

The Lord's Day in the Book of Revelation

Easter 6 2016
Acts 15:1–2, 22–29
Psalm 67:2–3, 5–6, 8
Revelation 21:10–14, 22–23
John 14:23–29

What would jokes be without “puns”? Take this one. A piece of string walks into a bar and says, “Give me a cold one.” The bartender points to a picture of a string on the wall with a line crossed through it and says, “Sorry, we don’t serve your kind here.” The piece of string goes outside, gets all tangled up and tatters his ends by rolling around, and comes back in. The bartender says, “Didn’t I just tell you that we don’t serve strings?” The string responds, “No, I’m a frayed knot.”¹

Plays on words are important when it comes to understanding the Book of Revelation too. For the past number of weeks our second readings have been taken from the Bible’s last book. Today I want to help you to grasp something of the big picture of this book.

In order to understand the big picture of the Book of Revelation the language play is important to capture. In Revelation chapter 1 verse 10 St John says that he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day”. Now our immediate association with the Lord’s Day is to understand that the Revelation unfolded before John on a Sunday. However there is another understanding of the Lord’s Day that we need to consider when interpreting this book. The Lord’s Day can also be called the “Day of the Lord”. This is a term used in the Prophetic Writings of the Old Testament and is utilized to refer to the Lord’s Judgement both of Israel and the Nations. Consider the following taken from Zephaniah 1:14-15.

“The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness”²

Both dimensions of the Lord’s Day are in play in Revelation. When we think of the Lord’s Day as Sunday, what association do we make? It is the day of Worship, the Day on which we celebrate the Mass in a special and extended way. When we study the structure of the book of Revelation this is what we find. After the book is introduced in chapter 1, where we meet St. John, the Angel, Jesus, the seven angels and their churches we move into chapters 2-3. They are

¹ Barber, M. (2005). *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation and Applying Its Lessons Today* (pp. 25–26). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.

² Barber, M. (2005). *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation and Applying Its Lessons Today* (p. 26). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.

given over to the Letters to the Seven Churches where there is, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the Church, a call to repentance. In chapters 4 and 5 we are given a vivid depiction of the worship taking place in the heavenly liturgy. St. John is showing us that the Liturgy of Heaven, which is eternal, comes down to earth in the rest of the Book. Introduced here and then carrying on to the end of chapter 11 there is depicted a book with seven seals that is opened by Jesus and interpreted, ushering in seven judgments. Finally in chapters 12-22 seven chalices are poured out, climaxing with the marriage supper of the Lamb, where the Church is united to Christ.³

The threefold division of the Book of Revelation is analogous to the Eucharistic Liturgy. First we have the Penitential Rite, in which we repent of our sins. This corresponds with the Letters to the Seven Churches. After this, we celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, where the Scriptures are opened and read and corresponds to the opening of the seven seals. Finally, we celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist, where the Church is united to Christ through the celebration of the Lamb's Supper, and corresponds with the pouring out of the seven chalices⁴.

(For more parallels with the Mass please see the Appendix).

St. John, in a way that is highly nuanced, wants us to understand that on the Lord's Day it is the Eucharistic Liturgy that is celebrated in heaven and touches down to earth. It is also on the Lord's Day, that the second sense of the meaning of the Day of the Lord is displayed. Throughout this book we have cataclysmic language portraying God's judgment on the nations and the suffering Church. Page after page there is the language of devastation aptly portrayed in the Old Testament Prophet Zephaniah's depiction the Day of the Lord:

A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness"

Here is what I want you to see. The Lord's Day Eucharist is lived out in the present amidst the chaos of a world in opposition to the Reign of Christ. That is why the Liturgy is intertwined with such graphic language of violence, suffering and destruction, where God is judging the Church and the World in the present age.

With all of this in mind what we have portrayed in Revelation 21 is the victory that will result after the final defeat of Satan. Such a defeat will require of the Church the last and ultimate trial. When victory has been accomplished then will follow what we heard described today.

