

May 9, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Easter Season is approaching its culmination with the Solemnities of Jesus' Ascension and Pentecost coming over the next few weeks. Traditionally, Ascension is celebrated on the historical anniversary of Jesus ascending to the right hand of the Father which is 40 days after Easter, or Ascension Thursday. This year that falls on May 13th. In our region of the Catholic Church, our Bishops have transferred the celebration of the Ascension to the following Sunday. We will celebrate Ascension next weekend. However, it is still good to honor our Lord's Ascension this coming Thursday, May 13th, with personal prayers and devotions. One may choose to pray the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary that day which includes the Ascension in the 2nd Mystery. May 13th also marks the 104th anniversary of the first apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Fatima in Portugal and is therefore considered to be the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima. This is another good reason to pray the Rosary on Thursday of this week especially for the conversion of all people to God. Encouraging all of us to pray for the conversion of souls to God is the main reason why the Blessed Mother appeared to the three shepherd children when she visited Fatima. She asked them to pray especially for the conversion of Russia so that demonic and atheistic communism would not spread across the globe. Since it has already spread, our prayers need to become even more intense.

May is the month of Mary because we remember her rejoicing in her Son's resurrection during the 40 days after Easter Sunday, a good part of which occurred during the month of May. By extension, we celebrate Mother's Day in May because May is the month of the Mother of God. We pray for all of our mothers living and deceased today, on this Mother's Day, May 9th. May our mothers always know the joy and love of Jesus and Mary in their lives and may each of us have great respect and love for our mothers who cooperated with God to give us human life. Once God gave us life, we will have life forever. Thank you, dear mothers, for saying yes to God's plan and for working with Him to bring new life into the world! Mary, Mother of all the truly Living, teach us to love and cherish all mothers!

Not only is Thursday, May 13th, traditional Ascension and the Feast of our Lady of Fatima, it is also Fr. Derda's 15th anniversary of ordination to the Holy Priesthood of Jesus Christ. May Jesus bless all of our priests and may they have the protection and guidance of the Virgin Mary in carrying out the work of her Son! She reminds us always to "Do whatever He tells you." (John 2:1-11)

Last week in our reflections on the Book of Revelation we considered Chapters 6-10. This week we will consider Chapters 10-12 in St. John's Vision of the time of tribulation leading up to a Time of Peace which all happens before the Second Coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead. In Chapters 6-10, we heard St. John describe a scroll with seals, which when opened by the Lamb Jesus, would release plagues upon the whole world and humanity that would begin a process of purification of evil so that salvation and peace could come to God's elect. The number 7 is always associated with the divinity of God or of fullness. The opening of the first 6 seals reveals the suffering that is to come and the 7 trumpet blasts release phases of the sufferings that begin to purify creation. In Chapters 10-12, there is a break before the 7th trumpet blast at which point St. John has the vision of an angel with a small scroll which is not the scroll with the seven seals and a vision of two witnesses. St. John hears the voice of God (7 thunders) which announces judgement, but because there is little time before the judgement, St. John is given a scroll which he eats. The scroll tastes good because it means God's people will be rejoicing at His victory soon, but it makes him sick when he eats it because God's victory will come only through great suffering. Jesus' triumph over death came through the suffering on the cross and so it will be for all of God's sons and daughters before the great and final victory.

Chapter 10—The Angel with the Small Scroll.

Then I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven wrapped in a cloud, with a halo around his head; his face was like the sun and his feet were like pillars of fire. In his hand, he held a small scroll that had been opened. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and then he cried out in a loud voice as a lion roars. When he cried out, the seven thunders raised their voices, too. When the seven thunders had

spoken, I was about to write it down; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have spoken, but do not write it down." Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by the one who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them, "There shall be no more delay. At the time when you hear the seventh angel blow his trumpet, the mysterious plan of God shall be fulfilled, as he promised to his servants the prophets." Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So, I went up to the angel and told him to give me the small scroll. He said to me, "Take and swallow it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will taste as sweet as honey." I took the small scroll from the angel's hand and swallowed it. In my mouth, it was like sweet honey, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then someone said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."

In Chapter 11, St. John is told about a period of trial that will come to God's holy people.

The number 1260 is the number of days in 3 1/2 years. Seven (7) is the number of fullness or of divine things. Twelve—hundred and sixty (1260) represents of period of trial for the People of God. This number is based on the time of persecution by Antiochus Epiphanies in the book of Daniel. This persecution lasted for 42 months (1260 days) and is therefore the prototype period for all periods of persecution that follow, whether of Christians of the Roman Empire, or of Christians who will endure persecution at other points in later times. In our day, current prophecies of persecution and suffering also seem to follow this pattern of 3 1/2 years or 7 years. God will not allow His people to suffer forever, therefore 3 1/2 years may be seen as God's mercy permitting only a short time of great trial rather than an interminable time of trial (7 years). It is interesting that Communism in Russia reigned for approximately 70 years before its dismantling. It is also interesting that the use of concentration camps in the Nazi regime of Germany in the 1930's-40's lasted for about 7 years. The term "great city" refers to all evil empires such as Sodom, Babylon, Rome, and other regimes that are filled with evil and immorality. St. John sees two witnesses along with two lampstands and two olives trees that may represent the Law and the Prophets, Moses and Elijah, or St. Peter and St. Paul. They may also represent all of those who were martyred in witness to Jesus. The beast, or the Devil, is certainly the source for the persecution and martyrdom of Christians by the powers of the world (Babylon, Rome, Communist/atheist regimes, etc.). After the beast kills the witnesses, they are taken up to heaven. This is an encouragement to the Christians living in the Roman Empire, and Christians of every age who endure persecution and the hand of worldly and demonic powers, to remain faithful and be patient for God's salvation. St. John hears a seventh trumpet blast proclaiming God's victory over the evil of the Devil and the world and he sees the patriarchs and Apostles around throne of the God praising Him for the victory He is winning through those who have suffered so far and remained faithful.

