

33<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday II

**Revelation 4:1-11**

*I, John, had a vision of an open door to heaven, and I heard the trumpetlike voice that had spoken to me before, saying, "Come up here and I will show you what must happen afterwards."*

*At once I was caught up in spirit. A throne was there in heaven, and on the throne sat one whose appearance sparkled like jasper and carnelian.*

*Around the throne was a halo as brilliant as an emerald. Surrounding the throne I saw twenty-four other thrones on which twenty-four elders sat, dressed in white garments and with gold crowns on their heads.*

*From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder. Seven flaming torches burned in front of the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. In front of the throne was something that resembled a sea of glass like crystal.*

*In the center and around the throne, there were four living creatures covered with eyes in front and in back. The first creature resembled a lion, the second was like a calf, the third had a face like that of a man, and the fourth looked like an eagle in flight. The four living creatures, each of them with six wings, were covered with eyes inside and out. Day and night they do not stop exclaiming:*

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come."*

*Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before the one who sits on the throne and worship him, who lives forever and ever. They throw down their crowns before the throne, exclaiming:*

*"Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created."*

**Psalm 150:1b-2, 3-4, 5-6**

R. Holy, holy, holy Lord, mighty God!  
*Praise the LORD in his sanctuary, praise him in the firmament of his strength.*

*Praise him for his mighty deeds, praise him for his sovereign majesty.*

R. Holy, holy, holy Lord, mighty God!  
*Praise him with the blast of the trumpet, praise him with lyre and harp, praise him with timbrel and dance, praise him with strings and pipe.*

R. Holy, holy, holy Lord, mighty God!  
*Praise him with sounding cymbals, praise him with clanging cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Alleluia.*

R. Holy, holy, holy Lord, mighty God!

**Luke 19:11-28**

*While people were listening to Jesus speak, he proceeded to tell a parable because he was near Jerusalem and they thought that the Kingdom of God would appear there immediately.*

*So he said, "A nobleman went off to a distant country to obtain the kingship for himself and then to return.*

*He called ten of his servants and gave them ten gold coins and told them, 'Engage in trade with these until I return.' His fellow citizens, however, despised him and sent a delegation after him to announce, 'We do not want this man to be our king.'*

*But when he returned after obtaining the kingship, he had the servants called, to whom he had given the money, to learn what they had gained by trading.*

*The first came forward and said, 'Sir, your gold coin has earned ten additional ones.' He replied, 'Well done, good servant! You have been faithful in this very small matter; take charge of ten cities.'*

*Then the second came and reported, 'Your gold coin, sir, has earned five more.' And to this servant too he said, 'You, take charge of five cities.'*

*Then the other servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your gold coin; I kept it stored away in a handkerchief, for I was afraid of you, because you are a demanding man;*

*you take up what you did not lay down and you harvest what you did not plant.'*

*He said to him, 'With your own words I shall condemn you, you wicked servant. You knew I was a demanding man, taking up what I did not lay down and harvesting what I did not plant; why did you not put my money in a bank? Then on my return I would have collected it with interest.'*

*And to those standing by he said, 'Take the gold coin from him and give it to the servant who has ten.'*

*But they said to him, 'Sir, he has ten gold coins.'*

*He replied, 'I tell you, to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Now as for those enemies of mine who did not want me as their king, bring them here and slay them before me.'"*

*After he had said this, he proceeded on his journey up to Jerusalem.*

X

Try to imagine what Heaven is like. I think I used to wonder in all kinds of ways when I was really young. I don't take as many imaginative risks in my senior years. As a deacon, people think I should know what I'm talking about. During formation, it was constantly impressed upon me to "Teach what you are taught." And for good reason, too. All too often when I hear of clergy who preach out of their own wisdom and not from God's revelation as given through our Holy Mother, the Church.

We have such a revelation in our reading today from the Apocalypse, or Revelation to John. The New American Bible's introduction<sup>i</sup> says that this last book of the Bible is one of the most difficult to understand because it abounds in unfamiliar and extravagant symbolism. This book contains an account of visions in symbolic and allegorical language borrowed extensively from the Old Testament, especially Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel.

Biblical scholars question whether or not these visions were real experiences of the author or simply literary conventions employed.

These symbolic descriptions are not to be taken as literal descriptions, nor is the symbolism meant to be pictured realistically. It was composed as resistance literature to meet a crisis—the ruthless persecution by Rome. The book is an exhortation to stand firm in the faith despite the threat of adversity and martyrdom, patiently awaiting the fulfillment of God’s mighty promises.

The symbolism frees us. We are allowed to be transported, as John was, into the mystical world. He is invited, and we through him, to peer through the opened door. He witnesses a Heavenly liturgical celebration replete with hymns, angels, all seeing creatures and elders in unending praise and prostration.

Allow yourself to enter into their songs of praise:

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty,  
who was, and who is, and who is to come.*

*Worthy are you, Lord our God,  
to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things;  
because of your will they came to be and were created.*

The effect is a powerful scene of heavenly glory and reverence for the mysterious source of all being.<sup>ii</sup>

Our Catholic traditions have inspired others to imagine. In Dante’s 14<sup>th</sup> century *Paradiso*, the reader is led through the nine celestial spheres of Heaven to the Empyrean sphere, which is the abode of God.<sup>iii</sup> The structure of *Paradiso* is based on the four cardinal virtues (Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude) and the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity).

Dante describes the final destination:

*Like sudden lightning scattering the spirits  
of sight so that the eye is then too weak  
to act on other things it would perceive,*

*such was the living light encircling me,  
leaving me so enveloped by its veil  
of radiance that I could see no thing.*

*The Love that calms this heaven always welcomes*

*into Itself with such a salutation,  
to make the candle ready for its flame.*<sup>iv</sup>

This makes me yearn to apprehend the inapprehensible, to offer myself as fuel for the consuming light.

St. Cyprian tells us:

*How great will your glory and happiness be, to be allowed to see God, to be honored with sharing the joy of salvation and eternal light with Christ your Lord and God, ... to delight in the joy of immortality in the Kingdom of heaven with the righteous and God's friends.*

St Augustine's plea echos in my soul:

*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*

Rest for one's heart, joy, delight, enveloping living light, enflaming love, face to face with the One who willed me to be and created me— along with you.

I pray I will be with you unto eternity — our birthright as our Father's children — all through the loving sacrifice of our brother, Jesus, and moved by his holy Spirit. And we can start living that life together, now.

×

---

<sup>i</sup> *The New American Bible (Revised Edition)*, 2012, HarperCollins Publishers

<sup>ii</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse, A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 1991, Liturgical Press, p. 37

<sup>iii</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradiso\\_\(Dante\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradiso_(Dante))

<sup>iv</sup> *Paradisio*, Canto XXX, lines 46-54, Mandelbvaum translation