

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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First Week of Advent: Nov 30 – Dec 6

Sunday, November 30: What is the Book of Revelation?

Lectio Divina

Read the passage four times. Allow for contemplative silence in between the readings. Let your mind fall silent, then, in faith, rest in the Mystery of God without looking at, listening to, or talking to your thoughts.

Revelation 1:1-3

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show his servants what must happen soon. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who gives witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ by reporting what he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud and blessed are those who listen to this prophetic message and heed what is written in it, for the appointed time is near.

Reflection

In the original Greek of the New Testament, the first word of the book is *apokalypsis*, which means “revelation” or “unveiling.” This word signals that this biblical book will tell us about God and not the destruction of the world. Revelation calls us to stay faithful to God and the Lamb through worship and witness. It is a first century Christian call to resist any powers that usurp God as the center of reality. Thus, Revelation has an intensely political

character for it is often governments throughout history that have tried to assert their (false) divinity, notably the Roman Empire in the context of the writing of the Book of Revelation.

Now, the Book of Revelation is a strange book. It is not as straightforward as other books the Bible. It reads like a fantasy. Revelation consists of a series of visions, prophetic oracles, and hymns to God and the Lamb. These are not predictions of the end of the world but fantastical summons to worship God, do justice, and not give in to the ego-seductions of the Roman or any empire. Indeed, the book counters imperial propaganda – the story any empire tells itself and its subjects about its divine validity – by unveiling God’s truth and the truth about the empire.

The Roman Empire had a grand network of media that functioned as propaganda. “The Roman media included temples, monuments, inscriptions, festivals, orations, coinage, games, and so forth. Taken together, these media communicated powerfully the message that Rome was a beneficent and well-ordered society, and that its emperor was the guarantor of peace and harmony (Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*).” Wealthy individuals in Roman cities used this media to gain favor with the emperor and enrich themselves. “Despite the powerful rhetoric of these friends and propagandists of Rome, most Christian texts offered a view that stood in defiant contradiction to the dominant imperial view of reality” (Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*).

Christians opposed this propaganda with the story of Jesus, which recalls the dangerous memory of the suffering and oppressed of any society. A prominent Christian messenger who opposed this imperial propaganda was John of Patmos, the one who received the visions and wrote them down to compose the Book of Revelation.

John was not an apostle but, rather, a Jewish Christian prophet writing from Patmos. Likely, the empire exiled him to Patmos because of his preaching. He wrote Revelation, we believe, between 95 and 96 AD. “John saw from the heavenly perspective granted to him that empire in itself stood in contradiction to the ways of God, and that communities that embraced YHWH’s covenant were the faithful ones. We cannot know the exact circumstances that led John to this island. Yet Revelation tells us that it was the power and truth of the visions he had while there that led this person of high social status to reject completely empire as a way of life” (Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*).

John “gives witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ by reporting what he saw” (Revelation 1:2). Ian Boxall tells us: “Revelation recounts the journey of its narrator, ‘John,’ from an identifiable place on the earth (‘the island called Patmos,’ Rev 1:9), into the heavenly throne room, where he witnesses a series of visions,

some located in heaven, others apparently on earth” (Boxall, *Christ in the Book of Revelation*).

Further, the weirdness of the book’s visions is a key feature. They serve to wake us up. Boxall writes, “the revelation is frequently conveyed through symbolic, often surreal visions. The Italian academic Umberto Eco (1932–2016), author of the famous novel *The Name of the Rose*, famously defined apocalypse as ‘the vision of the outsider, or of the artist who makes us see by making things strange.’” When we see strangely, we break out of myopic, egocentric vision and become receptive to a divine vision.

Even though we may be horrified by the plans, workings, and effects of empire, we can get imprisoned by the fear it tries to induce and the comforts it promises. “The major issue seems to be the appropriate relationship between followers of Jesus and their surrounding Roman culture...Revelation unveils Roman culture as demonic and advocates a strongly countercultural stance...Rome has a darker, monstrous side, which is only visible by divine revelation (Boxall).” The Book of Revelation forces a decision: God or empire. Which will we choose?

Praxis

Notice the propaganda around you that promotes money and power over people. Notice the propaganda that tries to paint the administration as the standard of truth and powerful beyond question. What platforms promote this propaganda? Turn away from these sources. Then, turn off your phone and computer to be with family, friends, and God. *Above all, turn to pray.* Worshipping God alone is a crucial act of resistance.

Monday, December 1: Alpha and Omega

Lectio Divina

Read the passage four times. Allow for contemplative silence in between the readings. Let your mind fall silent, then, in faith, rest in the Mystery of God without looking at, listening to, or talking to your thoughts.

Revelation 1:4-8

John, to the seven churches in Asia: grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever [and ever]. Amen.

