

# The Book of Revelation

## Week #5 – Heavenly Worship – Liturgy of Creation

### I. REVIEW OF WEEK #4

#### A. To Sardis: Not Alive, But Dead

- The Church of Sardis appears to be alive but is in fact spiritually dead, because most of its members are living in serious [mortal] sin.
- Anyone who behaves like that is dead in Christ.

For a renewal of the spiritual life of the Church, four things are necessary:

- **Remember! Repent! Obey! Watch!**
- Jesus tells the Church to wake up;
- To *remember* and live up to the Gospel preached to them in the beginning, and to repent.

If not He will come in judgment when they least expect it.

#### Application

It is not enough that Parishes have strong social and pastoral programs. Parishes must be:

- Christ-centered,
- Nourished by Word and Sacrament, and
- Centered on the Eucharist.

#### B. To Philadelphia: The Reward of Endurance

#### State of the Church

The Church in Philadelphia is praised for its fidelity.

- Despite their weakness and persecution by the Jews they have not denied Christ.

- On the contrary, they have witnessed to him, and thus will be protected from the coming judgment.
- Those who are faithful they will receive the crown of life.

### **Key Concepts**

Jesus is pictured as the one who holds the **“key of David.”**

This “key of David” is mentioned in Isaiah 22:22, where the faithful Eliakim replaces the corrupt Shebna as the prime minister of the Davidic kingdom, and is given the *“key of the house of David.”*

There the “key” of the kingdom is a symbol of the authority of the Davidic king given to the prime minister who acts with the king’s authority.

Jesus holds the key because he is the Davidic king.

Jesus gives “the keys of the kingdom” [his authority] to Peter making him the “prime minister” of his kingdom. Peter therefore acts with the authority of Jesus!

### **Application**

God has a task for every person and every institution, but if the person or institution proves to be unfit it is taken away and given to another.

The same thing may happen to our Catholic school system, if it is not faithful to Christ and His Church.

#### ***C. To Laodicea: Lukewarm and Complacent***

- Laodicea was the only Church of which Jesus has nothing good to say. It had no redeeming feature.
- Its Bishop, Archippus, failed to live up to his responsibilities as the shepherd of his flock, with tragic consequences.
- Because of their complacency and lukewarmness they have a nauseating quality about them. Jesus says, **“I will spew (vomit) you out of my mouth.”**
- The one attitude Jesus condemns the most is indifference.

Despite their earthly wealth, they are spiritually naked and bankrupt: **“You are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”**

Jesus prescription for their wretched state is three-fold.

1) Purification through suffering.

Only through suffering will they learn life-giving love. Persecution therefore, is not necessarily a sign of God’s rejection, since:

*“Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent” [Rev. 3:19].*

2) Seek the white garments of righteousness to clothe their spiritual nakedness.

3) Come to Jesus to cure their spiritual blindness.

#### ***D. The Christ Who Knocks***

The image of Christ knocking on the door is a way of describing God’s love for us. He invites us to greater intimacy with him, especially in the Eucharist.

Jesus awaits our response. Don’t keep him waiting!

## **II. OVERVIEW OF WEEK #5**

The third phase of the book [Rev 1:19] – the revelation of the future (“what must take place after this”) – now begins as John is caught up into heaven at the invitation of Christ.

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

#### ***A. On Earth as it is in 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. A door opens between earth and heaven giving John entry into heaven.

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

### ***B. Liturgy of Creation and Redemption***

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

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

**Note:** In the OT the Ark of the Covenant is one of the visible signs of God's presence in the temple.

Approximately 5 feet long, three feet wide, three feet high, it enclosed the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, and was covered by a plate of gold, the "mercy seat." This was the seat of God's throne.

It was kept in the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple. At either end of the "mercy seat was a carved image of a Cherub.

It was an ancient belief of the Jews that the Temple of Jerusalem was a visible replica of the invisible sanctuary of God in heaven.

As we study these chapters it will be helpful to recall that our liturgies here on earth are a participation in the heavenly liturgy.

The prefaces of the Mass often recall this fact:

*"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."*

## **III. A DOOR OPENS ON HEAVENLY WORSHIP**

**Read: Revelation 4:1**

*After this I looked, and lo, in heaven an open door! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this."*

The trumpet-like voice is the voice of Christ. John is invited to heaven where he will be shown new visions concerning the future of mankind. Chapters 4 and 5 are the introduction to this phase.

### **A. The Throne of God**

#### **Read: Revelation 4:2-3**

*2 At once I was in the Spirit, and lo, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne! 3 And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald.*

The introductory vision begins with God in heaven in all his majesty and glory being worshipped by all creation [liturgy of creation].

He alone controls the destiny of the world and the Church.

God's appearance is described in terms of the vivid and radiant colours of precious stones to avoid describing God in human terms.

The stones "jasper" and "carnelian" are first mentioned in the Garden of Eden, the original earthly sanctuary. They were also worn by the high priest when he ministered in Israel's sanctuary.

