

The Book of Revelation

Week #6 – The Scroll and the Lamb

I. REVIEW OF WEEK #5

Week 5 began the introduction to the third phase of the book as outlined in Rev 1:19 – the revelation of the future (“what must soon take place after this”).

Chapters 4 and 5 are the introduction to this new phase of revelation.

A. A Door Opens between Earth and Heaven

In Chapters 2 and 3 we saw the Risen Christ walking amidst his churches on earth. The letters had been revealed in a vision, but both vision and letters take place on earth.

Now in Chapters 4 and 5 the scene shifts dramatically to the court of heaven – the heavenly throne room. A door opens between earth and heaven giving John entry into heaven at the invitation of Christ.

B. Heavenly Liturgy

In a new vision before the throne of God in all his glory [the throne room vision], John witnesses the heavenly liturgy – the angels and saints worshipping the Lord and the Lamb.

Chapter 4 praises the Father as the Creator of all [liturgy of creation], and Chapter 5 praises the Son as the Saviour of all [liturgy of redemption].

C. On Earth as it is in Heaven

The liturgical setting in heaven alludes to the Jerusalem Temple e.g., the throne [ark], the seven torches [menorah], the winged creatures [cherubim], twenty-four elders [24 priestly divisions], and the sea of glass, etc.

The Jews believed that the Temple of Jerusalem was a visible replica of the invisible sanctuary of God in heaven. The ark in the Temple was the throne of God on earth.

As we study these chapters remember that our liturgies here on earth are a participation in the heavenly liturgy.

“Through Christ the angels of heaven offer their prayer of adoration as they rejoice in your presence forever. May our voices be one with theirs in their triumphant hymn of praise.”

II. THE SCROLL AND THE LAMB

A. The Scroll with the Seven Seals

The scroll with the seven seals contains God’s mysterious plans for the salvation of mankind; no one on earth can disclose them.

Only the Risen Christ can take the scroll and make the contents known. Because of this he is praised by the four living creatures, by the elders, by a whole host of angels, and by all creation.

Read: Revelation 5:1-4

1 And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals;

2 and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it,

4 and I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

The scroll is written on both sides indicating the completeness of the revelation it contains.

It seems to be a covenant document [suggested by the number seven] whose decrees are put into effect in Rev 6: 1-17 [the breaking of Seven Seals] and 8:1-5 [ICSB, note 5:1].

As each seal is broken something of the book will be revealed, namely, a glimpse of future events. Opening the seal permits the event to actually happen.

The scroll contains the record of what is to happen in the End Times, the Last Days, which have already begun with Christ.

Some believe that “the sealed scroll refers to Sacred Scripture, for it was opened only by Christ whose death, Resurrection and Ascension opened access to all the mysteries it contained” [ICSB note on 5:1].

III. THE LION AND THE LAMB

Read: Revelation 5:5-7

5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Weep not; lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth;

7 and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

John expects to see the mighty conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah – instead he is amazed to see a “slain Lamb.” But this Lamb is not lying down in death: it is standing upright and victorious.

It is a miracle that it is standing – we call it the Resurrection.

However, Jesus will forever appear as a sacrificial Lamb, having taken the scars of his Crucifixion into heaven with him.

Recall that after the Resurrection, on Easter Sunday, Jesus showed the apostles the nail marks in his resurrected body.

Application

“There is a lesson here for those whose witness to Christ involves suffering of any kind. The hurts received, be they physical or emotional, are not erased when they are healed. Resurrection is not plastic surgery, nor is the healing of painful memories a spiritual lobotomy.

As with the Lamb, the wounds are transformed by Christ’s resurrection power to become badges of victory and windows of hope for others” [Fr. George Montague, S.M. – The Apocalypse].

A. Who is Worthy to Open the Scroll?

Jesus’ is able to open the scroll because of his death and resurrection – an event symbolized by the Lamb standing upright and victorious, even though it has suffered a mortal wound.

Jesus is worthy to open the scroll because:

1. He was slain as the Paschal lamb;
2. He purchased a people by his blood. This is the Passover image of liberation, like the ransom of prisoners of war.
3. He made his people a kingdom and priests.

B. Lamb of God

This is the first of 29 times in 22 chapters that Jesus is depicted as a Lamb in Revelation.

The image of the Lamb reminds us of the Passover lamb, whose blood was smeared over the door frames of the homes of the Israelites in Egypt.