Behold, he is coming amid the clouds,

and every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him.

All the peoples of the earth will lament him.

Yes. Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty.”

Reflection

Revelation opens with a greeting in the name of the Trinity: “grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:4-5). The One Who Is, Was, and Is To Come is God the Father. The “seven spirits” is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit – seven is a highly symbolic number in the Bible; it stands for wholeness and perfection. The perfect spirit is the Holy Spirit. And Jesus is referred to as the “faithful witness” who has risen victoriously from the dead.

Everything in Revelation revolves around God. The visions of John of Patmos that constitute the body of the text keep circling back to one essential point: the Holy Trinity, God, is our source and our fulfillment. We should worship God alone and nothing else, which means not even the emperor or the empire or any era. This worship of God alone then flows into treating others with love, mercy, and justice.

Next comes a prayer to Jesus and a hymn or quasi vision of Jesus (1:5-6). In this hymn, Christ is celebrated for the love he shows for us (it is God’s love for us, too!) by dying on the cross. This frees us and turns us into a kingdom of priests (those whose sole job is worship). Praise Jesus! A curious hymn or sort-of vision follows. Jesus is coming and all will see him, even those who oppose him. Those dedicated to any empire over God will lament because the illusions of the ego will be unveiled. Empire rests on the ego’s inordinate need for security, affection, and control. Seeing these needs in truth will cause some to weep for they have been chasing lies and fantasy. The Real – Christ Risen and revealing the One Who Is, Was, and Is To Come – relativizes everything. Michael Gorman reflects, “These assertions challenge the blasphemous claims made by and about the emperor, remind the audience of who and whose they are, and give them and us hope for ultimate triumph” (Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness).

The central theological claim of Revelation is found in this line: “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty’” (1:8). God is the beginning (Alpha) and the end (Omega) of all things. As “the one is and who was and who is to come,” God is eternal, transcendent, and absolute Reality the MYSTERY beyond all things. The line evokes the divine name, YHWH or “I AM WHO I AM.” God alone is God, there is no other.

This leads to a major question, perhaps the only question the Bible is interested in asking. It is the question of whom we worship. Is God the center of your life or is empire,

privilege, and ego? The transcendent relativizes everything, especially the imperial way of life since it is diametrically opposed to the Gospel way of life.

God gave John of Patmos the vision to see how empire impedes the way of God and the faithful communities dedicated to God as revealed in Jesus. The Book of Revelation forces us to face a question with serious consequences: will we choose the way of the slaughtered Lamb or the way of the slaughtering Eagle? The eagle was a symbol of Rome just as it is a symbol of the USA. "The target of Revelation's prophetic critique is imperial idolatry...and injustice (military, economic, political, and religious oppression)...worship is a political act. Through worship one declares one's allegiance" (Michael Gorman, Reading Revelation Responsibly). Revelation summons us to love God and only God. Naturally, love of neighbor, even enemies, flows from the love of God. But only God is God. Thus, the one great act of fidelity to Jesus is to worship God alone. For the Gospel, it is the only way to resist empire.

The fact of the Absolute – we do not grasp this fact, this truth. The One, Absolute Reality, makes everything else relative. So total and defining and unqualified that it is ultimate, the center, the ground, the ONLY. The unconditional encircling, enveloping, absorbing all without question or exception; everything fades into insignificance in the shadow of The Real. Nothing else matters.

Praxis

Today, spend more time in prayer than usual.

Tuesday, December 2: the First Vision

Lectio Divina

Read the passage four times. Allow for contemplative silence in between the readings. Let your mind fall silent, then, in faith, rest in the Mystery of God without looking at, listening to, or talking to your thoughts.

Revelation 1:9-20

I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus. I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest. The hair of his head was as white as white wool or as snow, and his eyes were like a fiery flame. His feet were like polished brass refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing water. In his right hand he held seven stars. A sharp two-edged sword came out of his mouth, and his face shone like the sun at its brightest.

When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives.

Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld. Write down, therefore, what you have seen, and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards. This is the secret meaning of the seven stars you saw in my right hand, and of the seven gold lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Reflection

Stranded on the island of Patmos off the coast of Turkey, John is caught up in a vision on Sunday, the Lord's Day. He experiences a strange vision of Jesus: a brilliantly shining and white-haired Jesus whose mouth has a double-edged sword. He holds seven stars and stands amidst seven golden lampstands. Immediately, Jesus tells John, "Do not be afraid." Jesus then asserts he is the one who was dead but is now risen.

