

## The Apocalypse of St. John

### Chapter 15

1. Passed out Dr. David McGraw's notes on some modern philosophical observations on the coming of the final anti-Christ.
2. Passed out article: On the Tripartite Nature of Man in Orthodox & Eastern Christian Tradition.
3. Reviewed purposes this class: (a) Spending Time with the Incarnate Word of God, (b) Growing deeper in our Eastern Christian Faith (what St. Paul calls the equipping the saints in light!).

Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB): This section (15:1-16:21) begins the final cycle of judgments.

#### **READ 15:1**

Orthodox Study Bible (OSB) NOTE: 15:1

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

OBS: Just as St. John saw a great sign in heaven in Chapter 12, here (v.1) he sees another sign in heaven [which will likewise involve the Ark of the Covenant]. This is a vision great and marvelous of the seven angels who have the seven plagues. Just as God promised in the O.T. book of Leviticus, "...if you walk contrariwise and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins..." (26:21). So now

judgment has come. These final plagues, which complete the wrath of God, correspond both to (a) the seventh trumpet and (b) the third and final woe. -P. 167

## READ 15:2

OSB NOTE: 15:2-4

OBS: This is a vision of triumph (v.2) of those who have conquered the beast. They stand on the glassy sea mixed with fire and having harps [and this image] forms the background for the coming judgments. These judgments will come as divine vengeance for what these martyred hosts have suffered for God. -P. 167

OBS: The glassy sea (v.2) mixed with fire is represents the holiness of God which separates sinful man from His holy Presence -even as the sea separates one from another on earth (4:6). As St. Paul says in Hebrews (12:29, cf. Deut 4:24), our God is a consuming fire and later it states in Revelation about heaven: “nothing unclean shall enter into it” (21:27). The martyrs who stand on the water, having drawn near to the very Throne of God, are ready to sing hymns of His wonders because they have been found worthy.

Cf. OSB NOTE 4:6, 7 The sea of glass can also be seen as an image of Christian Baptism. Just as the Israelites were saved from the evil Pharaoh through the water of the Red Sea, so Christians are saved from Satan and evil by passing through the waters of Baptism. It is only through Faith and Baptism that we may approach God in His glory.

ADD: It is also said (v.2) that they have "conquered the beast." The word in Greek used for victory is "nikao" which comes from...

νίκη níkē, nee'-kay; conquer / conquest (abstractly or figuratively), to have success or victory.

ADD: Q. Hadn't these martyrs suffered terribly and died?

So how are they seen as victors or conquerors? A. For Christians, just as Christ's crucifixion meant victory over sin and death, so too our martyrs are victorious because they have triumphed over evil –by not giving into it, till their very last breath. As it said earlier in Revelation (12:11), "They overcame (conquered) him [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives even to death!" This is as true for us as it was for them.

OBS: Their harps are "harps of God" (v.2) because their victory comes through Him and their song is to Him.

### READ: 15:3

OBS: The "Song of the Moses" (v.3) was a hymn of triumph found in Exodus 15 which Israel sang after she was freed from Egypt and victorious over Pharaoh's drowned armies. They sang this song in the sight of the watching nations. Now the martyrs sing an adaptation of this song to the King of the nations [this is most likely a better translation than "King of the saints"].

OBS: This song (v.3) is also called the "Song of the Lamb" because the martyr's victory and triumph is rooted in the victory of the Lamb over death. As St. Paul states, "If

Christ is not raised... our faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:17). St. Paul then adds: "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep [...] For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor 15:20, 22).

ADD: The martyrs conquered the beast and its image through their testimony and the Blood of the Lamb (12:11).

Q. What does testimony mean? A. It means "witness" and comes from what Greek word? A. Martyria (or martoos). We give testimony and witness to God through our words, our lives, our patient acceptance of suffering (referred to as perseverance) and even our martyrdom.

