

7th Sunday after Pentecost, 2007

“Come ye to Him and be enlightened; and your faces shall not be confounded.”

(Ps. 33. 6)

A quote from the Daily Missal applied to this morning's Mass carries the same message in fuller terms: “Grafted on the wood of the Cross and on Christ Himself, the branch bathed in the bright sun of grace, must bring forth good fruit,” so that joined to Christ as the branch is to the tree which gives life, the Christian must bear good fruits under pain of being cut off and cast into the fire.

It is in and through the liturgy that we become strongly bonded to our Lord, our High priest and Saving Victim. Ukrainian Christians love to tell the story of how their ancestors “discovered” the liturgy. In 988, Prince Vladimir of Kiev, upon converting to the Gospel, sent emissaries to Constantinople, the capital city of Eastern Christendom. There they witnessed the Byzantine liturgy in the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom, the grandest church of the East. After experiencing the chant, the incense, the icons – but above all the “presence” – the emissaries sent word to the Prince: “We did not know whether we were in heaven or on earth. Never have we seen such beauty ... we cannot describe it, but this much we can say: there God dwells among mankind.”



The Presence. In Greek, the word is *parousia*, and it conveys one of the key themes in the Apocalypse. In recent centuries, interpreters have used the word almost exclusively to denote the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time. Yet it is not the primary meaning. *Parousia*'s primary meaning is a real, personal, living, lasting and active presence. In the last line of St Matthew's Gospel Jesus promises, “I will be with you always.” The Apocalypse captures that powerful sense of Jesus' imminent *parousia* – His coming that takes place right now – that He is here in His fullness, in Kingship, in judgement, in spiritual warfare, in priestly sacrifice, in Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, whenever Christians celebrate the Eucharist.

In his book *The Lamb's Supper*, Dr Scott Hahn shows that, in that Vision, the Mass is not just in selected small details. It is in the grand scheme too. We can see that the

Apocalypse, like the Mass, divides rather neatly in half. The first eleven chapters concern themselves with the proclamation of the letters to the seven churches and the opening of the scroll. This emphasis on the “readings” makes Part One a close match for the liturgy of the Word. Significantly the first three chapters mark a sort of Penitential Rite; in the seven letters to the churches, John uses the word *repent* eight times. For me this recalls the words of the ancient *Didache*, the liturgical manual of the first century: “First confess your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.” Even John’s opening assumes that the book will be read aloud — “Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear.”

Revelations’ second half begins in chapter eleven with the opening of God’s temple in heaven and culminates in the pouring of the seven chalices and the marriage supper of the Lamb. Let us look first at chapter four of the Apocalypse in more detail. “Behold a door was opened in heaven, and the first voice I heard said: ‘Come up Hither.’” Now at every Mass we are told to “Lift up your hearts” and we reply, “we have lifted them up to the Lord.” After this we cry out in our hearts, with the priest, that “it is truly fitting and proper, right and profitable to salvation, that we should always and everywhere give thanks to Thee, Lord, Holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Christ Our Lord.” Now we know that The gloriously Risen Christ, with the triumphant wounds of His Passion, offers His sacrifice perpetually to the Father in the heavenly liturgy. We lift up our hearts to that “altar on high” and unite ourselves with Jesus our Saviour, and with Mary and all the angels and saints in heaven, being joined in the One Sacrifice through the sacrifice offered on our altar here.

The Vision revealed “a throne set in heaven and one Who sat upon the throne in glorious majesty: round about the throne sat four and twenty ancients robed as priests: seven lamps burning before the throne which are the seven spirits of God: in the sight of the throne a vast sea of glass like to crystal” (the faithful in heaven pure and holy in sanctifying grace by which they partake of the divine life of God). Four living creatures represent the Popes the Hierarchy. The One on the throne holds a scroll in His right hand; St John weeps because there is no one to open the scroll of seven seals. Then the voice says, “Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.” St John turns but he does not see a Lion, he sees “a Lamb standing as it were slain.” The Lamb stood — signifying the High Priest; also “the Victim,” as it were slain. And the Lamb, priest and victim can take the scroll out of the Hands of God the Father and open the seven seals. That same Eucharistic Lamb at the Consecration of the Mass appears on our altar — priest and victim; that same Lamb we receive in Holy Communion making ever more firm our being grafted into Christ, the tree that give life. In the Sacred Scriptures – the living word of God – He draws aside the veil to reveal to us so much of the mystery we celebrate every day in the Holy Mass, and never ceases to guide us into the way we can live through that true love that comes from God, in Christ who with the Father loves us and abides with us.

Years ago, when Ireland bore some semblance to the “vast sea of glass like to crystal,” the hymn *Be Thou my Vision* was often sung, especially in Franciscan churches. We should make the second verse our deep hearts’ desire:

Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word,
I ever with thee, and Thou with me Lord.
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son;

Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Let us invoke the powerful help of Our Lady, help of Christians, “Seat of Wisdom”, that she may bring us into close intimacy with Christ through the Mysteries of His life in the Holy Rosary.