

The Apocalypse of St. John

Chapter 14

INTRO: Last chapter we learned a little about “the mark of the beast.” But what is the real meaning behind the symbolism of the mark of the beast? Is it really a number stamped on our foreheads? Is it a computer chip stuck under our skin?

In the Christian faith (as well as in the Jewish faith) sinful sexual acts have a stigma. They are stigmatized as being evil (cf. St. Paul’s 1 Cor 6:18). Sadly today, not only is the Church not influencing the world... but the world is influencing the Church. We see some in the Church now flirting with ideas like cohabitation is ok ---even though pre-marital (and non-marital) sex is fornication! Or that homosexuality is ok (even though this is sodomy)! These sinful acts were stigmatized by the Scriptures by God for a reason: Because they are evil. They bring evil into our lives and into our society.

It used to be a norm in Christian society that sin, especially sexual sin, was stigmatized as something very negative. This is because all sin has spiritual consequences and consequences on the world we live in. Today we live in a society that no longer recognizes the evil of sin. In fact the stigma (or mark) is on those who do not engage in sexual sin or try speak out against it (like St. John Paul II for speaking out against the “culture of death” and the recent Firefox CEO who was forced to resign for simply giving a donation to a campaign to stop legal recognition of homosexual marriage).

In today’s chapter (14) we are going to see a huge emphasis not only of the marks on people but also on their works. I would argue it is these very works that will be our marks because our works “follow us” into the after-life (as we will read). If we engage

in or even support sexual immorality this will be our mark on our foreheads (in our minds) or on our right hands (in our works). If God's presence is manifested in our lives and we stand against evil (like the evils described in this chapter), we will bear the stigma or mark of God. In reading this chapter today, each of us has to ask ourselves which mark do we have on us? Are we silent and complacent about the evil all around us? Or are we standing up and fighting against it in our lives and the lives of our children, family and society? Based on our works... which mark will we have on us, the mark of God or the mark of the beast?

READ 14:1, 14:2, 14:3

Orthodox Study Bible Note 14:1

Orthodox Bible Study (OBS) by Fr. Lawrence Farley:

This (v.1) is now [a divine response] to what we read in the last chapter. Just as the slaves of the beast prostrated in worship before it -with its name and number written upon their foreheads- now St. John sees the Lamb standing upon the heavenly Mount Sion with His own army of 144,000, having His Name and the Name of His Father written upon their foreheads (cf. 7:3, 9:4). This passage echoes a prophecy found in 2 Esdras, where the Son of God leads a great victorious multitude on Mount Sion (2:42-48). Psalm 2 states that the Son of God is established as King by God on Sion, His holy mountain and that He would "shatter the nations like a potter's vessel." Also the prophet Joel writes those who are saved will be gathered on Mt. Sion (Joel 2:32 LXX). So this reference to heaven as "the heavenly Mt. Sion" is a promise of ultimate victory for the Church. -P. 154

Note 14:2, 3

OBS: In the last chapter, the roar of acclaim for the beast on earth, from every tribe and people and tongue and nation, had

been impressive. Here (v.2) is a mightier roar of acclaim, a voice from heaven as a sound of many waters and of great thunder, an overwhelming outpouring of praise.

OBS: They sing a "new song" (v.3). In Old testament a new song commemorated a new and recent victory given by God, because He rescued His people from their foes. Here it is a song praising God for giving His martyrs victory over the beast. They had kept their faith and conquered the world (cf. 1 Jn 5:4). That no one is able to learn the new song except them symbolizes that their separation from the world (virginity) and their suffering for the Lamb (martyrdom) is what qualifies them to sing the song. -P. 155

READ 14:4, 14:5

Note 14:4

OBS: Being called "virgins" (v.4a, Gr. parthenoi) does not necessarily mean they are celibates. First sexual relations are only impure when they are done outside of God's meaning and purpose for them. This title also symbolizes that they have preserved their spiritual purity as well. In the Bible there is no dichotomy between spiritual purity and moral purity. Eastern Christianity teaches we are body, soul and spirit. What we do in our spirits affects our bodies and what we do in our bodies effects our spirits. We are understood to be tri-partite -but integrated- beings. We cannot be spiritually pure if we are morally sinful. Sin (Gk. hamartia) is (1) missing the mark and ultimately (2) a participation in the "mystery of iniquity" (2 Thess 2:7). Sin is the only thing that can separate us from God.

Not only have they maintained their purity, they have followed Christ (v.4b) who, as St. Peter said, has left us an example so we could follow in His steps (1 Pet 2:21). They have given the ultimate witness to God as martyrs and become an offering of first fruits in their sufferings and deaths. -P. 156.

