

The number seven is very prominent and important in the book of Revelation. There are seven visions of seven elements. What does 'seven' mean in the bible and the Christian Tradition? Seven is the image and symbol of absolute fullness and completion. In the book of Revelation many numbers will be written. They are all apocalyptic and mystagogical which means they are all symbolic. They are not about arithmetic but about revelation of meaning. The book begins with seven letters to seven churches with seven spirits and seven stars and seven words. Then there is a vision on the celestial glory of God in heaven. Then there are seven seals, seven trumpets, seven visions of the dragon's kingdom, seven visions of the worshipers of the Lamb, seven visions of the bowls of wrath and seven visions of the fall of Babylon. Seven times seven means absolute perfection -the ultimate revelation. That's why the ultimate mystery will have seven seals because it means the mystery of all mysteries. So, the book has seven apocalyptic visions coming together with seven mysteries. Thus, it is the ultimate insight into God's revelation concerning the state of the world and Christians in this age." -Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko, On the Apocalypse, Dk 1.

OBS: St. John, even though he is their chief shepherd, calls himself their brother and suffers with them. He shares in the tribulation they are undergoing, as well as the Kingdom for which that suffering is making them worthy, and that patience or perseverance which is needed to overcome. St. John, even though in exile, is telling his flock, he is with them in spirit and in suffering.

According to Fr. Hopko: "Tribulation is a technical term for the End time because tribulation characterizes it, including temptation, trial and affliction. During the tribulation, we are also in the kingdom because we belong to Christ. So, we are in two worlds, spiritually, mystically, sacramentally, liturgically, baptismally and eucharistically... we are in the kingdom. But we are in history in the time of tribulation. The End time which St. John mentions is when the children of the kingdom get nailed by the children of this world. We must stand fast in the tribulation."

Add: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day..." In other words John was worshipping in the Holy Spirit during the Divine Liturgy.

As Eastern Christians do everything in and through the Holy Spirit.

-He never became "the forgotten person of the Holy Trinity" as is claimed about other Christian traditions.

-St. Paul tells us, "We do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us..." (Rom 8:26).

-"No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).

-Even St. Paul was "caught up to the third heaven" in worship (2 Cor 12:2).

-Here St. John encounters something similar in the context of the Divine Liturgy on the Lord's Day. "Lord's Day" in Greek is κυριακῆ ἡμέρα (Kyriake hemera).

OBS: v.10 By stressing this vision was received on the Lord's Day St. John is pointing us to the book's liturgical context & meaning. The Apocalypse is centered on the Church's liturgical experience of the heavenly worship of Christ who is enthroned in glory.

-Our liturgical worship is patterned on what God has revealed of the worship that goes on in heaven. One example of this is that our Altar Tables are traditionally referred to as "the Throne" both in Slavonic & Armenian (Ator). \*\*\*Revelation will show elders and priests around the altar with our Lord, the Lamb, sitting upon the throne or altar.\*\*\*

OBS: "By choosing but seven of the Churches which were under St. John's pastoral care, he widens the intended audience, for seven is also the number of symbolic perfection. Thus the Revelation is intended... for the perfect totality of all of God's churches."

Add: Many writers believe the book of Revelation was received in the context of the Divine Liturgy. As Fr. Hopko states: Christ comes to us in our Liturgy primarily as the Word of God and the Lamb of God. First He comes to us as the Word of God through the Scriptures. In fact, we don't place the Bible on the Altar. We don't even place the NT on the Altar. Instead we put the Four Gospels on the Altar to show that Jesus is center of our faith & the Church's Liturgy. The main name for Christ in the Eucharistic Liturgy is the "Lamb of God." In fact the bread that becomes His body is called, "The Lamb." These are also the main two ways Jesus comes to us in the Book of the Apocalypse. First He comes to us through his word: in his messages in the letters to the seven Churches. Then He comes to us as the "Lamb of God" which is even more prominent in the Apocalypse. He is called lamb of God 28 times in this book! This is a very important connection b/t the Liturgy of the Church and the Book of the Apocalypse. In the Divine Liturgy Christ comes to us in the same two primary ways: Through the reading of His Word in the Scriptures and through the bread which we call the Lamb.

Add: Remember the "Son of Man" is the title Jesus call's himself in the Gospel of John. It refers to a messianic figure of heavenly origin first mentioned in the Old Testament book of Daniel (7:13). It is interesting that the turning point of Jesus' trial before the Jews (which John doesn't go into much detail on -but the other Evangelists do) is when He was asked, "Are you the Christ" to which He replied, "I AM. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds in heaven..." John's heavenly vision is the fulfillment of Jesus' words at that trial. Jesus is seen by John sitting in glory at the right hand of the Father. The book will also show how He comes to us in so many ways. He comes today in His Word, in Holy Communion, in our hearts when we pray to Him, when He gives us the strength to endure things we know we couldn't endure without Him. He also comes in judgments on the world. Finally He is coming to us again when He returns at His Second Coming.

OBS: Christ tells His all the churches to "not be afraid" of death or martyrdom or anything in the world b/c Christ has overcome the world, trampling down death by death. By His Resurrection He has authority over death and Hades, therefore nothing can separate us from Him.

CONCLUSION:

The Church has been under persecution many times -under the Roman Emperors like Nero, Domitian and Diocletian, and under Muslims, Turks and Soviets. Now as Christians in this country are beginning to be fined and even jailed for their faith we too have this great calling from God of the Apocalypse which calls for “the endurance of the saints.” During the Soviet persecutions the Church heavily relied on this book. As persecution is beginning in our country and Christians try to stand for unpopular truths like the meaning of marriage as God intended and the sanctity of human life, this book is going to become more and more important to Church to strengthen us.