-interests have suffered a dire blow, for the capital of world-wide sea trade was Ostia, the port of Rome.
   (b) Ezekiel 27 portrays the destruction of Tyre – loss of imperial wealth – as a shipwreck, which the sailors would agree with here for Rome.

   1. God’s judgment has been given for Rome: death.
   2. Why? 18:24, “And in her was found the blood of prophets and God’s people, and of all who have been slain on earth.”
   3. This is the fulfillment of the martyrs’ prayers of petition under the altar in the liturgy (Mass) in Rev. 6:10, “They cried out in a loud voice, "How long will it be, holy and true master, before you sit in judgment and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?"
   4. God takes God’s time but God does respond to empires that destroy God’s people. It may take hundreds of years but God does respond, largely by allowing the empire to drown in its own sin.
   5. The western empire of Rome began to fall in the early fifth century around the time of Augustine, which he greatly lamented, for he deeply appreciated the privilege that the Roman Empire gave him as a bishop. It fell for good in 476 AD at the hands of the Germanic tribes, the Visigoths, who came south from, what is now Germany, and did to Rome what Rome had done to them for centuries: murder, pillage, taking slaves, etc.
   6. The eastern empire of Rome last until 1453 AD.
      (a) Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople (what is now Istanbul), renaming it Constantinople.
      (b) It survived the fragmentation of the western Roman empire in the 5th Century.
      (c) It gradually became the Byzantine Empire that lasted until 1453 AD when the Ottoman Turks conquered it.
f. **What about the American Empire today?**

1. Jesus tells us in Matthew 25:31-46 and Luke 16:19-31 that our eternal judgment is based on, not how often I went to church or prayed, but rather how often I reached out to the poor, suffering, and marginalized.
2. Do we realize that we, the United States who are four percent of the world’s population, use 40 percent of the world’s available resources? Is this just?
3. Not only does Jesus call us to share but he calls us to evaluate our economic systems that keep many peoples in grinding poverty and also create human livestock, that is, human trafficking today.
4. How does God want us to respond? The answer is found in prayer, sacrament, and self-sacrificial living.