

Homily for Wednesday November 16, 2016

Revelation 4

Today and tomorrow St. John records for us a vision of the throne room heaven. Today's reading begins with John telling us there was one seated on the throne that looks like jasper and carnelian and that around the throne there was a rainbow like an emerald.

The stones of "jasper" and "carnelian," which John sees, are significant. First of all, they were found in the Garden of Eden.

Furthermore, the Greek Old Testament tells us that these stones were worn by the high priest, when he ministered in Israel's sanctuary (Ex. 28:17–20, LXX). The rainbow, seen by John signifies "new creation" imagery in its connection with the Flood of Noah (Gen. 9:13).¹

Next we are told there are 24 elders dressed in white robes with crowns on their foreheads.

Presbyteroi, the Greek word for "elder," is the word from which we get the English word "priest." The number "twenty four," evokes 1 Chronicles 24–25, where David set up twenty-four divisions of priests to serve and sing in the temple. This is exactly what John's twenty-four elders do—sing and worship God.

These elders are also described in royal terms, since they sit on "thrones" and wear "golden crowns." Who are these elders?

These twenty-four elders, then, represent the saints, the faithful, whom Christ has made "a kingdom, priests to His God" (Rev. 1:6). They have passed the test, by offering their lives in priestly sacrifice and who now have received the "crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Their white garments are their righteous deeds (Rev. 19:8).

Then there are the four living creatures, one like a lion, another like an ox, the third with a human face and the fourth like a flying eagle. The Fathers of the Church associate the four living creatures with the angels of the four Evangelists. Matthew is represented by the Man, since his Gospel begins with Jesus' human genealogy. The Lion stands for Mark, whose account begins with a voice in the wilderness, where lions live and roam. Luke is symbolized by the Ox, since his Gospel begins and ends with the temple, where oxen are slaughtered. Finally, the Eagle denotes John, whose Gospel "soars" to the heights in contemplation of Christ's divinity².

¹ Barber, M. (2005). *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation and Applying Its Lessons Today* (pp. 83–84). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.

² Barber, M. (2005). *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation and Applying Its Lessons Today* (p. 86). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.

Joined with the 24 elders, who represent the fullness of redeemed humanity, the four living creatures represent the fullness of the angelic order. We are also told they have six wings, full of eyes all around and inside. This imagery is used to show us that they are all-knowing. They work as God’s agents, seeing all things and reporting them to Him³

And notice that redeemed humanity and the angels sing a very familiar song.

Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

Here of course is the “Sanctus” sung right before the Canon of the Mass – the Prayer of Consecration. Notice also, what John tells us.

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor 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.⁴

This is the same posture we assume after the Sanctus. We fall on our knees and our focus turns to Jesus – the exact thing that happens now in Revelation 4 as the elders the cherubim sing:

***Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.***⁵

In the New Testament the title “Lord” is always given for Jesus of whom St. Paul in Colossians says:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born* of all creation; 16 for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together⁶

³ Barber, M. (2005). *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation and Applying Its Lessons Today* (p. 87). Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.

⁴ The Holy Bible. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Re 4:9–10). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

⁵ *The Holy Bible*. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Re 4:11). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

⁶ The Holy Bible. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Col 1:15–17). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Here is the point I would like us to take from this reading. Whenever we come to Mass we are joining with the faithful in heaven, both the angels and people. Although not visible to us today, the angels of the evangelists are present through the reading of the Gospels and in their invisible activity among us. We too, although as of yet not fully redeemed, are the faithful in Christ who though imperfectly, and at times distractedly, focus our own gaze and hearts to the throne room of heaven.

Every Mass therefore is a participation in and a preparation for that day when we hopefully will enter into the fullness of the heavenly glory where we will no longer walk by faith but by sight.

For now our faith informs us and inspires us to believe with hope that this is the glory awaiting us. A glory shown to us on the pages of Revelation Four and Five.