

The Apocalypse of St. John Chapter 21

INTRO:

ICSB (Ignatius Catholic Bible Study): This final vision of the book (Chps. 21 & 22) unveils the Bride of the Lamb, the heavenly city of Jerusalem, which awaits the saints. It depicts the state of glory in terms of a marital union (21:2), a holy city (21:10), a divine temple (21:22) and a garden of paradise (22:2).

Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko on the Eschatological Meaning of Marriage in the Eastern Tradition:

If you are at all familiar with Mystical Literature, it is filled with nuptial and conjugal images about the reality of the union between God and His people. Therefore the infidelity of being God's bride, God's faithful one, is to be the adulterer, the unfaithful one. That is why marriage for us is so precious. Unlike the western tradition, marriage for us is as much an eschatological sign as celibacy. If it's done right. If it's done according to God. And it may even be harder! St. Paul says it's harder to image the kingdom married than it is as a celibate - because you are going to have these other concerns that you are going to have to conquer. But it's not only possible it's what we are created for. This is why we exist! And this is why marriage is a great mystery (Eph 5), and the fatherhood and the motherhood in Christ in the Church and the offspring and the children, it's all a story that is ultimately God's story with us that we are actualizing.

[Why the harlot? That's why in the Christian Tradition, the sin of sins will always be adultery. That's why the quintessential sinner will always be a woman. It has nothing to do with women as bad - just the opposite: If the greatest image we have for us is the woman toward God (and we are all feminine toward God in that sense), then the greatest evil is to betray that calling and to

commit fornication with the one who is not God and not your lover. If the Bible is anything, it is the story of God's love for us. Apocalypse Disk 4, Track 1 @10-11 minute.]

Read 21:1-3

OSB (Orthodox Study Bible) Note: 21:1

ICSB: The new heaven & earth are not entirely new, but entirely renewed (v. 5). St. John sees creation transformed [or transfigured] and made radiant with the glory of God. It is no longer a world subjected to death and the damaging effects of human sin (Gen 3:17-18; Rom 8:20-22). This process of renewal of the cosmos began in Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection. St. John witnesses this new creation completed (CCC 1042-1048).
ADD: We are given and foretaste of the Resurrection and partake of this regeneration when we die and rise with Christ in Baptism.

OBS (Orthodox Bible Study): Isaiah the Prophet had prophesied "a new heaven and a new earth" (v. 1) & that God would heal the sorrows of His people and "make Jerusalem an exceeding joy and My people gladness" (65:17-19). This new creation is rooted in Christ and His Second Coming. There will be a renewed cosmos, and creation will be freed from the slavery of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:21). P. 210

OBS: In this renewed cosmos the sea (v.1), which represented for the ancient world: restlessness, chaos [and all things dreadful and demonic, ICSB], is said to be no more. P. 211

OSB Note 21:2

OBS: The cosmos will be renewed b/c heaven or paradise will come to earth (v. 2), uniting earth with heaven. God, who now

dwells in the heavens, will then dwell in our midst and make His dwelling (lit. Tabernacle) [permanently] among men. P. 211

OBS: The holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God represents God's dwelling place or tabernacle (Gr. *skene*) would be with men. P. 211

ICSB: The heavenly city touches down to earth so that the worshipping Church can join in the heavenly liturgy of the angels and saints. who never cease to praise the Lord and the Lamb.

[ICSB: There are several antithetical parallels between the new Jerusalem and the harlot city (cf. ICSB Note 21:2)]

OBS: In the new city, God will draw close to all men in an intimate communion of love and all the nations will be His peoples (V. 3). "People" here is actually plural. In other words in the Old Covenant Israel alone was called God's holy and chosen people. Now in the consummation of the age, Christ's Church will be made up of people from all the nations of the earth. P. 211

OSB Note 21:3-4

OBS: The indwelling Presence of God among men meant the final glorification of His bride, a triumphant *theosis* and transformation for all His creation.

ADD: This is key b/c it is the ultimate goal of our lives: Union with God (*Theosis*).

OBS: The bride of Christ is prepared, adorned with her righteous deeds, and eager to meet her divine husband. The joy of an earthly wedding reflects something of the eternal joy of the indissoluble union of Christ and His Church. P. 211

Read 21:4-5

OBS: As it says in Is 51:11, at that time "everlasting joy.... praise and gladness shall come on them and pain, grief, and sighing shall depart from them." Although we experience many sorrows in this life, if we remain faithful, God will someday "make all things new" (v. 5) and He will wipe away every tear from our eyes (v. 4). Death will be no more, nor will there be sorrow (from disaster), no crying (from bereavement), nor pain (from disease and loss). Such promises sound almost too good to be true God tells John to "write" them down b/c these prophetic words are "faithful and true" (v. 5)

Add: Talk about death and the "fear of death" (Heb 2:14-15).