### **B. The Rainbow**

The rainbow signifies "the new creation" in its connection with the permanent covenant God established with Noah and the earth [creation] after the flood.

### **C. The Twenty-Four Elders**

#### **Read: Revelation 4:4-5**

*4 Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads. 5 From the throne issue flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder, and before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God;*

The twenty-four elders appear frequently in Revelation, always positioned beside God, giving him praise and worship; offering him the prayers of the faithful; and explaining events to John.

They represent the saints – the faithful people of God whom Christ has made “a kingdom, priests to his God” [Rev 1:6]. They are dressed like priests [in white], and kings [crowns].

White garments also suggest they have achieved their eternal salvation, and the golden crown stand for the reward they have earned.

The number “twenty-four” – twelve plus twelve – represent the number of the tribes of Israel [twelve patriarchs], plus that of the twelve Apostles. They represent the old and new Israel – the universal Church [Jew and Gentile] in heaven.

They also recall the twenty-four divisions of priests David set up to serve and worship God in the Temple [see 1 Chron 24:1-31], thus emphasizing the liturgical dimension of heaven.

#### ***D. The Majesty of God***

In the OT the Lord’s Presence is signified by “*flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder,*” as on Mt. Sinai.

#### ***E. The Sea of Glass***

##### **Read: Revelation 4:6a**

*And before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.*

Many interpretations have been suggested for the “sea of glass.” It could represent:

- 1) A geographical sea e.g., the sea of the Exodus.
- 2) A liturgical sea, or
- 3) A mythical sea.

#### **Liturgical Sea**

In the court of the Mosaic tent, there was a large bronze laver used by the priests to wash their hands and feet before entering the tent to minister [Ex 30: 17-21].

Later, the gigantic bronze basin in Solomon’s Temple used for the priest’s ablutions was called “the sea.”

If such a liturgical sea is meant the idea is the necessity of purification before any creature can enter the presence of the All-Holy God.

### **F. The Four Living Creatures**

#### **Read: Revelation 4:6b-7**

*And round the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: 7 the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle.*

The four living creatures appear frequently in the heavenly scene. They are always found near the throne and the Lamb. They have six wings and are full of eyes.

The only function they have here is the perpetual praise and worship of God.

The four living creatures are very much like those in the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the chariot of the Lord drawn by four angels representing intelligence, nobility, strength, and agility [Ez 1:10; 10:1].

In Ezekiel the four living creatures are definitely identified with the Cherubim, with the multiple eyes representing their heavenly knowledge.

In Ezekiel's vision the four living creatures each have four faces – the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle.

From the earliest times the Fathers of the Church associated the four living creatures with the four Evangelists; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Man represents Matthew since his Gospel begins with the human genealogy of Jesus.

The Lion stands for Mark: his Gospel begins with the voice crying in the wilderness where the lions roar can be heard.

The Ox symbolizes Luke, since his Gospel begins and ends with the Temple, where oxen are slaughtered as sacrifices.

The Eagle symbolizes John, whose Gospel “soars” to the heights in contemplation of Christ's divinity.

## **G. Holy, Holy, Holy**

### **Read: Revelation 4:8-10**

*8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to sing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"*

*9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever,*

*10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing,*

Like the six-winged Seraphim in Isaiah's vision in the Jerusalem Temple [Is 6:3], the four living creatures, the Cherubim, are chanting a hymn of praise to God: "**Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty . . . !**"

The four creatures [angels] take the lead in worshipping and praising God, but they are joined by all the people of God represented by the twenty-four elders [the saints], who fall down and worship whenever the angels do.

At Mass the Church enters into this heavenly liturgy, as she sings the *Sanctus* with the angels and saints, "**Holy, Holy, Holy.**"

This angelic chant, performed on earth as it is in heaven, reminds us that the Mass is a participation in the heavenly liturgy, where the worship of God crosses the frontiers of time and space and has a positive influence on the entire world.

The Second Vatican Council refers to this:

*"In the earthy liturgy we take part in the foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. . ."* [SC #8].

## **H. Thou Art Worthy**

The twenty-four elders [the saints] continue to praise God in words that have become an all-time favourite hymn, "Thou Art Worthy."

*11 "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created."*

God is praised on two counts by the elders.

- 1) **He is Lord and God.** This would be even more meaningful to John's people that it is to us, because the phrase "Lord and God" was the official title of the Roman Emperor, Domitian.

It was because Christians could not acknowledge that claim that they were persecuted and killed. Simply to call God *Lord and God* was a triumphant confession of faith, an assertion that He holds first place in the entire universe.

- 2) **God is Creator.** It is through his will and purpose that all things existed even before creation and in the end were brought into actual being.

Man does not possess the power to create. He can alter and rearrange; he can make things out of already existing materials; but only God can create something out of nothing [William Barclay – *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1]

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Preparation for Week #6 (Revelation Chapter 5 – The Scroll and the Lamb):

### **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 5 – The Scroll and the Lamb.
2. *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation* – Chap 6.

### **Discuss**

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