

May 16, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we observe the celebration of the Lord's Ascension into heaven which is traditionally kept on Ascension Thursday each year, 40 days after Easter. This is the third most important day in our Catholic faith after Easter Sunday and Christmas. The Ascension was the day when our humanity, fully present in Jesus Christ, entered triumphantly into heaven because Jesus had conquered human sin and death in himself. He was the first to go where all of us hope to be: fully resurrected in body and soul with all the Saints in the glory of God's presence forever. It is from the "right hand of the father" that Jesus showers us with His own divine life in the sacraments and will come, at some definitive moment in time and history, to "judge the living and the dead". May we be ready for that moment by remaining always in His love and sanctifying grace through a frequent confession of our sins and reception of His Body and Blood in Holy Communion.

We are also remembering the 9 days in between the Ascension and Pentecost when the Apostles with the Blessed Virgin Mary were praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room where Jesus had celebrated the Last Supper. In imitation of the 9-day period of prayer we offer the first "Novena", a 9-day period of intercessory prayer, to the Holy Spirit asking for a new Pentecost to fall upon the church and the world so desperately in need of spiritual renewal and of the saving grace of Christ. The tradition of novenas in our faith traces itself to the first Novena prayed by the Apostles during this time. When in need, pray for nine days as the Apostles did and the Holy Spirit will certainly come to your aid!

As we continue into the heart of the Book of Revelation this week (Chapters 13 and 14) we remind ourselves that we need to interpret the meaning of this book in light of its literal meaning at the time St. John had the vision, its meaning now in our time, and its meaning for the future. These next chapters describe two beasts and another vision of heaven and the activity there, with a final vision of a harvesting of souls by angels at the appropriate time.

The beast is always a symbol of controversy in our modern world because no one really wants to think that evil and its allies can be active in their own time. And so, discussion of these symbolic images are often misunderstood and avoid and even mocked as "conspiracy theories". An educated understanding reveals that "The beast" and its allies are present in every time and place with the certainty that the end of the ages will also have its own beast which will ultimately be defeated by the Lord and His holy angels. Every Christian should be able to recognize the beast as evil in its various forms being present in certain human organizations, Godless governments, and in individuals from time to time. The "mark of the beast" is present when anyone substitutes the devil, his values, and evil ends for God and truth in their hearts and lives. It is even more present when those who bear the "mark of the beast" try to coerce others into giving in to and surrendering to evil of any kind. Is "the beast" and the "mark of the beast" present in our time. Certainly they are. Will there be a final manifestation of "the beast" and the "mark of the beast" at the end of the current period of time before God and His holy angels defeat the devil and all those in his company? Certainly there will be. For the spiritual person, who has the eyes of faith to see, the beast and its mark are not difficult to recognize. For those without spiritual vision born of God's grace, they will not recognize it to their own spiritual harm.

During the time of St. John, the obvious interpretation of the beast and its mark is the Roman Empire, the Emperors themselves, and specifically the worst of the Emperors, Nero and Domitian, who demanded that they themselves be worshipped as God and put to death any person who would not. Obviously, Satan himself wants to be worshipped as God and is therefore always warring against God and, therefore the Roman Empire and its Emperors were a visible manifestation of the Kingdom of Darkness. The first beast has seven heads which may directly refer to seven of the worst emperors. However, the city of Rome is built on seven hills and also is a symbol for the whole empire. Some anti-Catholic preachers love to interpret the beast as representing the Catholic Church. However, they overlook the obvious interpretation at the time of St. John's vision as the Roman empire itself. The Catholic Church eventually replaced Rome because Christ Himself conquered "the Beast" in the hearts of Roman citizens and their leaders eventually. The beast can be conquered if those in its power open their hearts of Jesus the Lamb. Can the "the beast" manifest itself in the Catholic Church? The obvious answer is yes, whenever its members turn away from Christ to follow the devil and lead lives of sin. However, the Catholic Church herself is always the spotless bride of Christ.

The number 666 represent in the Greek letters the same letters that make up the name Nero who was the worst of the persecutors of Christians and quite evil in every way. You may recall he blamed the Christians for the burning of the city

of Rome and used that as justification for the cruelest persecution of Christians the world has seen. It is not difficult to see why Nero would be associated with Satan and evil. The name of another Empire that took over the People of God in the Old Testament is also used for Rome and other evil empires: Babylon. Are there other "Neros" and other godless and satanic empires that exist in history and even in our day? There certainly are. The Atheistic Communist regimes of the last hundred years or so are just one example in a world that has yet to conquer "the beast" and reject its "mark" on the souls of many human persons and organizations. This chapter reminds us that those who are faithful to God will be victorious in the end!

