

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

After the Octave of Easter we are entering a liturgically quieter and more reflective part of the Easter season. Our readings at Mass during the week shift from a focus on the resurrection appearances of Jesus with His disciples to Jesus' resurrected life as given in the Sacraments of the Church for the next few weeks until the 4th Sunday of Easter which is Good Shepherd Sunday. During a good part of the Easter Season, we also read through the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation. The Acts of the Apostles recounts the early history of the Church where Jesus' resurrected life had now passed into the Life of the Church. By grace, Jesus' resurrection was now lived by the Apostles and other disciples as the news of Jesus' resurrection continued to spread by the power of the Holy Spirit in miraculous signs and wonders. The Book of Revelation gives a warning to the Church to remain faithful to Christ and describes the final triumph of Jesus' Resurrection over sin and death into eternity.

Over the next several weeks in these bulletin letters we will consider the messages found in the Book of Revelation. The Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, is often the least known and understood by many believers. It should be read in three ways representing the full revelation of God found in Jesus Christ. Firstly, we should read it in terms of what it means in the past (the life of the early Church and what God was saying through the message to the early Christians); secondly, what God is saying to the Church and the world now in our time; and thirdly, what God is saying about His final triumph and all the events that will lead up to the moment when Christ finally conquers sin and death and the forces of evil in His last glorious triumph. In fact, every book of the Bible could be looked at and interpreted with these three perspectives in mind. It is good to keep in mind that prophetic literature in the bible and all prophecies connect God's current and future action to what He has already done in the past. Prophecy has something to say to us about what God is doing now and what He will do in the future. Prophecy many times does give insight into actual events and occurrences that may happen and so we cannot say that prophetic literature is merely symbolic but can predict events in the present and future that may actually occur. Prophetic events foretold, however, may always be changed because God's relationship with His People and with the world is a dynamic interaction that may change the outcome at any time. For instance, there are multiple examples in the Bible and in the history of the Church where God's People have prayed and catastrophic events were averted.

We traditionally understand the Book of Revelation (also called the "Apocalypse") to be written by St. John of Patmos who we also believe to be John the Apostle and John the Beloved Disciple who wrote both the Gospel of John and the three letters of John in the New Testament. We give Him the title of St. John of Patmos in this cast because He describes himself being on that island when God gave Him the visions that comprise the Book of Revelation. The book begins with St. John having a vision of Jesus Christ in His glory in the heavenly Kingdom. Then: Jesus was showing His glory to St. John so that He could give an immediate message to the members of the Church at that time. Now: the message reminds us that Jesus Christ is the Lord of Heaven and Earth now and that He is should be reigning in our hearts, and lives, and homes right now. We should also remember to be prepared because Jesus could come in His final glory at any moment. Are you ready for that moment? Future: The Lord will come as St. John describes in a moment in time which is not far away.

He first has a message for seven churches that were founded by the Apostles and their immediate successors. The number 7 is highly symbolic in the Book of Revelation and the entire Bible. It refers to divine things, the Holy Spirit and God Himself. There are Seven Sacraments through which God gives us the fullness of His divine life. St. John has a message for seven churches because they represent the whole Church. Seven churches are the fullness of God's Church. So the messages while being for each individual church are at the same time for the whole Church. Each message calls out the sins of the people in their particular church and then calls them to repentance and back to faithfulness to Jesus Christ. For instance, a few of the Churches were living a heresy called "Nicolaitanism". These Christians believed that they could "lead lives of unrestrained indulgence" and still be saved by the grace of Christ. In other words, they could live any way they wanted to

sexually and that their sexual sin did not matter and that they would be saved anyway. This is obviously a prevalent attitude of many Christians today. Many Christians think they don't have to live by God's laws and that He will save them anyway. This part of the Book of Revelation reveals the grave danger that people are in who take that approach to living as a Christian. Then: God was speaking very clearly to the actual churches of the time about their particular sins and the need for them to repent, be purified and be faithful or else there would be consequences for their unfaithfulness. Now: the message for us today is that the people of the Church have many sins and practices and habits that are not of God and we also in our time need to turn from our misguided understanding of Faith and Truth and repent or else we will be cut off from the saving grace of Christ now. Future: The Church must always be vigilant and can never become complacent in Her effort to be purified of sin and become untainted by the fallen world around us: the Church must always be spiritually vigilant and is always in need of purification. If the messages were directed at the Church today, the Spirit may say something like: "You priests have become immersed in many worldly things and some have committed scandal against God's little ones. You faithful no longer consider the law of God but live like the rest of the world violating the Sabbath rest by pursuing worldly activity, they consider unfaithfulness in marriage to be virtuous. They say that God will forgive and keep sinning with no regard for the judgement that is to come. Return to true love for God and His ways before the coming fire." Please read and reflect upon this first section of the Book of Revelation and what the spirit is saying to you as an individual member of the Church now and what God might be saying to the Church as a whole in our struggle to be faithful in the midst of an unfaithful world.

From the beginning of the Book of Revelation 1:1-20—*John's Vision of the Son of Man*

This is the revelation God gave to Jesus Christ that he might show his servants what must happen very soon. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who in reporting all he saw bears witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Happy is the man who reads this prophetic message, and happy are those who hear it and heed what is written in it, for the appointed time is near! To the seven churches in the province of Asia: John wishes you grace and peace—from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead and ruler of the kings of earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his own blood, who has made us a royal nation of priests in the service of his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

See, he comes amid the clouds!

Every eye shall see him, even of those who pierced him.

All the peoples of the earth shall lament him bitterly.

So it is to be! Amen! The Lord God says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty!"