Chapter 11—The Two Witnesses.

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff and I was told, "Come and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count those who are worshiping in it. But, exclude the outer court of the temple; do not measure it, for it has been handed over to the Gentiles, who will trample the holy city for forty-two months. I will commission my two witnesses to prophesy for those twelve hundred and sixty days, wearing sackcloth." These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone wants to harm them, fire comes out of their mouths and devours their enemies. In this way, anyone wanting to harm them is sure to be slain. They have the power to close up the sky so that no rain can fall during the time of their prophesying. They also have power to turn water into blood and to afflict the earth with any plague as often as they wish. When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will wage war against them and conquer them and kill them. Their corpses will lie in the main street of the great city, which has the symbolic names "Sodom" and "Egypt," where indeed their Lord was crucified. Those from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation will gaze on their corpses for three and a half days, and they will not allow their corpses to be buried. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and be glad and exchange gifts because these two prophets tormented the inhabitants of the earth. But, after the three and a half days, a breath of life from God entered them. When they stood on their feet, great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven say to them, "Come up here." So they went up to heaven in a cloud as their

enemies looked on. At that moment, there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell in ruins. Seven thousand people were killed during the earthquake; the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed, but the third is coming soon.

The Seventh Trumpet. Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet. There were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world now belongs to our Lord and to his Anointed, and he will reign forever and ever." The twenty-four elders who sat on their thrones before God prostrated themselves and worshiped God and said: "We give thanks to you, Lord God almighty, who are and who were. For you have assumed your great power and have established your reign. The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for the dead to be judged, and to recompense your servants, the prophets, and the holy ones and those who fear your name, the small and the great alike, and to destroy those who destroy the earth." Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a violent hailstorm.

Chapter 12 is particularly important in our Catholic understanding of Mary the Mother of God and of the Church. Both Mary and the Church are the mother of all Christians. This passage may be seen as literally describing Mary giving birth to the Son, Jesus Christ, during the time when Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were living on earth. When Mary gave birth, she and her Son were literally taken into the desert to escape the evil wrath and murderous and envious hatred of King Herod. Herod, very literally, went to wage war on all the children of Bethlehem when Jesus escaped into Egypt. The Holy Innocents were murdered by King Herod and became the first martyrs. When it was safe for Mary and Joseph to bring Jesus back to Nazareth (after 1260 days) they made their way from Egypt. The image of the beast in St. John's time represents the evil Roman Empire which is persecuting and killing Christians. All evil empires are the emissaries of the Devil who exist to further his kingdom of darkness. The beast is both literally the Devil and all of those who are in league with him whether they be empires or persons.

This passage may also be interpreted in view of time and eternity after Jesus' Ascension, where Mary (and the Church as the mother of all Christians born spiritually to a new life of grace from her through Baptism) and Jesus her Son continue to do battle with the dragon who is the Devil. This passage says that the dragon tried to devour her, but that she escaped to the desert where a special place had been prepared for her. This can be seen as Mary being taken to Heaven in her Assumption where the Devil cannot get at her and she is safe and protected. On a spiritual note, if we are close to the Virgin Mary and asked her protection, she hides us in her "mantle" or "cloak" and keeps us safe from the attacks of Satan who continues to "do battle" with the rest of her children. We are the rest of her children and the dragon is trying to devour us in our day. Do you ask the Virgin Mary for protection against the forces of evil in your life? Mary has a crown of twelve stars. She is the Queen and Mother of the Apostles. She gave birth to the Church on Pentecost Sunday when the Holy Spirit transformed her sons into the Shepherds of the Church. The woman in this image of twelve stars also represents the Church herself whose princes are the Twelve Apostles who rule on behalf of Christ and through their Sacramental ministry give birth to Christians throughout the centuries.

St. Michael and all the good angels have been waging war with the Devil and his angels from the beginning of creation, during Jesus time on earth, and now through the era of the Church. They will be engaged in this battle with us until the final battle which will be described later in the Book of Revelation. God had already won the definitive battle with Satan in the victory of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. However, that battle continues in the world and in all of us until the definitive final battle before the new heavens and the earth are complete (See Rev 20 and following).

This passage is used often on Marian feast days such as the Assumption, the Queenship of Mary, etc., for all of the above reasons. Many artistic images of the Blessed Virgin Mary show her with a crown of twelve stars and crushing the head of a dragon as a representation of both this passage and Genesis 3 where the prophecy is given regarding the woman and her offspring (Jesus and her other offspring) who would crush the head of the serpent.

Chapter 12 -The Woman and the Dragon.

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days. Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have salvation and power come, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed. For the accuser of our brothers is cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night. 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. Therefore, rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them. But woe to you, earth and sea, for the Devil has come down to you in great fury, for he knows he has but a short time.” When the dragon saw that it had been thrown down to the earth, it pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the desert, where, far from the serpent, she was taken care of for a year, two years, and a half-year. The serpent, however, spewed a torrent of water out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away with the current. But the earth helped the woman and opened its mouth and swallowed the flood that the dragon spewed out of its mouth. Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God’s commandments and bear witness to Jesus. It took its position on the sand of the sea.

May Mary our Mother protect us, and with St. Michael the Archangel, defend us from the attacks of the Devil in our time, and win the victory over sin and death by her Son's glorious Resurrection!

In Our Lady of Fatima and Her Victorious Son,
Fr. Derda Fr. Steve, Deacon Russ & Deacon Ed