This was a sign to the avenging angel not to inflict on the people of Israel the divine punishment to be inflicted on the Egyptians.

In John’s Gospel, John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God. In Revelation this is the title most used to refer to Jesus.

In the Mass we use it often - after the kiss of peace when the Lamb of God is invoked three times, and just before Holy Communion, the priest holds up the host and declares:

“This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world . . .”

C. Seven Horns and Seven Eyes

The Lamb that John sees is a rather frightening creature – it has seven horns and seven eyes.

The horns symbolize the power of the Risen Lamb and the eyes his knowledge, both of which he has to the fullest degree, symbolized by the number seven.

He is almighty and omniscient.

D. Christological Titles of Praise

Lamb of God: Lion of Judah: Root of David.

IV. WORSHIP OF THE LAMB

Read: Revelation 5:8-13

8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints;

9 and they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

*10 and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall **reign on earth.**"*

11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,

12 Saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"

13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!"

14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

A. The Lamb is God

The Lamb receives the same worship as the Father [see Chapter 4], first from the four living creatures [angels/Cherubim] and the twenty-four elders [saints/priests], then from all the angels, and finally from the whole of creation, indicating that he too is divine.

This is the greatest chorus of praise the universe can ever hear. Heaven and earth and all that is within them are designed for the praise of Jesus Christ.

B. CCC - The Prayer of Praise

CCC 2639: Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God.

It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS. By praise, the Spirit is joined to our spirits to bear witness that we are children of God,¹²¹ testifying to the only Son in whom we are adopted and by whom we glorify the Father.

Praise embraces the other forms of prayer and carries them toward him who is its source and goal: the "one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist."¹²²

CCC 2642: The *Revelation* of "what must soon take place," the *Apocalypse*, is borne along not only by the songs of the heavenly liturgy¹²⁷ but also by the intercession of the "witnesses" (martyrs).¹²⁸

The prophets and the saints, all those who were slain on earth for their witness to Jesus, the vast throng of those who, having come through the great tribulation, have gone before us into the Kingdom, all sing the praise and glory of him who sits on the throne, and of the Lamb.¹²⁹

C. Prayers of the Saints

The elders are holding harps and golden bowls of incense *“which are the prayers of the saints.”*

- The harp was the traditional instrument to which the psalms were sung. The harp stands for the music of praise.
- The elders offer up the prayers of the saints as “incense.” The saints in heaven [the elders] mediate the prayers of the saints on earth [Rev 8:3].
- The rising smoke of incense is a visible sign of prayers ascending to God [Ps 141:2].
- The offering of incense was a function of the Old Testament priests [1 Sam 2:28].

D. A New Song

The heavenly congregation sings a new song. The phrase “a new song” is very common in the psalms. Whenever the Lord acted in a new way to save his people it was common to “sing a new song to the Lord.”

The new song now proclaims that Christ alone decides the destinies of the world and of mankind, the consequence of his offering himself in sacrifice as an atoning victim.

E. Ransomed from every Tribe and nation

By shedding his blood Christ has won for himself an immense people, from every nation under heaven. God’s salvific plan extends to the whole human race.

He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” [1 Tim 2:4].

This does not exempt us from doing our part to cooperate with God’s plan of salvation, for as St. Augustine teaches, “God who created you without your cooperation, will not save you without your cooperation.”

F. They Shall Reign on Earth

He has made them a kingdom and priests [5:10]. The new people of God are a priestly people [1 Pet 2:5, 9], a fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant promise [Ex 19:6].

[9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light [1 Pet 2:9]

[6] And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel” [Ex 19:6].

But the emphasis falls on their kingly role; and they shall reign not in heaven but *on earth*. Christ continues his reign through Christians presently on earth.

G. The Great Amen!

The twenty-four elders follow the lead of the Cherubim – the four living creatures. The angels teach the saints to worship God in heaven. When the Cherubim say “Amen” the elders fall down and worship.

Preparation for Week #7 – The Seven Seals

Review

1. *The Apocalypse* – notes by Archbishop Collins (handout)
2. The Four Senses of Scripture (handout)

Read

1. *Revelation to St. John* – Ignatius Catholic Study Bible
Chapter 6 – The Seven Seals.
2. *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation* – Chap 6.

Discuss

1. Study Questions 1-6 at end of Chapter 5 of *Coming Soon*.