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THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Chapters 13-14

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Direct, O Lord, we beseech you,
all our actions by your holy inspirations,
and carry them on by your gracious assistance,
that every prayer and work of ours
may begin always from you,
and by you be happily ended.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Source Material

- *Revelation*, Peter S. Williamson
- *Revelation, Sacra Pagina*, Wilfrid J. Harrington, OP
- *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Ratzinger
- *The Antichrist*, Vincent P. Miceli, SJ
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE)*
- *Douay-Rheims Bible*

Summary of chapter 12

- Chapter 12 began a 'reset' of the story we've already heard, this time from a different perspective and filling in some details
 - *The seventh trumpet from Ch11 signaled the final victory, the utter destruction of evil and the fullness of God's reign*
 - *Chapter 12 starts a symbolic retelling of part of salvation history*
- It begins with the birth of the Messiah from among God's faithful people (the woman giving birth)
- The devil's greatest attack against Christ was on the cross, but Jesus remained humble and obedient to his Father's will (the opposite of the devil). Thus Jesus was victorious in his death and resurrection
- After his victory, with the sins of the faithful forgiven, the devil has lost his power to accuse and is cast down
- At the same time, heaven rejoices with the victory, and Christians are praised for their steadfastness and their participation that victory through faith

Summary of chapter 12

- The time of the Church has begun with ascension of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and though the final victory is certain, the devil will continue to wage war against God's people (the woman and her offspring)
- Those who remain in the Church (!) are spiritually protected from all the evil that the devil throws against it.
- His attacks will grow stronger, and chapter 13 will reveal his minions – the beast and the false prophet

Intro to chapter 13

- Our time period is now the 'time of the Church,' the period beginning after the ascension of the Lord (and including our own time!)
- The devil (dragon) has lost in his attack against Christ, who was victorious on the cross. Now the devil will go after Christ's disciples and faithful ones
- Chapter 13 details symbolically what the devil will be doing during this time of the Church
 - *Remember that, whatever symbolic calamities or physical trials the devil throws against the faithful, his ultimate goal is to tempt people away from Christ*
 - *His war against Christians is delegated to two 'beasts,' one of whom we already heard mentioned without any details in 11:7*
 - *In his providence, God allows the devil to exercise power over the earth during this time. Though ultimately mysterious, we'll talk about why in the coming chapters*

Description of the Beast (13:1-4)

- Ten horns, seven heads
 - *A near exact description of the dragon (devil) in 12:3*
 - *Ten and seven, both representing totality or completeness; horns representing power*
 - *Thus, a powerful force, summoned and commissioned by the devil*
- Out of the sea – the realm of chaos and evil
- Leopard, bear, lion
 - *All of them powerful creatures, describing the beast's dominance and ferocity*
- Blasphemous names
 - *Likely divine titles that it has usurped for itself.*
 - *In other words, it claimed divinity (and the accompanying worship of divinity) when it had no right to it – because it is not divine*

Description of the Beast (13:1-4)

Ancient interpretation

- The original readers may well have seen in the description of the beast a good description of the Roman Empire (and the emperor in particular)
 - *It was the overwhelming political and economic power and earthly force of culture and religion in that era*
 - *The emperors were given divine titles such as “Son of God” and “Savior” after their deaths*
 - *By the time of the Emperor Domitian (contemporary to the text), the cult of emperor worship even while they were alive was very active (thus the temples and statues of the emperors in chapter 2-3)*
 - *There was a legend that the murderous Emperor Nero, who died in 69AD, had returned in the person of Domitian – thus “mortally wounded and healed”*

Description of the Beast (13:1-4)

- In summary, the original readers could see the beast of Revelation as being an image of the Roman Empire and the emperor
 - *This is not to specifically identify the beast with Rome, but the image fits*
 - *What is presented in the image of the beast is a diabolical and worldly opposition to God's reign*
 - *The outward foes of God's people (in this case Rome) operate under the evil spiritual influence of the beast*
 - *Those outward foes will change from age to age but will still have the same evil animating spirit of opposition to the Kingdom.*

