

John wrote the Book of Revelation when the church was being mercilessly persecuted. He exhorts and admonishes “Christians of the first century to stand firm in the faith and to avoid compromise with paganism, despite the threat of adversity and martyrdom; they are to await patiently the fulfillment of God’s mighty promises” (Introduction).

In school, we are given a report card at the end of the period to indicate how we are doing. In the beginning chapters of the Book of Revelation, 7 local churches under the pastoral care of John, the beloved disciple, are given a report of their progress. John had a vision and wrote what he saw as Jesus spoke to him. “I, John, heard the Lord saying to me: ...of the Church in Sardis, write this: ... you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (Rev 3:1).

The report from Jesus is not good for the Church in Sardis, however, like any report card, the frank assessment shows the need for improvement but is meant to motivate a change for the better. Without change the church will die, but there is still time to work and strengthen what is left. Many in the church need to repent, they need to turn back to God. Jesus has praise for “a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; they will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy” (3:4-5). The faithful will share in Christ’s victory and their names will be inscribed in the book of life.

When we are baptized, we receive a white garment to show on the outside what happens to the soul on the inside. It is cleansed and made pure. When we sin, we soil the garment. We can restore the garment to its baptismal purity through repentance and confession of our sins. “Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (3:6).

Jesus goes on to point out the failings of another church. The letter to the Church in Laodicea reprimands the community for being lukewarm in their faith. They are content with earthly wealth instead of what really matters. Materially prosperous, they are spiritually poor. “I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich” (3:18). When gold is tested in fire, the impurities come out and one is left with pure gold. Although the church is under persecution, this can have a strengthening effect if people move away from their lukewarm comfort and put their foot to the fire. “Christ’s chastisement is inspired by love and a desire to be allowed to share the messianic banquet with his followers in the heavenly kingdom (note to Rev 3:19-21).”

Each of us should listen and take to heart to the report cards for the churches in Sardis and Laodicea. As John saw Jesus in a vision in the past, one day in the future we will see Jesus directly. When we die, we will be judged by the just Judge. With life still in front of us at this point, Jesus advises us to listen to his voice. We do this as a community when we hear the Gospel in the Liturgy of the Word. We do this as individuals in our prayer and in our own reading of Sacred Scripture. And sometimes Jesus comes to us in disguise calling us to love our neighbor.

“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” (Rev 3:20). The Gospel today from Luke chapter 19 gives us a clear example of Jesus’ desire to dine with us. Jesus encounters Zacchaeus, a tax collector who climbs a tree just to see Jesus in passing. Jesus speaks and he hears. Zacchaeus has a repentant heart and responds wholeheartedly to Jesus. “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over” (Lk 19:8). Jesus is excited that the tax collector is alive, on fire, and ready to repent. And Jesus wants to share a meal with him. “Today salvation has come to this house ... For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost” (19:9-10).

Jesus wants to come to your home. Are you ready to repent? Are you listening? Are you ready to open the door?