

Advent Daily Prayer: The Book of Revelation

This is a guide for praying and reading the Book of Revelation during the liturgical season of Advent 2025. This guide is intended to be read and prayed every day from November 30 – December 24, 2025.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Against popular opinion, the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, is not predicting the end of the world, much less a horrific destruction of the world. This is a deeply disturbing and wrong approach to the Book of Revelation.

Rather, the Book of Revelation is a highly symbolic and fantastical book that critiques empire and the way of Caesar, because they oppose the way of Jesus. Revelation is about staying faithful to the Gospel amidst the comforts and delusions of life in an empire, which are, ultimately, the delusions of the ego.

Above all, Revelation challenges us to worship God and not the idols lifted up by empire. These idols are the rotten heart of empire, which is a society organized around greed, dominating power, repressing the poor, stripping freedoms, putting women into subservience, marginalizing minority communities, and terrorizing anyone who disagrees.

This, of course, sounds familiar to us. The modern face of empire appears to be the current US administration. Some fear this is authoritarianism. Others dismiss this fear as partisan. Jesus tells us “by their fruits you will know them” (Mt 7:20). I ask you to consider what the current administration is doing – their “fruits”: the national guard and the military have been sent into American cities; health care is set to become excessively expensive; the gap between rich and poor grows ever wider than before; the uncovering of a conspiracy of an elite ring of wealthy sex traffickers and pedophiles.

Even more, ICE agents, presumably, are violently arresting undocumented people. ICE is also arresting citizens and immigrants here legally in the process of rounding up the undocumented. Families are being torn apart. Children are being taken. They fear attending school. The administration’s treatment of immigrants is a violation of Catholic teaching as Cardinal McElroy expressed in a homily for the world day for migrants on September 28.

These are the kinds of things long-dead empires have done. The book of Revelation severely critiques ancient Rome as much as modern-day America. This critique is not reserved for only one political party. When there is a Democrat in the White House, just as much as there were different Roman emperors, Revelation prophetically calls out the imperial system.

But with dreadful irony, Christian nationalists and religious fanatics use the Book of Revelation to further their authoritarian programs. They fuse a very shallow Christianity – just the trappings of biblical language – with a worship of money and America. They are not Christian, for they do not do what Jesus commands, i.e., love God and neighbor. Their movement violates the heart of the Book of Revelation. The last book of the Bible does not predict a violent end of the world unless society reverts to right-wing values and culture, which means the rabid desire to reassert racial, gendered hierarchies.

Revelation assaults the very thing America has become, that is, an empire. It is not a book for religious fanatics proclaiming everyone a sinner and hated by God, forcing God to destroy the perversity of the inhabitants of this wretched world. According to Michael Gorman, a biblical scholar, “Revelation is not about the antichrist, but about the living Christ. It is not about a rapture out of this world but about faithful discipleship in this world.” Jesus calls us, through the Book of Revelation, to oppose empire in all its forms by the divine love that led him to the cross and raised him from the dead.

In their wonderful book, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*, Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther describe the immediate historical context of the Book of Revelation:

“For most of its history of interpretation, Revelation was thought to have been written in a time when the churches were suffering a great persecution. Revelation, it was believed, was written to help the followers of Jesus maintain their faith amid distress, with the promise that the imminence of the End would bring to a close their great tribulation. This traditional view does not fit with the emerging consensus among historians that finds no evidence for a widespread or systematic persecution of Christians in first-century provincial Asia. Rather, the evidence of both historical documents and the text of Revelation itself suggests that it was seduction by the Roman Empire from within a context of relative comfort, rather than a terrifying persecution, that more accurately describes the situation of the original audience of the book of Revelation.”