Read 21:6-8

OSB Note 21:6-8

ICSB: The water of life is the supernatural life, the Divine grace or energy of the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:37-39).

OBS: It is done (v. 6) refers to the "making all things new" (v. 5). God is the One who is the Alpha and the Omega [the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet], the Beginning (*arche*) and the End (*telos*) [notice the capitalization in the OSB text]. [Explain the importance of *arche* in relation to our Symbol of Faith]. In other words God is the source of all creation and its final goal. All things began through His command, and all will find their consummation, meaning and fulfillment in Him as He recreates them in the final age. The world lost its primordial beauty when we fell into sin. This divine beauty will be restored, as God recreates all, healing and transfiguring the cosmos and restoring its original beauty in His divine image. P. 212-213

Add: Overcome (v. 7) is literally: Conquers! (Gr. *nika*). How do we conquer? By being faithful unto the very end of our lives, just like our Lord.

Add: Explain the significance and importance in the Bible of being a "son."

Add: But the way to not conquer is (v. 8) to be cowardly (v. 8) and not stand up for one's faith. It's to join in with the abominable (v. 8) of this world: the murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters and liars (those who accept the lies of the world).

ADD: Let's recall the meaning of these sins mentioned here by our Lord and understand why they are mentioned. Our goal and purpose in life is union with God. Sin disrupts, frustrates that purpose and leads to our separation from God.

OSB: To these comes the second death (also mentioned in 20:14).

ADD: Explain that Jesus came to set us free from these lies, to help us know the truth so that we could be free (Jn 8:32). He not only teaches us the truth, He gives us the power to live it.

Read 21:9-11a

OSB Note: 21:9

OSB Note 21:10

OBS: Once before St. John had been carried away in the Spirit into the wilderness to behold the harlot (17:3). Now he was similarly carried away to a great and high mountain (signifying an exalted location) to see such an exalted sight: not the harlot, but the spotless bride of Christ, the wife of the Lamb. -P.214

The Archbishop Andrew of Caesarea (563-637) beautifully states about this passage: "He correctly calls the Bride 'the Wife of the

Lamb,' for when Christ was slaughtered like a lamb, He betrothed the Church to Himself by His own blood. Just as a wife was created for Adam during his sleep through the taking of a rib, so also the Church fashioned by the shedding of blood from the side of Christ at the time of His voluntary repose on the Cross in the sleep of death, was united with Him Who was wounded for our sakes." -Commentary on the Apocalypse, Ch. 67.

OBS: This image of the bride becomes also an image of a city, the holy city Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, radiantly illumined with the glory of God. ADD: For the significance of the New Jerusalem see OSB Note 21:2. In other words, in the end God will manifest His unveiled glory in the midst of His people.

Read 21:11b-21

OSB Note 21:12-14

OBS: This long passage (11b-21) gives a symbolic description of the holy city. According to Fr. Lawrence Farley:

---Her light and brilliance was like a precious stone (v. 11), sparkling like crystal-clear jasper, shining with the radiance of the divine Presence.

---Its wall is "great and high" (v. 12) showing that the saved will remain secure, protected by God.

---This wall (according to v. 17) is one hundred and forty-four cubits high. Twelve symbolizes completion. So "144" is a number of perfect completion. There is nothing lacking in God's provision of security in the age to come.

---(V. 12) The wall is really twelve walls sectioned between each of the twelve gates. These walls also have twelve foundations (v. 14) (i.e., a stone foundation under each wall), and on these are written the twelve names of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb. The Apostles are the foundation of the Church's faith (Eph 2:20), b/c it is upon their witness that our salvation is built.

---(V. 12) These unbreachable walls are nonetheless pierced by twelve gates, because the Kingdom stands open to all. At each of the four directions are three gates because, as our Lord said, "they will come "from east and west, and from north and south to recline at table in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29).

---(V. 12) At the gates are twelve angels representing the power of God guarding over the city.

---(V. 12) On the gates are written the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. The Kingdom of God fulfills all of the divine promises to His chosen people.

---(V. 15) The angel who speaks with St. John has a measuring reed to measure the city to survey and praise all that God has done. This reed is gold to symbolize the city it measures is precious and eternal.

---(V. 17) That this measure of man is also that of the angel (who speaks with John) means that the city is to be home not only to angels but also to men.

---These measurements are also deeply symbolic. The city is four square (v. 16, Gr. *tetragonos*) , with its length and breadth and height all equal. In the thought of the ancients, the cube is the perfect shape. The inner sanctuary of Solomon's Temple was also of cubic shape. Each of these measurements was twelve thousand stadia, the number twelve being the image of completeness and the number thousand that of vastness (cf. 7:5-8 & 20:2, 4, etc.) -P. 216-217.

