

Code Breaking

Homily for November 19, 2020

Reading Revelation is like trying to decipher a complicated code. I have been interested in World War II History of late. One of the most important military jobs was that of the Code Breaker. For instance, in May 1942 Edwin Layton who was a Rear Admiral in the United States Navy was able to work with a team of experts and break the Japanese Codes. These codes detailed that on June 4th 1942 the Japanese air force was planning to bomb Midway Island. If Japan gained control of Midway, this would provide a strategic bridgehead to gain access to Hawaii and thereby be that much closer to the Continental USA. But because of the Layton's Code Breaking team the Americans were expecting the Japanese and won the most important Pacific maritime battle of World War II.

Clearly the Book of Revelation is also a wartime document. For the devil wants to gain control of this world to defeat Jesus and His Kingdom. And just as it appeared to the Americans that the Japanese air force was invincible, so too from the perspective of this world it does so often appear the devil has the upper hand. Think for instance John's situation when writing the Revelation. His dearest friends, starting with his brother James, had all been martyred for the faith. Now he is a senior – 80 plus - and he is imprisoned on the Mediterranean Island called Patmos because of his testimony to Jesus and the Word of God. Each day in the heat of the Middle East Sun he is required to exercise hard labour in the stone quarries providing building materials for Imperial Rome – the most powerful empire the world had known to this date.

And yet if we can interpret the code of Revelation 5 – we can perceive all is not lost. So let's think for a minute about the Code of Revelation Chapter 5.

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

Notice that the one hold the scroll is the Ancient of Days – that is God the Father and he is holding it in his right hand – representing his authority. The scroll is written on the inside and on the back, like the Ten Commandments. We then read:

and I saw a mighty 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.

Remember that the scroll has seven seal symbolic of completion – wholeness. Throughout Revelation the number 7 is of great importance. Notice that the angel is described as mighty – keep that in mind with what we read next:

And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

St John's grief results from his false assumption that there is no code breaker – no one who can make sense of it all. But then appears the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, code for the great Davidic King who alone can open the scroll and its seven seals. What this means is that Jesus is the one who interprets the whole of biblical history, the scroll with the seven seals. He is then able to help us interpret this biblical history in the context of our present day lives.

The next thing we see in the Revelation is not the Lion, rather the Lamb who has been slain. But this isn't just any old lamb not this lamb has seven horns and seven eyes. Horns in the Bible are representative of authority and eyes of true knowledge. Because there are seven horns and eyes the lamb has complete authority and is all knowing. However note this, that even in heaven Jesus appears as the one who is slain. Why is that?

Here we see the point of the code. In heaven the angels, twenty-four elders, the four living creatures and saints are singing the song of the crucified, risen and exalted one. It is the same song we sing at every Mass. Notice today after the Consecration the repeated reference to the Lamb that was slain: Especially when the priest declares:

Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sin of the world.

So do you see the Code of Revelation 5 is the heavenly Mass in which those of us on earth our privileged to share? The opening of the scroll happens at every Mass as we look into the Scriptures and understand their fulfillment in Jesus. Then here the Eucharistic Lord – draws us to himself as we join with those of every tribe, language, nation and people in worshiping now by faith, hope and love the Lamb we will one day see.

The Cross is for us what Midway was for the Allies, the decisive battle – but the war is not over yet. We thank God that here in the Mass we can see how to live and engage in the battle until that day ultimate victory is declared and the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 is ushered in.