

May 5, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are moving very quickly through the Easter Season and will be coming to the Ascension and Pentecost in only a few weeks. We have been reading through the Gospel of John and Jesus' last conversation with His Apostles during the Last Supper (John 13-17). We will continue to read these passages until the end of the Easter Season. They are also Jesus' lasting words to us about who He is and about His relationship with the Father, the Holy Spirit, and us who live in Him through our Baptism. It would be a good idea to prayerfully read through these chapters of John over the next few weeks. As Jesus reminds us in this weeks Gospel, if we do not remain connected with Him through His word, through the Sacraments, and through consistent prayer, we cannot live just as a branch cannot live without a vine.

We continue our consideration of the Book of Revelation during this Easter Season because Jesus, who is Lord by the power of His resurrection "will come again to judge the living and the dead" and reign as resurrected King forever.

Last week we learned that St. John was given a vision of a scroll with seals. The next section of the Book of Revelation is the longest section (Chapters 6-16) and describes what is written in that scroll regarding the judgement of God and the Lamb, Jesus, upon the earth, and the judgement of those who do not follow the Lamb. What is in the scroll also involves the destiny of those who have been faithful to Jesus and those who have already made it to the heavenly Kingdom. The Lamb opens the seven seals on the scroll so that St. John can see what is coming for both the faithful and the unfaithful. After the opening of the scroll, St. John also sees visions of punishment and reward involving images of heaven and those who are there, seven trumpets, and seven bowls which represent the kinds of punishment that will come to the earth and the beings (both human and angelic) who refuse to follow the Lamb, Jesus. He also sees visions that describe the activity of human and angelic beings who are involved in the process of judgement and of salvation, both those who will reign with the Lamb in heaven and those who are battling on the side of evil and the Evil One. It is clear that there is reward for those who persevere in faithfulness to Jesus the Lamb until the end and there is judgement and punishment for those who do not repent of their sin or evil deeds.

When we read these passages we should think of what God was saying to the Church at the time St. John had the vision, what God is saying to the Church and the world now, and what He is saying regarding the future which includes the "end times" and the future events that lead up to those times and the Final Judgement. It is also good to remember that some of the imagery that St. John witnessed is symbolic and some imagery is literal. For example, the fantastic creatures described have elements of their descriptions that stand for other realities (7 eyes means that God is all-seeing, nothing is hidden from Him) whereas some imagery in his visions is literal (the Saints and angels really do worship God and the Lamb, Jesus, around His heavenly throne). What is clear in these visions is that the Lamb is coming to set things right, that justice and mercy will both be perfectly served, and that the Lamb's faithful followers will be saved.

We have room to consider only Chapters 6-9 today. These chapters deal with the opening of the scrolls by the Lamb. The opening of the seven scrolls lead into the blowing of seven trumpets. Both the seals and the trumpets reveal the means God will allow or use to bring justice to the earth, to eliminate evil and to bring victory to His Faithful. In the middle of these visions, St. John also sees what heaven is like, who is there, and what they are doing. The punishments and battles described in these chapters and all the chapters leading up to Chapter 20 tell of all the things that will happen before Jesus establishes a period or "Era" of Peace that comes before the Last Judgement and the final coming of Christ and His New Creation. Christ will reign in human hearts for a time in this world before the end comes. The first 4 seals opened represent a conquering power, bloody war, famine and plague, and death itself that will come upon the world in the beginning of the time before the "Era of Peace" described in Chapter 20. The reality is that God needs to purify and heal the earth and human hearts before there can be an "Era of Peace" on earth. That process will be both painful and purifying because many refuse to enter willingly into that necessary process. And of course, the fallen angels have already made their definitive choice against God and will therefore need to be taken by force from their

current place of influence. Obviously, the events described by the opening of the four seals have happened before during the Roman Empire when St. John had his visions and also at many times before in human history. The events described by the opening of the four seals have also happened during the last century or two in our time. These two thousand years are certainly part of the preparation for the Era of Peace that is to come. The only question remaining for the future is: is this the last cycle of these events before the definitive Era of Peace? Are the signs of our times matching even more closely to St. John's descriptions of his visions?