OSB Note 21:15-21a

OBS: "Furlong" is the old English for the Greek word stadia which is the equivalent of fifteen hundred miles. [ICSB: The heavenly city is pictures as an enormous, each side measuring nearly 1500 mile and its walls measuring over 200 feet thick.] But to translate this in its literal equivalence would be to miss the point of the symbolism This city is thus vast enough to hold all the redeemed and contains their complete number.

OSB Note 21:15-21b

OBS: The foundations of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone known to man, reflecting the stones on the breastplate of the high-priest (Ex. 28:17-20), because the city contains the Presence of God. Such precious stones once belonged to the high-priest alone, but now this privileged place is the possession of all of God's people. -P. 217

Read 21:22-27

OBS: John sees no temple (v. 22), i.e., no place to worship God. Earthly sanctuaries were places for God to dwell, localities where His Presence could be accessed. In the eternal Jerusalem the divine Presence is no longer localized, for that Presence fills the city.

OSB Note 21:22

OBS The Presence of the Father and His co-equal Son together form a single light that ceaselessly illumines those who dwell there so that they will never need to [combat] darkness again (John 12:46).

ICSB: The Trinity is the sanctuary of the heavenly city, which is encompassed by the Father (Lord) and the Son (Lamb) and filled with the glory of the Spirit (light). No longer having the partitions and veils of the earthly temple, this means that our communion with God in heaven will be immediate and direct.

ADD: This is what it means to have *theosis*, or union with God.

OSB: All of God's creation, symbolized by all the nations and their kings (v. 24) will walk by this light. No longer will the nations and

kings serve idols powerless to save, they will bring their glory to God alone.

OSB: Notice (v. 25) the gates are never closed by day. In the ancient world city gates were shut at night to keep out the threat of invasions, but no such precautions will be necessary there. The gates are always open because there will be no night there.

OBS: But the redeemed alone will have access (v. 27). No unclean thing that defiles shall enter it. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (i.e., who are acknowledged by Christ), may enter into the joy of their Lord. -P. 218-219

Add: This also explains our concept of a final cleansing before entering heaven.

OSB Note 21:23-27

CONCLUSION: In this chapter, once again, Christians who might be tempted to apostatize in the coming persecutions are encouraged to hold on to their faith. This is the way to ensure their names will not be erased from the Lamb's Book of Life (3:5). If they would enter that shining city, the heavenly Jerusalem, they must persevere in their Faith and not give up. The same is true today for all of us. -P. 219

The Apocalypse of St. John Chapter 22

Q. & Clarifications from last week:

A. Where does the word "Theosis" come from: "Theos" meaning God and "henosis" meaning union.

B. Why the nonsensical descriptions of stones & metals (e.g. "sparkling like crystal-clear jasper," and "the city was pure gold, like clear glass")?

-Recall the Apocalyptic interpretive keys on the board. Also recall Rev. 7:14 where it says those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Its meant to convey a message not an image. So, for example, the city (v. 18) & its streets (v. 21) were "pure gold as clear as glass" could mean the Heavenly Jerusalem shares in Christ's royalty -represented by gold- (we are called "a kingdom of priests," Rev. 1:6). Then, this adopted royal status as sons of the Most High, makes us worthy of the clear vision of God (Rev. 22:4 states we "will see His face"). Ultimately the main point of the various stones is that the Heavenly Kingdom will be priestly b/c the stones that are contained within it correspond almost to those worn by the O.T. high priest on his garments.

C. What word does St. John use in Greek for "son." According to Strong's Concordance: υἱός huiós, hwee-os'; apparently a primary word; a "son" (sometimes of animals), used very widely of immediate, remote or figuratively, kinship:—child, foal, son.

INTRO:

Read 22:1-5

OSB (Orthodox Study Bible) Note 22:1a

[Skip: OBS (Orthodox Bible Study): (v. 1) This river of the "water of life" flows from the very Presence of God.]

ADD: It was during the feast of Tabernacles that Jesus made the connection between the water of life and the Holy Spirit. "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. "He

who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (Jn 17:37-39).