I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress and the kingly reign and the endurance we have in Jesus, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God's word and bore witness to Jesus. On the Lord's day I was caught up in ecstasy, and I heard behind me a piercing voice like the sound of a trumpet, which said, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea". I turned around to see whose voice it was that spoke. When I did so I saw seven lampstands of gold, and among the lampstands One like a Son of Man wearing an ankle-length robe, with a sash of gold about his breast. The hair of his head was as white as snow-white wool, and his eyes blazed like fire. His feet gleamed like polished brass refined in a furnace, and his voice sounded like the roar of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars. A sharp, two-edged sword came out of his mouth, and his face shone like the sun at its brightest.

When I caught sight of him I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said: "There is nothing to fear. I am the First and the Last and the One who lives. Once I was dead but now I live—forever and ever. I hold the keys of death and the nether world. Write down, therefore, whatever you see in

visions—what you see now and will see in time to come. This is the secret meaning of the seven stars you saw in my right hand, and of the seven lampstands of gold: the seven stars are the presiding spirits of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

2:1-11 To the churches at Ephesus and Smyrna I, John, heard the Lord saying to me: “To the presiding spirit of the church in Ephesus, write this: ‘The One who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven lampstands of gold has this to say: I know your deeds, your labors, and your patient endurance. I know you cannot tolerate wicked men; you have tested those self-styled Apostles who are nothing of the sort, and discovered that they are impostors. You are patient and endure hardship for my cause. Moreover, you do not become discouraged. I hold this against you, though: you have turned aside from your early love. Keep firmly in mind the heights from which you have fallen. Repent, and return to your former deeds. If you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this much in your favor: you detest the practices of the Nicolaitans, just as I do. “‘Let him who has ears heed the Spirit’s word to the Churches! I will see to it that the victor eats from the tree of life which grows in the garden of God”. To the presiding spirit of the church in Smyrna, write this: “The First and the Last who once died but now lives has this to say: I know of your tribulation and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander you endure from self-styled Jews who are nothing other than members of Satan’s assembly. Have no fear of the sufferings to come. The devil will indeed cast some of you into prison to put you to the test; you will be tried over a period of ten days. Remain faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life.” “Let him who has ears heed the Spirit’s word to the churches! The victor shall never be harmed by the second death.”

The Book of Revelation 2-12:29 To the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira I, John, heard the Lord saying to me: “To the presiding spirit of the Church in Pergamum, write this: ‘The One with the sharp, two-edged sword has this to say: I know you live in the very place where Satan’s throne is erected; and I know you hold fast to my name and have not denied the faith you have in me, not even at the time when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred in your city where Satan has his home. Nevertheless I hold a few matters against you: there are some among you who follow the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak to throw a stumbling block in the way of the Israelites by tempting them to eat food sacrificed to idols and to practice fornication. Yes, you too have those among you who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent! If you do not, I will come to you soon and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. “‘Let him who has ears heed the Spirit’s word to the churches! To the victor I will give the hidden manna; I will also give him a white stone upon which is inscribed a new name, to be known only by him who receives it.’ “To the presiding spirit of the church in Thyatira, write this:

“The Son of God, whose eyes blaze like fire and whose feet gleam like polished brass, has this to say: I know your deeds—your love and faith and service—as well as your patient endurance; I know also that your efforts of recent times are greater than ever. Nevertheless I hold this against you: you tolerate a Jezebel—that self-styled prophetess who seduces my servants by teaching them to practice lewdness and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I have given her a chance to repent but she refuses to turn from her lewdness. I mean to cast her down on a bed of pain; her companions in sin I will plunge into intense suffering unless they repent of their sins with her, and her children I will put to death. Thus shall all the churches come to know that I am the searcher of hearts and minds, and that I will give each of you what your conduct deserves”. “And now I address myself to you others in Thyatira who do not uphold this teaching and know nothing of the so-called “deep secrets” of Satan; on you I place no further burden. In any case, hold fast to what you have until I come”. “To the one who wins the victory, who keeps to my ways till the end, I will give authority over the nations—the same authority I received from my Father. He shall rule them with a rod of iron and shatter them like crockery; and I will give him the morning star.”

“Let him who has ears heed the Spirit’s word to the churches!”

From the book of Revelation 3:1-22 The churches of Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea I John heard the Lord saying to me: “To the angel of the church in Sardis, write this: ‘The One who has the seven spirits of God and

the seven stars says this: I know your works, that you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Be watchful and strengthen what is left, which is going to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember then how you accepted and heard; keep it, and repent. If you are not watchful, I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come upon you. However, you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; they will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy. The victor will thus be dressed in white, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name in the presence of my Father and of his angels.”

“Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write this: ‘The holy one, the true, who holds the key of David, who opens and no one shall close, who closes and no one shall open, says this: I know your works, behold, I have left an open door before you, which no one can close. You have limited strength, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make those of the assembly of Satan who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying, behold I will make them come and fall prostrate at your feet, and they will realize that I love you. Because you have kept my message of endurance, I will keep you safe in the time of trial that is going to come to the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming quickly. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one may take your crown.’”

“The victor I will make into a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never leave it again. On him I will inscribe the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, as well as my new name.”

“Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea, write this: ‘The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the source of God’s creation, says this:

“I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I am rich and affluent and have no need of anything,’ and yet do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich, and white garments to put on so that your shameful nakedness may not be exposed, and buy ointment to smear on your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and chastise. Be earnest, therefore, and repent.”

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me. I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne.”

“Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

May our Resurrected Lord raise the Church today from sin and death to be faithful to His saving Grace once more!

In the Power of Jesus' Resurrection to Heal and Save,
Fr. Derda, Fr. Steve, Deacon Russ & Deacon Ed