### **Chapter 13—The First Beast**

Then I saw a beast come out of the sea with ten horns and seven heads; on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads blasphemous name[s]. The beast I saw was like a leopard, but it had feet like a bear, and its mouth was like the mouth of a lion. To it the dragon gave its own power and throne, along with great authority. I saw that one of its heads seemed to have been mortally wounded, but this mortal wound was healed. Fascinated, the whole world followed after the beast. They worshipped the dragon because it gave its authority to the beast; they also worshipped the beast and said, "Who can compare with the beast or who can fight against it?" The beast was given a mouth uttering proud boasts and blasphemies, and it was given authority to act for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling and those who dwell in heaven. It was also allowed to wage war against the holy ones and conquer them, and it was granted authority over every tribe, people, tongue, and nation. All the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, all whose names were not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life, which belongs to the Lamb who was slain. Whoever has ears ought to hear these words. \_Anyone destined for captivity goes into captivity. Anyone destined to be slain by the sword shall be slain by the sword. Such is the faithful endurance of the holy ones.

### **The Second Beast**

Then I saw another beast come up out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb but spoke like a dragon. It wielded all the authority of the first beast in its sight and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. It performed great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of everyone. \_It deceived the inhabitants of the earth with the signs it was allowed to perform in the sight of the first beast, telling them to make an image for the beast who had been wounded by the sword and revived. It was then permitted to breathe life into the beast's image, so that the beast's image could speak and [could] have anyone who did not worship it put to death. \_It forced all the people, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to be given a stamped image on their right hands or their foreheads, so that no one could buy or sell except one who had the stamped image of the beast's name or the number that stood for its name. Wisdom is needed here; one who understands can calculate the number of the beast, for it is a number that stands for a person. His number is six hundred and sixty-six. Then St. John has another vision of those who are worshipping the lamb in heaven. We have already covered the interpretation of the symbolic imagery in the following passage in previous articles. There will be punishment that will come upon the earth for its evil. These punishments will be delivered by three angels. The number three represents the fact that God who is a Trinity has permitted punishments to purify and save His faithful ones for the reward that comes at the end. Finally, there is a harvest of all souls, both those destined for eternal life and those destined for eternal punishment. The "son of man" Jesus Christ is the one who begins the harvest or judgement with the help of angels who do the harvesting. The son of man is Jesus who now wears the Crown of glory representing his victory over sin and death through His suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. This passage certainly plays out now in the particular judgement that happens for those who die now, and ultimately will be fully realized when Christ "comes to judge the living and the dead" at the end of time in His Final Coming. Obviously, the Battle Hymn of the Republic was inspired by the events described at the end of Chapter 14. That Hymn particularly describes the victory Christ has won and those who sing it in a patriotic manner are asking God to win His victory of salvation in the hearts of all their fellow countrymen and women.

### **Chapter 14—The Lamb's Companions**

Then I looked and there was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. \_I heard a sound from heaven like the sound of rushing water or a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. They

were singing [what seemed to be] a new hymn before the throne, before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn this hymn except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been ransomed from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women; they are virgins and these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been ransomed as the first fruits of the human race for God and the Lamb. On their lips no deceit has been found; they are unblemished.

### **The Three Angels**

Then I saw another angel flying high overhead, with everlasting good news to announce to those who dwell on earth, to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, for his time has come to sit in judgment. Worship him who made heaven and earth and sea and springs of water." A second angel followed, saying: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great that made all the nations drink the wine of her licentious passion." A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, "Anyone who worships the beast or its image, or accepts its mark on forehead or hand, will also drink the wine of God's fury, poured full strength into the cup of his wrath, and will be tormented in burning sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb. The smoke of the fire that torments them will rise forever and ever, and there will be no relief day or night for those who worship the beast or its image or accept the mark of its name. Here is what sustains the holy ones who keep God's commandments and their faith in Jesus. I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes", said the Spirit, "let them find rest from their labors, for their works accompany them."

### **The Harvest of the Earth**

Then I looked and there was a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud one who looked like a son of man, with a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Another angel came out of the temple, crying out in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, "Use your sickle and reap the harvest, for the time to reap has come, because the earth's harvest is fully ripe." So the one who was sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven who also had a sharp sickle. 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." 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. 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.

May our Ascended Lord win the victory over sin and death when He comes again from the "right hand of the Father" to save us once and for all!

In Our Ascended Lord,

Fr. Derda, Fr. Steve, Deacon Russ & Deacon Ed