Unlike other rivers that can be muddy, this river is said to be "clear as crystal" to show it contains the very life of God. It is down the middle of the street to show it is accessible to all. P. 220

OSB: (v.1) Once again the and His co-equal Son are portrayed as sharing the same authority and throne). P. 220

OSB (Orthodox Study Bible) Note 22:1b

OSB Note 22:2, 3

1 Pet 2:24 - [He] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousnesses - by whose stripes you were healed.

Gal 3:13 - "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, '*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.*'")"

OBS: Notice that even the river of the water of life (v. 2) goes down the middle of the street, meaning it is available for all ("to him who who thirsts" as it says in 21:6). This tree produces twelve fruits, one for each month, and its leaves are for healing. In other words the Kingdom, there is abundant variety and healing for everyone of life's wounds. P. 220

OBS: Then this glorious vision reaches a climax. In the city of God "there shall be no more curse" (v. 3). The curse of death,

suffering and sorrow, which has darkened the steps of man since he left the Garden (Gen 3:17-19) will be no more. P. 221

ADD: In this midst of the Heavenly Jerusalem will be the Throne of God and of the Lamb, just as God's throne, the altar, is in the midst of the Sanctuary. OBS: God's servants will approach this Divine throne with joy and worship Him.

OSB Note 22:4

OBS: At last the pure in heart will see His face (as promised Matt 5:8); In this age, no one could behold His face without dying (Ex. 33:20), but in that blessed age, His servants will look upon their King and live forever.

OSB Note 22:5

OSB: The uncreated light is the light of God Himself. This will enlighten them and fill the city so that "there shall be no more night there (v. 5)." They will bask in this Joyful Light and reign with God "unto ages of ages."

[Skip? Q. What is this Uncreated Light of God?]

OSB: This section was the concluding triumphant final vision of the Apocalypse. It is given as the final word, a word of peace and a vision of joy. This sight of the heavenly Sion which is glorious and triumphant and eternally secure in the joy of heaven is meant to help sustain the Church through the dark days of this present age P. 221

Read 22:6-9

OSB: We now begin the final commendation of the Revelation of St. John. These words are faithful & true" (v. 6) certifies the Revelation is certain to be fulfilled.

ADD: "which must shortly take place..." -the Apocalypse has immediate relevance (i.e., for the audience who first received it) as well as relevance for Christians of all generations. It also has a final fulfillment at the close of this age (the end of the world).

OSB Note 22:7

Num 6:23 - "[May] the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be merciful to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace."

ADD: This (v. 7) is the sixth of seven beatitudes in the Apocalypse. OSB: Those who keep the words of the prophecy of this book and resist the beast will be blessed and inherit all these things when the Lord comes. -P. 223

OSB Note 22:8, 9

Read 22:10-11

OBS: The persecution from the state had already begun (of which John's presence in Patmos was evidence), and the spread of the cult of emperor worship was soon to face all Christians with the decisions of their lives.

OBS: "He who is "unjust," "filthy," "righteous," or "holy," ---be this still. In other words: All are called to decide now.

Read 22:12-13

OSB Note 22:12, 13

OBS: The decision about one's moral and spiritual stance is urgent because Jesus is coming soon (v. 12), and His reward is with Him, to "give to everyone according to his works."

OBS: Note that in 21:6 God the Father declared Himself to be "the Alpha and the Omega," "the beginning and the end" and now Christ declares this of Himself. This is further proof of the co-equality and consubstantiality of the Father and of the Son. Christ is one nature (essence) with His Father (John 10:30) and both share equally with the Holy Spirit in the creation of the world out of nothing.

Read 22:14-16

OSB Note 22:14, 15

OBS: Christ pronounces the final blessing (v. 14) of the Apocalypse (the seventh beatitude) upon those who keep the commandments or wash their robes in His precious Blood (making them white, 7:14).

OBS: The "dogs" are the sexually impure. This title is used in Deut 23:18-19 to describe homosexual and pagan cultic religious prostitutes.

ADD: To review, here (v. 15) Jesus tells us the kind of sins that will separate us from Him: sorcerers (included use of mind altering drugs and occultism), sexual immorality (pornea) is all sexual activity outside the covenant of marriage between a man and woman, murders (is the intentional taking of innocent life), idolaters (are those who put anything before God and His truth). "Whoever loves and practices a lie" means those who willfully reject God and His truth. Christianity can be summarized as "living the truth & living in union with God."

OSB Note: 22:16

OBS: When it says (v. 16), "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify," this is our Lord reaffirming the authenticity of this revelation. It is He who speaks; He has sent His angel; What John has written was by His authority.

OBS: When our describes himself as the "Root and Offspring of David" This speaks to His human origin as the true Messiah and descendant of David whose human origin was prophesized in the Old Testament.

When our describes himself as the "Bright and Morning Star" this witnesses to His eternal Divinity. Both of these are alluded to prophetically by David himself in Psalm 109 where David states, "

In other words he is both transcendent as God ruling over history, and a participant in history as a man who is a partaker of our human nature through His incarnation.

Glory to Jesus Christ!
Sub-Dn. Lazarus Der-Ghazarian