These martyrs, like Moses & Israel, are free. Israel was delivered from Pharoah and death by the blood of the Passover lamb. Jesus Christ is our passover Lamb who saves us from Satan and eternal death. This is why the traditional Christian title for Easter (in East and West) is "Pascha" (which means "Passover"). Like the martyrs, we are saved by the blood of the Lamb of God.

#### **READ 15:4**

OBS: The song states (v. 4), "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your Name?" Many people today have no reverential fear of God and do not glorify His name. This is one of the reasons we come to Church: to worship Him and give Him honor. It's also why we sing "Blessed be the name..."

ADD: We also have to remember that b/c of us God will be honored or because of us God will be dishonored. As St. Paul states in Romans, "You who make your boast in the law [of God], do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For, as it is written, *"the name of God is blasphemed among the Nations because of you"* (2:24-25). By our own lives as Christians we can bring honor or dishonor to God.

ADD: The song states (v. 4), "You alone are holy." What does holy mean?

OBS: In the age to come, God's power and holiness (v.4) will be acknowledged by all the nations of those who are saved. They will come and worship before Him in His City (Rev. 21:24). They will bring Him their glory and honor because His righteous acts of judgment will be manifested (or made known) to all. -P. 167.

### READ 15:5

OBS: In dramatic fashion (v.5) St. John looks and sees the temple of the tabernacle of witness opened. The earthly tabernacle of witness was that part of the tabernacle (or tent) which contained "the ark of testimony" (or the ark of the covenant). What was in the ark? It contained the "two tablets" on which were the Ten Commandments. It also contained the manna and the rod of Aaron which budded. In Exodus (40:28) a divine "cloud covered the tabernacle of testimony, and... the tabernacle was filled with the Lord's glory" -so much so Moses could not even enter it. P. 168

Now they see not this earthly copy but the actual tabernacle (or tent) of witness in heaven. This appearance is a sign of the God's awesome presence.

The fact that it is seen opened means that God's wrath is about to manifested upon the world.

OSB NOTE 15:5-7a

**READ 15:6**

OSB NOTE 15:5-7b

These seven angels (v.6) with the seven plagues (**or** the seven bowls of wrath), are clothed as priests. They wear linen, clean and bright, and are girded around their breasts with golden belts much like the priests described in Ezekiel (9:2, 44:17) and Daniel (10:5). Just as the priests ministered to God and carried out His will, so these angels now execute God's judgment [in the midst of the heavenly liturgy]. -P. 168

**READ 15:7**

OBS: The "Four living creatures" (v.7) represent the created cosmos (cf. OSB note 4:6, 7). Earlier in Revelation (6:1) these four living creatures called out for God's judgment upon the earth. Now, one of the four living creatures gives the bowl of God's wrath to the angel to be poured out upon the sinful mankind. P. 168

OBS: It is interesting that this judgment comes from within the created cosmos (not from outside of it). This reminds us of St. Paul's words that "the earnest expectation of the

creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." In other words creation itself awaits deliverance from the bondage of evil and sin. And it serves as an instrument of God's judgment upon those who chose evil.

The primary meaning of the bowls is a reference to a liturgical vessel like those used to carry incense (in 5:8) now these holy vessels pour out the plagues of God's wrath showing the God's divine judgment and justice. Therefore the bowls are also a horrible image of punishment. Just as boiling liquid is poured out on a besieging army as it tries to scale the city walls to invade it, so heaven will pour out from its high heavenly temple God's wrath upon the world. P. 168

### **READ 15:8**

#### **OSB NOTE 15:8a**

V. 8 In the Old Testament book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, when God's earthly temple was consecrated, "fire came down from heaven and... the glory of the Lord filled the house and the priests could not enter the house of the Lord at that time because the glory of the Lord had filled the house" (cf. 7:1-3). Now something similar takes place in God's heavenly temple.

#### **OSB NOTE 15:8b**

Likewise now, His glory that shines forth forbids entry into His temple from God's sheer majesty. In other words on one can any longer enter His temple to make intercession

for the world. Time has run out for the nations and the wrath of God has begun.