

A thick black L-shaped border is positioned on the left and bottom edges of the page. The vertical line on the left extends from the top to the bottom, while the horizontal line at the bottom extends from the left edge to the right edge. The top and right corners of the page are open.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Chapter 12

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 11

- The first vision of John recounted the time at some period near the end, in which the Church (symbolized by the two witnesses), gave powerful and anointed testimony to Christ before the world
 - *We also saw the forces of the “world,” unleashed by the beast (who is yet to be properly revealed) stage an enormous spiritual “counter-attack.”*
 - *The two witnesses were killed, causing great rejoicing among the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ at the apparent silencing of the preaching of the Church, which caused them ‘torment.’*
 - *But God raised up the witnesses in the sight of their foes, and assumed them into heaven*
 - *Many of the inhabitants of the earth, upon seeing the action of God, repented at long last*

Summary of chapter 11

- The second vision began with the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet
 - *We saw a vision of heaven at the very moment in which the fullness of God's Kingdom was inaugurated, with the utter destruction of all evil and the everlasting joy of the blessed in God's presence*
 - *The 24 elders led a song of praise of God, recounting what the inhabitants of the earth had done, the steadfastness of the Church's faithful, and the recompense that God brought to both those faithful and to the wicked.*
 - *It was the most glorious vision of heaven, overflowing with great joy and praise, that we have seen yet (it'll get better!)*

Summary of chapter 11

- It appears that we have reached the end, and in a sense we have.
 - *But there is more to the story, including the details of the final battle and the persecution that the Church will be called to endure.*
 - *We have also yet to learn the identities of leaders of the rebellion against God and the tricks and snares they initiate to seduce the faithful away from God*
 - *John will also tell us of how the final battle played out, including the ultimate defeat and punishment of evil*

Introduction to chapter 12

- We have mentioned how Revelation shifts time periods, traveling from the “present day” of the first century, to the future time of the Church, to the final battle before the end, to the joys of heaven after God’s final victory.
- In chapter 12 we will go back to learn how the final battle will come to pass and the major antagonists working against the Kingdom.
- This is essentially a retelling of salvation history, beginning with the birth of the Messiah, his victory, and the time of the Church. But it is told from a new perspective
- Our time period for this chapter is basically the “present day,” meaning the first century and even a little further back to the time of Christ.
 - *But these events are not visible on earth and happen in a ‘war in heaven’ as we will see*
- Chapter 12 is filled with many images that will make our interpretation challenging, but we will sum it all up at the end.

A woman clothed with the sun (12:1-6)

- This is one of the most widely read passages of Revelation in the Mass lectionary cycle, typically proclaimed on Marian feast days, and there is an obvious Marian connection to this image
- Mary is the most exalted of all God's creatures, and the image of her "clothed with the sun" and standing on the moon with a crown of stars is a fitting picture of how God exalted her
- But it is the woman as the image of the Church that is most informative in this chapter.
 - *The vision here does not suggest that Mary, at some point in the future, will be threatened by the devil and forced to flee to safety (she's already Queen of Heaven and Earth)*
 - *This is to say that this image of the woman has multiple levels of meaning, and while the image fittingly describes Mary, it also more broadly describes the Church.*

A woman clothed with the sun (12:1-6)

- We're being introduced to the main "characters" in the story of salvation history
 - *The woman, symbolizing the faithful people of God, from the OT and the NT.*
 - *The child, symbolizing the Messiah, is 'born' from among God's people, who become the Church (the baptized)*
 - *The dragon, symbolizing evil in general and the devil in particular, will 'pursue' and persecute the Church until the end of time*
 - *The final battle, which we have already seen in summary (chapter 11), will result in the absolute defeat of evil and the vindication of the Church.*

- The dragon
 - *The perennial image of Satan, a creature of great power and authority on earth, symbolized by its ten horns (power) and seven diadems or crowns (authority)*
 - *As we've seen, both the number seven and ten reflect totality or completeness.*

