

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

St. John 21:1-14

Through the season of Easter, the fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost, the Church reads from the Book of Apocalypse, also called the Book of Revelation. It is a strange book filled with unusual creatures with seven horns and seven eyes, and dragons, and a woman on the moon, and because of the oddity of the characters it is difficult to understand. The problem is made worse by the improper use of the word “apocalypse” by authors and film-makers in depicting some catastrophic end of the world scenario. The fact is that the word “apocalypse” does not refer to war and annihilation or armageddon, but means “revelation”; which is why the book can also be called the Book of Revelation. The word “apocalypse” comes from the Greek which means “to lift the veil.” In other words, “apocalypse” means to show something that was hidden.

It was written by the apostle St. John, who also wrote the Gospel of St. John and the three letters of St. John. He was on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, off the coast of Greece, where an angel revealed to him, as he wrote “what soon must take place” (*Apoc.* 22:6). It is about the second coming of Christ and the establishment of His Kingdom at the end of time.

St. John writes of the Lamb who was slain, the victim of the greatest of all sacrifices, who sits now on a throne in the glory of Heaven, with the river of life flowing from His throne, and that Lamb will be the shepherd and guide of His people. In this context it makes sense why the Church reads this book at Easter, for in commemorating the Passion and Death of the Lord and celebrating His Resurrection we rejoice that the scales of good and evil have finally and forever more being tipped to the side of good, and that evil may win battles but it will never win the war, and that whatever evil we commit we can be washed white by the blood of Christ, the blood of the sacrificed Lamb. And just as at Advent

we look forward to the birth of the Lord as well as the second coming again of the Lord, so in Easter we celebrate the triumph of the Lord two-thousand years ago and the coming triumph of the Lord when He sets His Kingdom on Earth.

So much of the language of the Book of the Apocalypse is found daily in the Mass, for the Church sees that the triumph of God's Kingdom is not something just in the future but is something we already see now. Just as the Book of the Apocalypse is a dramatic tale of supernatural powers, so the Mass is a powerful supernatural drama, which Pope St. John Paul II called, "Heaven on Earth." If we are to understand the Book of the Apocalypse then we must understand the Mass, because it is the only way to make sense of it. Think of the language from the second reading: "The Lamb that was sacrificed is worthy to be given power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing" (*Apoc.* 5:12). And also, "the four animals said, 'Amen'; and the elders prostrated themselves to worship" (*Apoc.* 5:14). This sounds familiar because at the conclusion of the preface we pray, "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of Hosts, Heaven and Earth are full of your glory." At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, when the Priest raises the Body and Blood of Christ, he says: "Through Him, with Him, and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever." And all the people proclaim, "Amen!". Again, when we pray over and over again, "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world," and the Priest raises the Body of Christ over the chalice holding the Blood of Christ, saying: "This is the Lamb of God."

In the Mass we participate on Earth in the great worship of Heaven. The Book of the Apocalypse is made real, right before our eyes. As in Heaven, the Angels and Saints worship before the throne of God, so at Mass we worship and we see the images come to life from the Apocalypse: the robed priests, the altar, the people singing, "Holy, holy, holy," the incense that rises above us as clouds of Heaven, and the song of the Angels and Saints as we sing "alleluia".

The Book of the Apocalypse is not some doom and gloom book made for

Hollywood movies, it is the in-breaking of Heaven on Earth and the telling of the coming again of Christ. It is a story that we don't simply read but that we live each time we pray the Mass so that right before our eyes—right in front of us and all around us—Heaven is made real, and He who said, “when I am lifted up I shall draw all men to myself” (*Jn. 12:32*), lifts us up and seats us in Heaven.