The “deceit” or lie (v.5) is idolatry and sin. When we sin we make false idols for ourselves. We put them before God and we set aside God and His truth. As St. Paul said in Romans, “We exchange the truth about God for a lie, and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator...” (1:25). These martyrs have had nothing to do with emperor worship or immorality and have been true followers of Jesus Christ and His truth. P -156

EXCURSUS ON THE APOCALYPTIC & MARTYRIC CHURCH:
(The difference b/t being "martyric" and being an actual martyr)

A martyr is someone who is physically killed for his faith in Jesus Christ. But whether we are called to martyrdom or not, the Church [must always] be "martyric." Being martyric means the Church has to always be ready for martyrdom -always ready to suffer persecution and witness for Christ! The Church has always considered Christians who suffered for Christ to be true confessors and (in this sense) martyrs. -P. 157 God inspired St. John to write the Apocalypse to prepare Christians to persevere in confessing their faith. -P.157

READ 14:6, 14:7

Note 14:6,7

OBS: The angel (Gr. angelos, v.6) appears "in the midst of heaven" which can accurately be translated "in mid-heaven." In other words, it can be seen by all. The first angel's message is urgent, the time for the final outpouring of wrath has come. Each of the three angels has a different message but together they give God's call to those who dwell on the earth. -P. 157

OBS The first angel cries out calling the world to repentance. The “everlasting Gospel” he has is for every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.

ADD: Q. What does it mean to fear God? It means to show Him reverence and obey Him. Notice the emphasis on worshipping God and giving Him glory (v.7). This is why Byzantine Christians put so much emphasis on worship **and its why a** traditional title Eastern Christians is "Orthodox" b/c this literally means "right" (**ortho**) "glorification" (**doxa**) as well as "right belief."

OBS: So these pagans are urged to cast **down** their idols and worship the true God b/c the hour of judgment is come. **This is** their last chance for repentance and salvation. P.158

READ 14:8

OBS: The second angel (v. 8) follows **fast** on the heels of the first. "Babylon the Great" is code word for mighty Rome (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13). "Fallen" is **repeated** to emphasize the the proportion of its fall. P. 158

Note 14:8

OBS: "The wine of the wrath of her fornication" hearkens back to the OT where Jeremiah writes "Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, causing all the earth to be drunk. The nations drank from her wine; therefore, they were shaken. Babylon fell suddenly and was broken in pieces. Sing a dirge for her; take resin for her corruption... Let us forsake her, and let each move to his country. For her judgment draws near to heaven..." (28:7-9 LXX or 51:7 Heb).

It means the nations have committed fornication with Rome by participating in her sins (spiritually and morally). The wine of indignation that they have drunk from is the wrath of God. This wine offered by Babylon (Rome) may seem to lead to joy of intoxication and pleasure, but it finally leads to death and divine wrath. P. 158-159

READ 14:9, 14:10, 14:11

OBS the third angel also has a strong message: whoever drinks of the wine of fornication (v.8) will also drink of the wine of the indignation of God -mixed undiluted in the cup of His wrath. P. 160

Note 14:9-11

OBS V.11 serves to remind the faithful that it is far better to refuse to worship the beast and suffer martyrdom (13:5) than endure fire and brimstone (or sulfur) forever and ever (literally “unto the ages of ages”). Their torment is before [the presence] of the holy angels and before [the presence of] the Lamb. In other words those tormented will see the blessedness of heaven but will not be able to partake of it; they will know that such joy was lost to them forever. P.160

OBS: In this year of mercy, these words of Revelation may sound a little harsh on our ears. But we can't forget that our Lord Himself used such imagery and terminology in His own Divine teaching. He is the one who first taught that the fires of Gehenna were terrible and unquenchable (Mark 9:44). He also spoke of a fire of judgment so painful that one would be in agony in the fire (Luke 16:24) and He warned of the everlasting fire in which men would weep and gnash their teeth (Matt. 13:42). P. 160

ADD: So the reality of God's judgment is just as important as the reality of His mercy.

OBS His judgment is expressed here not so much to show God's severe justice but to help Christians realize their suffering for remaining faithful to God is nothing compared to those who reject God and His truth. cf. P.161

READ 14:12, 14:13

Note 14:12, 13

OBS Here (v.12) is again the call for "the perseverance [or patience] of the saints, to keep the commandments of God [refusing immorality], and to keep the faith of Jesus [refusing idolatry]." Notice how true Christianity is shown in our faith and in our works. We have to be united with God in our spirits (spiritually) and in our body (morally). It is not enough to say "we believe" (or have faith) in Jesus and not live our lives for Him.

