

Homily for November 27, 2020

The Perennial Millennial Question

Today's first reading presents to us the perennial millennial question. What is represented by the thousand year reign? Three views of the millennium have dominated theological discussion over the centuries.

(1) *Premillennialism* is the view that Christ, when he comes again, will establish his reign on earth for 1,000 years. This interpretation was popular in the second and third centuries. A modern version, advanced by Protestant dispensationalists, holds that the Church will be gathered into heaven at the Second Coming what is called "the Rapture", after which Christ will restore the theocratic kingdom of David in Jerusalem for 1000 years and fulfill all of God's promises to ethnic Israel.

(2) *Postmillennialism* interprets the 1000 years as symbolizing that period of history during which the gospel goes forth and gradually has its full effect of Christianizing the world. Once this global process is complete, Christ will return in glory. Advocates generally hold that the length of the millennium is beyond our ability to calculate.

(3) *Amillennialism*, like postmillennialism, holds to a symbolic view of the 1000 years and does not envision Christ reigning on earth in visible form. The millennium is said to represent the entire stretch of history between the First and Second Coming, that time when Christ reigns in a spiritual and sacramental way through the Church. Rising to prominence in the fourth and fifth centuries, this has probably been the most widely held view among Catholic theologians throughout history, beginning with St. Augustine. In his book *City of God* he states it this way:

But while the devil is bound, the saints reign with Christ during the same thousand years, understood in the same way, that is, of the time between his first and second coming.

The background of the millennium may be traced to the period of the Davidic covenant, which was established almost exactly 1000 years before the coming of Christ. This age began with David extending his rule over Israel and other nations as we read in 2 Sam 5–8, and with Solomon instructing the nations in the ways of righteousness (1 Kings 10:1–10, 23–24). It is also a time when the faithful of Israel first experienced martyrdom for their faith (Dan 3:16–23; 2 Mac 7:1–42). The images in 20:1 also have links with Davidic traditions: the key recalls the key of David in Revelation 3:7, that is based on the Keys given to Peter by Jesus in Matthew 16, that is related to the keys of the Davidic kingdom in Isaiah 22. The pit of the netherworld was believed to be sealed off by the foundation stone of Solomon's Temple; and the chain that prevents deception may reflect the tradition that a chain hung in Solomon's courtroom and was used to verify the truthfulness of testimony given under oath. These and other features of the Davidic age prefigure the messianic age, during which Christ reigns over the Church and the world as the royal Davidic Messiah.

The Catholic Church rejects all forms of millenarianism which contends that Christ will come again to establish a visible kingdom on earth and to inaugurate a golden age of peace and prosperity within human history (Decree of the Holy Office, 1944)

According to the Catechism millenarianism is a form of the antichrist's deception when the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the final judgment.

Therefore as we come to the end of this week when we have celebrated Jesus, King of the Universe its helpful to address the perennial millennial question - thankful to Jesus that we share in his reign until the time comes when according to Revelation 11:15:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.¹

¹ [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Re 11:15). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.