**Chapter 6 The First Six Seals.** Then I watched while the Lamb broke open the first of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures cry out in a voice like thunder, "Come forward." I looked, and there was a white horse, and its rider had a bow. He was given a crown, and he rode forth victorious to further his victories. When he broke open the second seal, I heard the second living creature cry out, "Come forward." Another horse came out, a red one. Its rider was given power to take peace away from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another. And he was given a huge sword. When he broke open the third seal, I heard the third living creature cry out, "Come forward." I looked, and there was a black horse, and its rider held a scale in his hand. I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures. It said, "A ration of wheat costs a day's pay, and three rations of barley cost a day's pay. But do not damage the olive oil or the wine." When he broke open the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature cry out, "Come forward." I looked, and there was a pale green horse. Its rider was named Death, and Hades accompanied him. They were given authority over a quarter of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and plague, and by means of the beasts of the earth. When he broke open the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the witness they bore to the word of God. 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?" Each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to be patient a little while longer until the number was filled of their fellow servants and brothers who were going to be killed as they had been. Then I watched while he broke open the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; the sun turned as black as a dark sackcloth and the whole moon became like blood. The stars in the sky fell to the earth like unripe figs shaken loose from the tree in a strong wind. Then the sky was divided like a torn scroll curling up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place. The kings of the earth, the nobles, the military officers, the rich, the powerful, and every slave and free person hid themselves in caves and among mountain crags. They cried out to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, Because the great day of their wrath has come and who can withstand it?"

In the next Chapter, St. John sees a vision of God marking and saving His elect for heaven and of the heavenly worship of the angels and those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus. Please see Dr. Scott Hahn's book *The Lamb's Supper* for an excellent explanation of how St. John's visions of heavenly worship are reflected in the worship that we give to God in the Holy Mass. That book is especially helpful for us to use in explaining to non-Catholics how Mass is very biblical and that we are entering into the same worship that the angels and Saints give to God in heaven when we worship the Lamb at Mass. The number 144,000 is always a controversial number in biblical discussion because the Jehovah's Witness claim that only 144,000 are going to make it to heaven. They misunderstand biblical symbolic use of numbers  $144,000 = 12 \times 12 \times 100$ . Twelve is a number that God choose to show the fullness in number of his chosen people Israel and also his twelve apostles. From these tribes flow innumerable descendants. The number 1000 in the Bible always represents a countless number. In reality the 144,000 represents a countless number of descendants promised to Abraham by God because of his faith, a number of descendants God promised would be as countless as the stars in the sky. In other words, this number is not limiting, but in fact a testimony to the countless people that will be saved and worshipping around God's throne forever. In fact, St. John says at the end of the chapter that after the 144,000, there was a multitude that no one could count. We just have to be sure as the famous song says, to do everything we can, "to be in that number when the Saints go marching in." We want to be sure to be marked by the seal of the Sacrament of Baptism and God's saving grace and not to loose His sanctifying grace by denying Jesus or by committing mortal sin.

**Chapter 7 The 144,000 Sealed.** After this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on land or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel come up from the East, holding the seal of the living God. He cried out in a loud voice to the four angels who were given power to damage the land and the sea, "Do not damage the land or the sea or the trees until we put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." I heard the number of those who had been marked with the seal, one hundred and forty-four thousand marked from every tribe of the Israelites: twelve thousand were marked from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand from the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand from the tribe of Joseph, and twelve thousand were marked from the tribe of Benjamin. **Triumph of the Elect.** After this, I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb." All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They prostrated themselves before the throne, worshiped God, and exclaimed: "Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen." Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me, "Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?" I said to him, "My Lord, you are the one who knows." He said to me, "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. "For this reason they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Remember that the number 7 means the fullness of God's divinity. And so, when we hear of seven seals, seven angels, seven trumpets, and seven bowls it means that God's divine judgement and justice is fully coming to His creation. In Chapters 8 and 9, the opening of the last of the seven seals lead to seven angels blowing seven trumpets, which usher in punishments that remind us of the 10 plagues used to free the chosen people Israel from slavery in Egypt under the dictatorship of the Pharaoh. As part of this vision, St. John sees the angels worshiping God around His throne using incense, which represent our prayers going up to God. This is one of the main reasons we use incense at Mass today, because the altar becomes the throne of the Lamb when Jesus becomes present in the Blessed Sacrament on the altar. We join in the heavenly worship. The priest and deacon are like the angels worshiping God around His throne and who present the prayers of all the faithful to him on our behalf.