A perverted image of Christ (13:1-4)

- The devil (dragon) gives the beast his 'own power and throne' just as the Father gave Christ all his power
 - *"The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him." (Jn 3:35)*
 - *"But he (the Father) has given all judgment to the Son (Jn 5:22)*
 - *"All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Mt 28:18)*
 - *"God exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name." (Phil 2:9)*
- The beast was mortally wounded yet somehow healed. An obvious reference to the death and resurrection of Christ
- The 'whole world,' reminiscent of Jesus' sending of the apostles into the 'whole world.' (Mt 28:18)
- "Fascinated" – the same word in Greek used to describe the crowds' reaction to Jesus' miracles (Mt 8:27, 9:33, 15:31, etc.)

A perverted image of Christ (13:1-4)

- The whole world ‘followed’ the beast, an image of discipleship
- The whole world said, ‘who can compare with the beast?,” a mockery of St. Michael’s name, who we just saw in 12:7 – “Who is like God?”
- The devil and the beast take on blasphemous divine titles and accept the worship and submission of the ‘whole world’ though they are not divine
- The entire picture painted here is one of an evil spiritual force that imitates Christ, but it is perverted, leading people away from God.
- This spirit is the very opposite of Christ – it is the anti-Christ

Excursus: The Antichrist

- The term is not used in Revelation, though it is associated with the beast in its perverted likeness to Christ
- We find the term explicitly in the Epistles of St. John, specifically associating false teachers with the spirit of the antichrist, ‘who is already in the world.’ (1 Jn 4:3)
 - *“Just as you heard that the antichrist was coming, so now many antichrists have appeared.” (1 Jn 2:18)*
 - *“Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh; such is the deceitful one and the antichrist.” (2 Jn 7)*
- St. Paul did not use the term antichrist but wrote about a ‘lawless one,’ an end-times adversary:
 - *“who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god and object of worship, so as to set himself in the temple of God, claiming that he is a god...his coming springs from the power of Satan in every mighty deed and in signs and wonders that lie.” (2 Thes 2:4,9)*

Excursus: The Antichrist

- Jesus does not use the term either but speaks of:
 - *“false messiahs and false prophets who will arise, and they will perform signs and wonders so great as to deceive, if that were possible, even the elect.” (Mk 13:14)*
- Christian tradition identifies all these figures with the beast of Rev 13. It is demonic in nature but operates in the world through human beings and human institutions.
- Ultimately, the figure of the antichrist is a mystery, but the faithful and discerning eye can identify its spirit at work in the world through its fruits. It will be the opposite of Christ!
- And how will we know what is the opposite of Christ unless we know Christ!?

The activity of the beast (13:6-10)

- 42 months – 3 ½ years, a ‘short’ time, the time of the Church, in which evil is allowed to flourish and even rule on earth, though the sense here is that it will intensify towards the end.
- ‘was given a mouth...,’ given by God, reminding us that God remains in control
- “proud boasts and blasphemies against God,” a reference to his claim to divine prerogatives and worship, all of his activity is directly against God and the Kingdom (and the faithful)
- “name and dwelling” – the beast blasphemes against both the name of God and God’s dwelling, in this case, his dwelling on earth, the Church
- The beast is allowed to ‘wage war’ against the ‘holy ones,’ the faithful of God and even to conquer them, almost exactly what was said about the beast’s attack against the two witnesses in 11:7

The activity of the beast (13:6-10)

- “it was granted authority,” again mysteriously by God (the only one who can grant such authority), which extends to the whole world – “every tribe, people, tongue and nation”
- Such will be its influence, that all the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ will worship the beast – not every single person, but all those whose names are not in the ‘book of life.’
- The faithful will suffer much during this reign of the beast – because of their faith, some will go into ‘captivity’ and some will be ‘slain by the sword’ in a violent death.
 - *This is consistent with Mk 13:9-13, in which Jesus predicted the severe persecution of the faithful*
- But we have already seen who their ‘faithful endurance’ will be rewarded.