“Yet the apparent attractiveness of empire began to entice some members of the [churches] back into Rome's orbit. That the members of the [churches] were increasingly attracted to the ways of empire constituted for the author of Revelation (who names

himself as John) a grave crisis. What could be more natural than this: that a tiny group of people—say between fifty and one hundred among a population of two hundred thousand in the huge cosmopolitan city of Ephesus—would experience the pressure of going along with the ways of empire just to get by in daily life? For those who were sorely tempted to make their peace with Rome, Revelation unveiled the truth about empire. It revealed empire as both a seductive whore who offered the good life in exchange for obedience and a ravenous beast that devoured any who would dare oppose it. The situation where seduction, rather than the fear of persecution, consumed the followers of Jesus also accurately describes the situation of First World followers of Jesus today.”

The comforts of empire tempted the church to turn a blind eye to the suffering the empire was creating and the idolatry it was engaged in. Howard-Brook and Gwyther continue, “Revelation was written to address what John believed to be the pastoral situation of the seven [churches] in their own time and place...Their task was to persevere in their resistance to empire and to embrace God's alternative way.” The danger was the seduction of money and material comfort. But, like today, the Roman empire threatened its enemies with material poverty, imprisonment, and death. The Christians of the first century needed, like we need today, a way beyond the fear of these threats and the temptations of comfort.

“Revelation is a call to have faith in God rather than empire. This call takes place in a narrative through which John tells of his visionary experiences...the story of YHWH's plan for the people of YHWH who live in a world dominated by concentrations of human power. The biblical Story tells of a people called to be “set apart” from the power arrangements that characterized Egypt, Canaan, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome” (Howard-Brook and Gwyther).

In its fantastical and at times grotesque imagery, Revelation appeals to our imagination to foster faithfulness to Jesus, the Lamb of God. We follow Jesus by giving our hearts to God. Revelation has a deeply mystical theme: worship God alone and not the spirit of the age or one's ego, which is ever ready to submit to the selfishness of the age. All Gospel resistance to empire, to fascism, begins here, that is, in the interior space being left for God and not for idols.

The Book of Revelation offers an outsider's perspective on empire. It critiques all systems everywhere, especially imperial systems. It is a drama rich in heavy symbolism and cartoonish images; its style is partly a lampoon of the Roman Empire. It presents the drama of letting go of idols to worship God alone, which is enacted in both the soul and the church.

Distressingly, the Book of Revelation contains violent imagery and scenes. But this need not scare us away. The center of the book is the slain Lamb of God, an image of Jesus Crucified and nonviolent. “Jesus offered his life in nonviolent witness to the way of God as a new means of leading people to repentance. The raising of Jesus from death was God’s vindication of this new plan. The followers of Jesus in the cities of Roman Asia were themselves called to continue the nonviolent witness practiced by Jesus. This is how the disciples of Jesus were to live in the midst of empire.” (Howard-Brook and Gwyther). Even when passages in Revelation showcase violence, often in satire, the correcting image is the nonviolent Lamb of God. Therefore, Revelation does not condone violence at all.

The Book of Revelation is like a surreal and satiric enactment of one of Jesus’ teachings: You cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). This word, “mammon,” may strike us as strange, but it only means the system of money, greed, gift, violence, and lies that characterize not only the current administration but many regimes throughout history. Mammon might be Jesus’ own word for empire. We ought not read Revelation as only opposing the current administration. It calls us to oppose, nonviolently and through crucified love, any administration that perpetuates injustice and sets itself up as the center of reality. So, Revelation seeks to animate resistance to mammon wherever it appears, giving us a spirituality of revolution and resistance to all empires.

“The divine pretensions of pharaohs, kings, and emperors were and are nothing more than a parody of the true sovereignty of YHWH. Because Revelation took seriously the world of the Roman Empire—and declared it a blasphemous caricature of God’s sovereignty over the world—we can take our own world no less seriously. Revelation spared nothing in its critique of empire” (Howard-Brook and Gwyther). This is the perspective these reflections will take so that we might love as Jesus did in today’s world.

Use this guide to reading and praying the Book of Revelation each day of Advent. Consult the guide daily to find a reading of Revelation, a way of praying with the passage called Lectio Divina, a reflection, and a call to action termed “praxis.”