A woman clothed with the sun (12:1-6)

■ A third of the stars

- *Many interpret this as a pre-historical vision of the fall of the angels, led by Satan, who were cast out of heaven for their pride, disobedience and unwillingness to serve God.*
- *Thus, some like St. Thomas Aquinas, have posited from this passage that about a third of the angels rebelled.*
- *Another interpretation refers to the stars as the great number of faithful being martyred for their faith*

■ “Devour her child”

- *The malice of the devil towards Christ and the Church is evident in this image*
- *It is the same spirit of malice that animates the enemies of God, from King Herod, to the religious authorities who killed Christ, to the persecutors of the Church throughout history until today.*

■ “with an iron rod”

- *The woman’s child (the Messiah) will in the end defeat the devil, as well as his earthly and demonic followers*

Excursus: From Genesis to Revelation

- We have said that there are an enormous number of OT references in Revelation
- One of the more well known is the connection of the woman of Revelation 12 with the 'woman' of Genesis 3:15, sometimes called the 'protoevangelium' or 'pre-Gospel'
- Gen 3:15 – describes God's punishment of the serpent, who tempted Adam and Eve to sin: "I will put enmity between you and the 'woman,' and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."
- The woman of Genesis prophesies a "new Eve," whose offspring (the Messiah and through him the Church) is in perpetual struggle with the offspring of evil (the forces of the world, both earthly and demonic)
- The final battle of Revelation represents Christ "striking the head" of Satan (with an "iron rod") in definitive defeat

A woman clothed with the sun (12:1-6)

- The child was “caught up to God” – a reference to the ascension of Christ after his resurrection
- The woman flees to the desert
 - *Referring here not to Mary but to the Church*
 - *The desert is a perennial image of a time of pilgrimage, trial and testing or refuge – much like the time of the Church on earth*
 - *Just as God provided manna and water during Israel’s 40-year sojourn in the desert, so too does he care for the faithful – nourishing them with the holy Eucharist, providing a ‘safe place’ in the bosom of the Church.*
 - *1260 days – as we said before, equivalent to 3½ years, half of seven, referring to a ‘short’ time.*
 - *The sojourn of the Church through the ‘desert’ of trials and testing is not infinite but will come to an end (with the seventh trumpet) in God’s good time. This ‘short’ time is essentially the entire time of the Church.*

A woman clothed with the sun (12:1-6)

■ In summary

- *The “woman” of Rev 12 has multiple meanings*
- *She is Mary, the mother of the Messiah and Mother of the Church. Both are her offspring, one literal and one spiritual.*
- *The woman is also “faithful Israel,” the people of God, out of whom the Messiah is born*
- *She is also the Church, “spiritual Israel,” sojourning through the ‘desert’ with trials and testing yet cared for by God.*
- *What we will hear in the coming chapters is the story of the Church, the faithful offspring of God, who are sojourning on earth (through a ‘valley of tears’) with much persecution and spiritual attack, but provided for by God, and journeying in faith while proclaiming the Gospel!*

War in heaven (12:7-9)

- Michael (whose name means “who is like God”) was first introduced in the book of Daniel and is depicted as the “prince of the heavenly host” of angels in heaven.
- The dragon is explicitly named as the devil (literally ‘slanderer’) and Satan (literally ‘accuser’ or ‘adversary’)
 - *Such is his power that he deceives the ‘whole world’*
- There is not universal agreement as to our time period here
 - *Is this during pre-history, when the fallen angels were cast out of heaven?*
 - *Is this at the end of history, when the definitive defeat of evil occurs?*
 - *Many interpret our time period here as the moment when the defeat first became self-evident – at the death and resurrection of Christ*
 - *God’s victory is assured with that event, yet the time of the Church has only just begun with the Lord’s ascension (just mentioned), and Revelation warns us (“woe to you, earth and sea”) that the devil has now come down.*

Excursus: “Already but not yet”

- The verses that follow call to mind the seemingly strange ‘middle ground’ in which we find ourselves.
- The Kingdom of God is here “already” with victory of Christ and the sending of the Spirit into the Church.
- But it is “not yet” fully manifested.
- The Church has much to do (“Go out into the whole world...” Mt 28:18), and the faithful will face tremendous opposition and persecution in the remaining spiritual ‘skirmishes’
- In a similar way, we could say that we “already” belong to the Kingdom and “already” share in the victory of Christ...but “not yet” fully. We must remain faithful to fully claim our share!