Quote from Romano Guardini

- “One day the antichrist will come: a human being who introduces an order of things in which rebellion against God will attain its ultimate power. He will be filled with enlightenment and strength...He will be a man of stupendous talents and spiritual force, of great knowledge and might. He will also be filled with religious power. Indeed, he will even have a certain resemblance to Christ...The ultimate aim will be to prove that existence without Christ is possible – nay rather, that Christ is the enemy of existence, which can be fully realized only when all Christian values have been destroyed. His arguments will be so impressive, supported by means of such tremendous power – violent and diplomatic, material and intellectual – that to reject them will result in almost insurmountable scandal, and everyone whose eyes are not opened by grace will be lost.”

The Second Beast (13:11-18)

If the first beast is seen as political or violent spiritual power, the second beast is a deceptive spiritual power.

- Textual note: from here on, the text refers to the second beast as the 'false prophet,' which we will use
- Like the beast, the false prophet is demonic in origin yet operates in the world through human beings and human institutions

Appearance of the false prophet

- Similar to the beast, it looks like Christ!
- It has horns like a lamb (Jesus) but its voice, like a dragon's, gives its true identity away.
- Remember what Jesus himself said: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves." (Mt 7:15)

The Second Beast (13:11-18)

- If a true prophet leads you to Christ, a false prophet will lead you away from Christ!
- The false prophet is subordinate to the beast, who gave it all its power and authority

The false prophet's activity

- The false prophet's primary work is summed up: "it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast."
- Notice a perverted 'anti-trinity' at work:
 - *The Father gives power to the Son (Mt 28:18), who is glorified by the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:14)*
 - *But here the dragon gives power to the beast (Rev 13:4), who is glorified by the false prophet (13:12)*

The Second Beast (13:11-18)

- So the false prophet's work is deception, inducing the 'inhabitants of the earth' to worship the beast
 - *He will apparently generate great signs to deceive the people*
 - *Moreover, such will be his power that he can have anyone who will not worship the beast put to death*

The Mark of the Beast (13:11-18)

- Not to be understood literally as a physical mark. It is like the indelible mark of baptism or confirmation – a spiritual seal.
- It is a parody or perverted imitation of the ‘seal of the living God’ received by the 144,000 (7:4) – in which the faithful had the name of God written on their foreheads
- The image of a seal or stamped image denotes ownership or allegiance
 - *To have the ‘mark’ of God means to belong to God*
 - *To have the ‘mark’ of the beast means similarly to belong to the beast*
- ”No one could buy or sell” – an indication of economic discrimination against Christians or anyone who would not submit to idolatry

The Number of the Beast (13:11-18)

- This figure has entered our culture as the number of evil, which it is, but we probably give more attention to it than it warrants. This is the only mention of the number in Revelation.
- It is most likely a reference to the evil and hated Roman Emperor Nero, who had died 30 years earlier and who had violently persecuted Christians. He was definitely seen as the embodiment of the evil of the beast.
- John says we can 'calculate' the beast's number.
- This calls to mind a common ancient practice called 'gematria,' in which the letters of the alphabet were assigned numbers. These numbers were then added up to arrive at a sum.
- If we did this using the English alphabet...

Simple English Gematria Chart:

A=1

J=10

S=19

B=2

K=11

T=20

C=3

L=12

U=21

D=4

M=13

V=22

E=5

N=14

W=23

F=6

O=15

X=24

G=7

P=16

Y=25

H=8

Q=17

Z=26

I=9

R=18

$$\begin{aligned} & Z + I + R + I + L + L + I \\ & 26 + 9 + 18 + 9 + 12 + 12 + 9 = 95 \end{aligned}$$

The Number of the Beast (13:11-18)

- Using the Greek word for 'beast' translated into Hebrew and plotted on a Hebrew gematria chart, we arrive at the sum 666
- Using the Roman spelling of Caesar Nero, translated into Hebrew and similarly charted, we also arrive at 666
- If this is who John meant to identify, it does not mean that Nero is literally the beast. Rather, that Nero personifies the attitude and evil characterized by the beast.
- It should also be pointed out that other names, including the Emperors Caligula and Domitian, depending on spelling and translation, could also add up to 666, but Nero is the most likely candidate.