Likewise it is not enough to be "a good person" and not believe in God and give proper worship to Him. P. 161

OBS In v. 13 we have a new beatitude about "blessedness of those who die in the Lord..." In other words, Christians should understand that with persecution comes the promise of great blessing in the age to come. This reminds us of another beatitude of our Lord, "Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you... rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven..." (Matt 5:11-12). P. 161

OBS: "Their works follow them..." (v.13) means their works will not be forgotten but will have their eternal reward from God in heaven.

ADD: This is one of the reasons for our practice of having saints as patron intercessors for particular causes or concerns. The works that they did on earth are not meaningless or forgotten; their works follow them into heaven and obtain for them a great reward. The Apocalypse has already shown us that the saints in heaven are aware of our plight and difficulties here on earth and concerned about what transpires on earth (Rev. 6:9-11; 8:3-4).

So the saints, whose works follow them, pray for us who struggle with similar issues here on earth, especially if we ask them to.

Remember: We do not render worship to saints as if they are God. Instead we ask their prayers for us just as we would ask those close to Him on earth.

ADD: Notice that although the Apocalypse focuses more on the Father and Son (or Lamb & the Father) the Spirit is also active. Here, as in chapters 2 & 3, the Spirit speaks -probably from within John's heart just as He spoke through the prophets.

READ 14:14, 14:15, 14:16

Note 14:14-20

OBS: After the three angels, St. John now has a vision of the final judgment (v.14-16). In the Old Testament era (cf. Books of Daniel & Enoch) "Son of Man" became a title for the Messiah who would bring in the final Kingdom. Daniel prophesied that "one like a Son of Man was coming with the clouds of heaven" (7:13). So the title "Son of Man" would evoke in the minds of the early Jewish-Christians this mysterious messianic figure. In fact, here is the ultimate fulfillment of St. Daniel's prophecy. The Lord has (1) a golden crown symbolizing eternal sovereignty and (2) a sharp sickle symbolizing God's ultimate judgment. He sits (symbolizing sovereign authority) on a cloud (i.e. in the heavens) ready to render judgment upon the world. P. 163.

Note 14:14

OBS: The angel (v. 15) comes from the heavenly sanctuary, i.e., from the presence of God with the command to reap (i.e. to judge), for the world is ripe (ready for judgment). The time to harvest the souls of men had come so the Son swings the sickle, the earth is harvested and all the souls of men are reaped at the Second Coming and brought before the judgment of God. As St. Paul states, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive the things *done* in the body,

according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor 5:10). This passage reminds us of our Lord's parable of the "wheat and the tares" where He compares the Last Judgment to a great final harvest (Matt 13:39; Mark 4:29). P.163

READ 14:17, 14:18, 14:19, 14:20

SKIP Note 14:18 (covered below)

Note 14:20

OBS: Here we have a second reaping and harvest which is just another aspect of the one Final Judgment. The first harvesting was of all the souls of men. Now this second is the harvesting of all the works and deeds of men. The fire which this angel brings from the altar manifests the judgment of God. This is an answer to the prayers of the saints for judgment earlier in this book (6:9-11; cf. 8:3-4).

OBS: The clusters of vine of the earth are harvested b/c "her grapes are fully ripe." The earth's wickedness had reached its full, and the time of divine judgment had come. In other words, when the evil of men's works reaches its limit, the End & Divine Judgment will come. P. 165

OBS: The image of the great winepress of the indignation of God is also used by Isaiah in the Old Testament (63:1-6). It means at the Second coming when all the evil deeds done by men come before the Face of God, this evil will be avenged. The blood of men will flow as God avenges their evil and oppression of the helpless of the earth. This blood will be so plentiful that it will not only flow outside of the city, it will even come up to the horses bridles for up to 1600 stadia or furlongs (about two hundred miles). P.165

OBS: Similar imagery of God's judgment is used in other apocalyptic works like the Book of Enoch where it says, "The horse will walk up to the breast in the blood of sinners."

OBS: 1600 stadia was also the approximate length of the Land of Palestine. In other words, the wickedness of the earth is so great that the resulting flow of blood will be of horrifying proportions filling the length and of the whole land. P. 166

OBS: This judgment comes outside of the Holy City symbolizing that those who spiritually dwell in the City of God (under God's protection) will be preserved from such wrath. P. 165