Michael Gorman writes, "The opening vision (1:9–20) draws on Daniel 7:9–14 to depict Christ as a powerful, priestly, and present (to the churches) figure. But by attributing to Jesus the features of *both* the human one ("one like a human being" or "son of man"; Rev 1:13; Dan 7:9) and the Ancient One (Rev 1:14; Dan 7:9) in Daniel 7, John tells us that Jesus partakes of God's identity and reign. Thus both the prologue of Revelation (1:1–8) and its opening vision tell us that Jesus really is Lord (Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*)." Thus, the point of this first vision is to tell us Jesus reveals reality, God. The implication is that empire – any empire – does not show us reality but often hides it and lies to us.

Further, the way to identify with Jesus, the crucified and risen one, is to follow him along the way of the cross, which involves practices of letting go, forgiveness, unconditional love, nonviolence, and ceaseless prayer. This is the way of discipleship; the Book of Revelation not only endorses it but heartily emphasizes it as the way to resist empire.

Last October, several news outlets reported that billionaire Peter Thiel gave a series of lectures about the anti-Christ. For the unfamiliar, Peter Thiel founded PayPal, Palantir, and was an early investor in Facebook from the ground floor. He is a hedge fund and Silicon Valley investor. He is also a political activist. He has funded far-right causes and candidates. He is worth about \$20 billion. In these lectures, Thiel wants to use the image of the anti-Christ to scare people in order to make them more manipulable. He suggests that those who want to regulate technology – particularly AI – are connected to the anti-Christ. It sounds like he is using religion to keep his money and investments safe. He is far from the only person manipulating people through the scare tactics of hyping Armageddon. Fear keeps people distracted and cowed before dominative power.

Thiel's use of the anti-Christ and the apocalypse is an example of how the Church needs to set the record straight about end-of-the-world narratives. The Book of Revelation never mentions the anti-Christ. In chapter 1:9-20, John experiences a vision of Jesus, not the anti-Jesus. This is no small point. It seems that many Christians, even Catholics, set figures of evil like Satan or the Anti-Christ at the center of their faith. This is plain wrong. God revealed in Jesus the slaughtered Lamb is the center of our faith. When we get that wrong, we become fanatically obsessed with sin and uncritically assume our chosen culture or ideology is the standard being sinned against. This is occurring a lot in America.

Jesus says to John and to us, "Do not be afraid." Religion that is fear-based and fear-inducing does not change us. And instilling terror is exactly the opposite of the Gospel. Fear makes us turn in on ourselves and become captive. God wants to free us. Indeed, Jesus frequently assures people with these same words, "do not be afraid," throughout the four Gospels. We need not fear, for God is with us.

Fear thrives in twenty-first-century America. Will I keep my job? Will I be able to afford insurance? What about my family? What kind of future will my children have? Will ICE come for me? And, of course, we all tremble at the thought of death. Fear casts a long shadow over our lives. Fear induces a narrow mind, forcing us to constrict consciousness and causing us to be blind spiritually. A major consequence is that we mistake the trivial for the essential. Acting like a film over our eyes, everything we perceive divides into what scares us and what gives us (mis)perceived security.

But even as feelings of anxiety and fear may be passing through us, fear will not rule our hearts as long as we rest in the presence of God. Finding the divine within, by becoming silent and present, fear subsides. Often it evaporates entirely. Then we realize the folly of making any decision based on fear.

Further, empires want us to be afraid, that is, wholly identified with our fear. A scared populace does not question authority. A cowed nation does not denounce imperial atrocities. Still, even as our world appears to be crumbling around us, Revelation advises turning to God to find firm ground from which to address our societal problems.

Praxis

When you start to feel fear, renew your faith in God and Jesus through a moment of conscious silence or a brief prayer. Repeat the words "do not be afraid," breathe deep, and rest in contemplative silence for a few moments.

Wednesday, December 3: Message to Ephesus

Lectio Divina

Read the passage four times. Allow for contemplative silence in between the readings. Let your mind fall silent, then, in faith, rest in the Mystery of God without looking at, listening to, or talking to your thoughts.

Revelation 2:1-7

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write this: “The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven gold lampstands says this: “I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate the wicked; you have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and discovered that they are impostors. Moreover, you have endurance and have suffered for my name, and you have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: you have lost the love you had at first. Realize how far you have fallen. Repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. But you have this in your favor: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ““Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the garden of God.””

Reflection

Before the major visions of Revelation, there are seven letters or messages from the Risen Christ to the churches of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The Risen Jesus addresses the “angel” of each church, which means the spirit or the assembled people that constitute the local church. The Risen Christ speaks to their personal and collective consciousness.

Christ has a message for the seven churches. The number seven symbolizes wholeness, so John is not just addressing seven particular and local churches but all churches. For everyone in the church, regardless of time or place, is vulnerable to the seductions of empire. “When we read these seven messages, we are struck by two major problems that the churches are confronting: the reality of various kinds of persecution, and the strong temptation to accommodate, with accommodation perhaps being seen by some as the way to avoid or stop persecution” (Michael Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*).