The Number of the Beast (13:11-18)

- Perhaps a simpler way to look at this is from our earlier discussion
 - *If the number seven represents completeness and perfection, then six represents incompleteness and imperfection*
 - *Repeated three times, the number six can mean a radical incompleteness or imperfection, a good way to think about evil.*

Reflection on chapter 13

- So was the beast a first century reference to Nero, and the false prophet a reference to those religious authorities who violently promoted the cult of emperor worship?
 - *Yes and no*
- Recall that while Revelation had a definite audience, it is also applicable to all believers at all times
 - *Moreover, the coming chapters will see the defeat of the beast and the false prophet with the victory of God at the end of time, so the references to Nero don't exactly fit*
- Tradition has always understood, from the words of Christ himself as well as Scripture, that a dramatic trial and upheaval will befall the Church before the end.
 - *A person, government or movement with tremendous political and military power will arise – earthly but perversely animated by evil – this is the beast that John describes*

Reflection on chapter 13

- *He or it will be assisted by its propagandist, the false prophet, who will powerfully deceive and violently promote and enforce allegiance – even worship – of this person or government, to the absolute exclusion of God.*
- This will be at the end, before the definitive battle and victory of God
 - *But there have been many historical movements in various places and centuries that bear a resemblance to this end-times prophecy*
 - *From Rome in the first century to the Communists of the 20th century, many forces have tried to destroy the Church, and set themselves up as the sole earthly and spiritual power.*
 - *Each of these could rightly be understood through the lens of Rev 13, representing the perennial forces of evil that try to bring down the Church and turn people from God.*
 - *It is the spirit of the antichrist that is in operation, who is “already in the world” (1 Jn 4:3) History repeats itself, and before the end we will see many such ‘prologues’ to the final battle.*

Reflection on chapter 13

- Thus, the beast and the false prophet were rightly understood as embodying Rome in the first century, and are rightly understood today as embodying similar worldly forces working against the Kingdom. All of these are precursors to their actual appearance before the end.
 - *Our great task and call is to be faithful, to know and follow Christ, to discern the signs of the times and the spirit of the antichrist at work today and to absolutely shun any compromise with it.*
 - *It will be difficult, because evil disguises itself as good (the antichrist will look like Christ!).*
 - *People, especially Christian people, will never follow something blatantly evil – it must look good, and thus evil always deceptively presents itself as good.*

Reflection on chapter 13

- Again, only by truly knowing Christ will we recognize the spirit of the beast and the false prophet and not be swayed by their deceptions.
 - *Evil may be presented as good, but the faithful friend of Christ can spot a fake. The devil always shows his tail.*
 - *It seems that before the end, many will be deceived, and those with the mark of the beast will far outnumber those with the mark of the Lamb.*

Reflection on chapter 13

Why does God allow the beast and the false prophet to rule the world and even to persecute believers?

- Revelation does not clearly spell out and answer, nor does any other Book from Scripture
- A few points to consider, however...
 - *Jesus never promised an earthly paradise to his believers. In fact, he promised just this sort of thing predicted in Revelation (Mk 13)*
 - *We must distinguish between God's active and his permissive will – he mysteriously permits evil (for a 'short' time) but he does not will it*
 - *Perhaps allowing evil to have free reign helps us to clearly understand its true nature – in other words, the battle lines are clearly drawn, helping some people make the right choice*
 - *Allowing evil to clearly show its nature makes God's justice all the more manifestly right and just*

Reflection on chapter 13

■ A few points to consider, however...