Celebration in heaven (12:10-12)

- With the death and resurrection of Christ, the victory is won, and heaven breaks out in great celebration
 - *He has done the 'hard part'*
 - *All that remains are the 'smaller' battles on earth during the time of the Church*

- “Now have salvation and power come”
 - *The Kingdom, marked by the salvation of the faithful, has arrived with the ascension into heaven of the victorious Christ*
 - *Friendship between God and humanity is restored, and heaven is now open to those who die in that friendship*

- “The accuser of our brothers is cast out”
 - *The devil's power to accuse us lies in our own sinfulness*
 - *But that power has been removed by three things, to be revealed next...*

In praise of the faithful (12:10-12)

- The faithful have a role to play in their own salvation (of course). Jesus has enabled us to claim salvation through his salvific death, but the faithful have to do their part.
 - *Here the angel praises them for doing just that in three ways...*
- “They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb”
 - *The faithful, as we saw in 7:14, washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb through baptism, repentance and steadfast faithfulness.*
 - *We truly participate in the power of Christ’s victory by our faith in Christ*
- “By word of their testimony”
 - *The faithful bear witness to Christ by their public lives of faith, by their preaching and by their steadfast adherence to the Gospel, in good times and especially in bad times.*
 - *This testimony of Christians faithfully living in the world is powerfully anointed and contributes to the defeat of evil*

In praise of the faithful (12:10-12)

- “Love for life did not deter them from death”
 - *Most especially, the Christians’ willingness to die rather than betray their faith in Christ is a powerful weapon in evangelization and the defeat of the devil.*
 - *Jesus was more important than anything else in their lives, including their lives themselves. People see that and repent!*
 - *These three characteristics of the faithful on earth are praised in heaven. This is how “they conquered” the devil!*

- “Woe...”
 - *Though his defeat is now certain, the devil is still active on earth during the time of the Church*
 - *What will follow in the coming chapters will reflect the spiritual attacks (and physical ones) he will unleash upon the Church until his definitive defeat*

The dragon's pursuit (12:13-18)

- We return to the “woman,” who had fled to the desert after giving birth to her child.
 - *Here, she is primarily identified with the Church, the people of God, and not Mary, since she is now beyond persecution!*
- The devil (dragon) is defeated with the death and resurrection of Christ, but still remains powerfully determined to persecute the Church on earth
- “Two wings, far away from the serpent” – an image of divine spiritual protection from evil
 - *How important it is to pray “not to be put to the test” and to stay in God’s friendship!*
- “A year, two years and half a year” – the same amount of time, equaling 3½ years, that we have seen before.
 - *Here it represents the “short” time of the Church, the time in which we are now living, and spans from the ascension of Christ until the end of time.*

The dragon's pursuit (12:13-18)

- The woman (Church) is spiritually protected, but the devil continues his attacks, including a “flood” of evil – lies, deceptions, slanders, temptations, mockery, persecutions, etc.
- “The earth opened...” – God’s protection is complete for those who remain faithful. No attack of the devil can spiritually harm those who remain steadfast.
- To be clear about who he is attacking, it is the faithful, who “keep God’s commandments” and “bear witness to Jesus.”

Summary of chapter 12

- What we've witnessed is a symbolic retelling of part of salvation history
- It begins with the birth of the Messiah from among God's faithful people
- 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
- 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

In two weeks...

- Next class Wednesday, February 24
- Lent begins with Ash Wednesday next week!
- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.