There are elements of these plagues before the "Era of Peace" that are symbolic and elements that may be literal prophecies of what will happen in the future. We must take to prayerful discernment by looking at the signs of our own times to understand if any of the experiences of our world today are actually fulfilling these events foretold in St. John's visions. All prophecy may represent literal events that will occur but many times uses symbolic language to express itself. The future is never fully revealed until it happens because God can always delay or modify the future based on our free will participation in His will and how our free choices interact with His divine will and timing. If that sounds mysterious, it is. However, we should continue to evaluate where we stand in our relationship with God and the things that are happening in our world today to see how well we align with God's plan to save us.

**Chapter 8: The Seven Trumpets.** When he broke open the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw that the seven angels who stood before God were given seven trumpets. **The Gold Censer.** Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a gold censer. He was given a great quantity of incense to offer, along with the prayers of all the holy ones, on the gold altar that was before the throne. The smoke of the incense along with the prayers of the holy ones went up before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with burning coals from the altar, and hurled it down to the earth. There were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

**The First Four Trumpets.** The seven angels who were holding the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. When the first one blew his trumpet, there came hail and fire mixed with blood, which was hurled down to the earth. A third of the land was burned up, along with a third of the trees and all green grass. When the second angel blew his trumpet, something like a large burning mountain was hurled into the sea. A third of the sea turned to blood, third of the creatures living in the sea died, and a third of the ships were wrecked. When the third angel blew his trumpet, a large star burning like a torch fell from the sky. It fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The star was called "Wormwood," and a third of all the water turned to wormwood. Many people died from this water, because it was made bitter. When the fourth angel blew his trumpet, a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them became dark. The day lost its light for a third of the time, as did the night. Then I looked again and heard an eagle flying high overhead cry out in a loud voice, "Woe! Woe! Woe\* to the inhabitants of the earth from the rest of the trumpet blasts that the three angels are about to blow!"

**Chapter 9: The Fifth Trumpet.** Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. It was given the key for the passage to the abyss. It opened the passage to the abyss, and smoke came up out of the passage like smoke from a huge furnace. The sun and the air were darkened by the smoke from the passage. Locusts came out of the smoke onto the land, and they were given the same power as scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or any tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not allowed to kill them but only to torment them for five months; the torment they inflicted was like that of a scorpion when it stings a person. During that time, these people will seek death but will not find it, and they will long to die but death will escape them. The appearance of the locusts was like that of horses ready for battle. On their heads they wore what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, and they had hair like women's hair. Their teeth were like lions' teeth, and they had chests like iron breastplates. The sound of their wings was like the sound of many horse-drawn chariots racing into battle. They had tails like scorpions, with stingers; with their tails they had power to harm people for five months. They had as their king the angel of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon. The first woe has passed, but there are two more to come.

**The Sixth Trumpet.** Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the [four] horns of the gold altar before God, telling the sixth angel who held the trumpet, "Release the four angels\* who are bound at the banks of the great river Euphrates." So the four angels were released, who were prepared for this hour, day, month, and year to kill a third of the human race. The number of cavalry troops was two hundred million; I heard their number. Now in my vision this is how I saw the horses and their riders. They wore red, blue, and yellow breastplates, and the horses' heads were like heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and sulfur. By these three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur that came out of their mouths a third of the human race was killed. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like snakes, with heads that inflict harm. The rest of the human race, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, to give up the worship of demons and idols made from gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic potions, their unchastity, or their robberies.

Clearly, many elements of these events seem present in our world today. We pray that all people will heed the prophetic warnings in these chapters of the Book of Revelation and turn with repentant hearts to the Lamb and be saved! May the Lamb who has truly risen come with His power and victory to rescue us from sin and death itself. He is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

In Our Victorious King,  
Fr. Derda Fr. Steve, Deacon Russ, Deacon Ed