- *Trials allow for the strengthening of faith: “for a ‘little while’ you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold...” may prove itself (1 Pt 1:6)*
- *All trials are ‘short’ – meaning time limited (3½ years) and “count as nothing compared to the glory to be revealed to us.” (Rom 8:18)*
- *We must have faith to believe, as Paul told the persecuted Romans: “that all things work for the good for those who love God.” (Rom 8:28)*
- *Jesus endured the totality of human suffering carrying the weight of the sin of the world yet remained faithful and was rewarded with eternal glory – a victory we will share.*

Intro to Chapter 14

- After a disturbing message and foreboding warning of the coming persecutions, we get another break - a consoling reminder of the rewards of faithfulness and the joys of eternal life with God
 - *In contrast to the multitudes in chapter 13 with the mark of the beast on earth, we see in chapter 14 another vision of the 144,000 – those who have the mark of the Lamb!*

The Lamb's Companions (14:1-5)

Mt. Zion

- The Lamb, the heavenly image of the glorified and victorious Christ, is standing unperturbed on Mt. Zion, remaining completely sovereign throughout the evil happening on earth
- Mt. Zion – the hill in Jerusalem where the Temple was, the physical location of God's presence on earth. Here it is an image of the heavenly Kingdom.

The Lamb's Companions (14:1-5)

- Mt. Zion is also mentioned in Hebrews 12 as a similar image of heaven. Addressing the baptized, Hebrews says: “You have come to Mt. Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant...”
 - *“You have come...” – the baptized on earth already have a share in what we are now seeing in Rev 14. We already have ‘access’ to it and we are ‘already, but not yet’ there.*
 - *Our worship on earth is a foretaste of this picture of heaven*

The Lamb's Companions (14:1-5)

144,000

- Mentioned as virgins, but likely referring to the same people in chapter 7 – who ‘purified’ themselves by faith and received the mark of God on their foreheads
- The opposite of the mark of the beast
- Thus we have a vision of two opposing forces – the righteous and holy ‘army’ of God in heaven, marked with his name – versus - the wicked army of the ‘inhabitants of the earth,’ marked with the sign of the beast.

The sound of heaven

- “Rushing water and pealing thunder” – as we’ve seen, an image of God’s presence
- Harps – the perennial image and sound of heaven
- “New hymn” – a common phrase in Scripture to describe a song of gratitude and praise to God for his salvation and mercy.
 - *Only those who accept that salvation can sing it*

The Lamb's Companions (14:1-5)

- “Ransomed” as the “first fruits”
- To ransom is traditionally to stand in for someone else or pay a price on behalf of another.
 - *Jesus used this phrase to describe what he was sent to do: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Jn 10:45)*
 - *Thus the blessed in heaven are those ransomed by Christ through his sacrificial death*
- First fruits – describing the first and best part of the harvest, which in OT times was given to God
 - *Here, these blessed are the first ones to enjoy the harvest of salvation that Jesus offers*

The Lamb's Companions (14:1-5)

- A present reality
- These two visions of the opposing 'armies' – those belonging to God and those belonging to the beast – appear to be in the same time period
 - *We receive either the mark of God or the mark of the beast while still on earth*
 - *In a sense, John is telling the faithful that despite their sufferings now (and to come), they are already among the blessed belonging to God*
 - *This accurately depicts the simultaneous reality that we find ourselves in today – the baptized among evildoers, the Church among the world, the sheep among wolves (Mt 10:16), the light shining in the world of darkness (Mt 5:14).*
 - *This vision reminds the redeemed on earth that they are, in a sense, already in heaven, and have the consoling presence of the Lamb with them*

The Lamb's Companions (14:1-5)

- Reflection
- A striking vision in the two opposite and opposing choices we have before us...
- Either we belong to God, are marked with faith and follow Jesus wherever he goes
- Or we belong to the world, with the mark of the beast and line up with those opposed to God
- There is no middle ground
- This is why Jesus so criticized those churches in chapter 2-3 who were compromising with evil or tolerating false teachers in their midst, as well as those who were 'lukewarm,' in their faith, whom he spat out of his mouth.
 - *Jesus calls those churches (and us!) to repent so that they will belong to this 144,000.*
 - *Or they will remain part of the 'inhabitants of the earth'*