The New Jerusalem will be a perfectly symmetrical city where on the gates are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The foundation stones are the names of the twelve apostles. This

³ Barber, M. (2005). *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation and Applying Its Lessons Today* (p. 25). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.

⁴ Barber, M. (2005). *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation and Applying Its Lessons Today* (p. 25). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.

represents totality and perfection. All that God had proclaimed and revealed in the Bible's 73 Books now comes to its culmination.

In the New Jerusalem the radiance of God will be all encompassing. This is what is emphasized in the closing verses of today's reading:

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb⁵

The New Jerusalem is described as one giant holy of holies. Now we realize why all in the heavenly city dwell in the presence of the Lord—He *is* the Temple. The righteous dwell within the Lord God and the Lamb. In other words, they are taken into the inner life of God; they live in the Trinity.

As we live in the present it is with the horizon of the beatific vision always in mind. Now with this big picture perspective of the Book of Revelation before us, listen again to Jesus in today's Gospel:

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Those who love Jesus will keep to his word as depicted by the Revelation Scrolls and the Liturgical Proclamation we hear whenever at Mass. This is linked with the Lord making his home with us. An abiding most fully expressed by Jesus' Eucharistic Presence both here on the Altar and in the Tabernacle. Do you hear how the liturgical shape of this verse parallels Revelation and the Mass? Then Jesus says:

Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.⁶

Again the Book of Revelation is filled with those who do not keep the Lord's words and we see the devastating effects of such disobedience in the Day of the Lord judgment.

Then there is this most assuring verse which is an expression of why the Revelation was given to St. John. Over in John's Gospel at 14:27 Jesus says:

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

The World looks for peace in the absence of conflict. The Church discovers peace in the midst of conflict. The Peace that is declared at every Mass is the Peace of Christ. It is this peace, that amidst the world upheaval depicted on page after page of Revelation is the gift of those who are

⁵ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Re 21:22–23). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Jn 14:24). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

a Eucharistic people in the present and who are looking for the New Jerusalem in the future. With this perspective on history we can live in a world like this and hear Jesus say:

*Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*⁷

Those whose imaginations and souls are steeped in the language of the Revelation of St. John the Divine can live courageously in the present, trusting in Jesus because we know that he is the one who is history's author and ultimately history's judge.

Such people's souls need not be like a frayed knot. Instead they can be unbound and free to be served by Jesus' infinite grace, poured out on this Altar and wherever Jesus' friends gather on the Lord's Day.

Appendix: Allusions to the Mass in the Book of Revelation

Sunday worship	1:10
A high priest	1:13
An altar	8:3–4; 11:1; 14:18
Priests (presbyteroi)	4:4; 11:15; 14:3; 19:4
Vestments	1:13; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9; 15:6; 19:13–14
Consecrated celibacy	14:4
Lampstands (Menorah)	1:12; 2:5
Penitence	ch. 2 and 3
Incense	5:8; 8:3–5
The book, or scroll	5:1
The Eucharistic Host	2:17
Chalices	15:7; ch. 16; 21:9
The Sign of the Cross (The tau)	7:3; 14:1; 22:4
The Gloria	15:3–4
The Alleluia	19:1, 3, 4, 6

⁷ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Jn 14:27). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

Lift up your hearts	11:12
The “Holy, Holy, Holy”	4:8
The Amen	19:4; 22:21
The Lamb of God	5:6 and throughout
The prominence of the Virgin Mary	12:1–6; 13–17
Intercession of angels and saints	5:8; 6:9–10; 8:3–4
Devotion to St. Michael the Archangel	12:7
Antiphonal chant	4:8–11; 5:9–14; 7:10–12; 18:1–8
Readings from Scripture	2–3; 5; 8:2–11
The priesthood of the faithful	1:6; 20:6
Catholicity, or universality	7:9
Silent contemplation	8:1
The marriage supper of the Lamb	19:9, 17 ⁸

⁸ Barber, M. (2005). *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation and Applying Its Lessons Today* (pp. 24–25). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.