We should know that the urge to accommodate, to go along to get along, was strong in these churches. The temptation to conform to the wider society was so great because everything in the Roman Empire revolved around worship of their gods and, especially, the emperor. Banking and the meat market were located in temples, for instance.

But, even more, to accommodate the empire was to participate in its injustices. The whole of the Bible links idolatry with injustice. When we worship false gods, we do bad things and hurt people. This is true of individuals and of society. The Roman empire expected its citizens to worship the emperor. To do so was to participate in the theology and ideology supporting Rome, and Rome invades, rapes, murders, and impoverishes. The Risen Jesus, through John of Patmos, calls on early and contemporary Christians to stop going along with the empires of both times.

The church of Ephesus is first to receive a message. A note in the New American Bible reads, “Ephesus: this great ancient city had a population of ca. 250,000; it was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and the commercial, cultural, and religious center of Asia. The other six churches were located in the same province, situated roughly in a circle.”

The Risen Jesus “walks in the midst of the seven gold lampstands” (2:1). This symbolizes the presence of the Risen Jesus, and therefore God, to and within the churches. Each of us is inhabited by the love of God. Further, the love of God dwells in every particular church.

Initially, Jesus commends them: “you have endurance and have suffered for my name, and you have not grown weary” (2:3). But then Jesus says, “Yet I hold this against you: you have lost the love you had at first.” He tells them to regain love. Religious exercises and spiritual practices are done out of love for God and others. They need to repent - we need to repent - by prayer that opens the soul to receive the love of God. Then, one can love others with divine love.

A wondrous medieval mystic named Julian of Norwich sings of the divine love: “Everything that is has its being through the love of God...the endless love that is without beginning, always is, and evermore shall be...In endless love we are held and made whole. In endless love we are led and protected and will never be lost. God wants us to know that the soul is a life unto itself, one that will endure without end, praising and blessing and loving him in paradise. And just as our existence has no limits, so too are we boundlessly cherished in God, a hidden treasure, whom he sees and knows and loves without beginning or end.”

Only by the incomprehensible love that is God can one be free of ego and the empire. Only by the love revealed in the Crucified and Risen One can we hope to resist the seductions of empire, the strong urge to conform to mob mentality. We must turn to God in prayer to receive this love and pass it on to others.

Further, religion without love is tyrannical. We observe this in any religious experience that seeks control, affection, or security for the ego and outside of the mystery of God. Such religious people become bullies and despots, trying to control and manipulate others through fear, guilt, and punishment. This is terrible religion.

Politics without love is also tyrannical. It is easy to hate the other side. This is wisdom for both sides of our partisan politics. Even though there are disagreements so divisive that one side feels threatened by the other, love must remain the standard. This does not rule out appropriate restraint and boundaries. But there is a great need for Christians to renew their love for all, which we can start by loving people we know from the other side of partisan politics.

Praxis

Rest in the divine love in prayer. Open your heart to God’s blissful and incomprehensible mercy in silence. Then, intend to love those around you today. Perform acts of kindness and mercy.

Thursday, December 4: Message to Smyrna

Lectio Divina

Read the passage four times. Allow for contemplative silence in between the readings. Let your mind fall silent, then, in faith, rest in the Mystery of God without looking at, listening to, or talking to your thoughts.

Revelation 2:8-11

“To the angel of the church in Smyrna, write this: “The first and the last, who once died but came to life, says this: “I know your tribulation and poverty, but you are rich. I know the slander of those who claim to be Jews and are not, but rather are members of the assembly of Satan. Do not be afraid of anything that you are going to suffer. Indeed, the devil will throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will face an ordeal for ten days. Remain faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ““Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The victor shall not be harmed by the second death.””

Reflection

The Christians of Smyrna receive no judgment from the Risen Jesus. They are a church undergoing persecution. Ancient Christians faced dire consequences if they chose to break with the culture and mindset of the empire. It appears the Christians of Smyrna were willing to accept those consequences due to their commitment to the Gospel.

“As Christian individuals and communities in Asia Minor interacted with family members, friends, business associates, and public officials who did not share their conviction that “Jesus is Lord,” the basic early Christian confession (Rom 10:9), these believers were faced with hard questions and decisions. Should they continue to

participate in social activities that have a pagan (non-Jewish, non-Christian) religious character? This would include most activities: watching or participating in athletic and rhetorical contests; buying and eating meat in the precincts of pagan temples; and frequenting trade guilds, clubs, and events in private homes, each with their meetings, drinking parties, and banquets. They would even have wondered, “Should we or can we go to pagan temples to do our banking or purchase meat? Should we acknowledge the sovereignty of the emperor when asked to do so at a public event in the precincts of his temple, or at another of the many events in his honor?” (Gorman, Michael J. Reading Revelation Responsibly)

“I know the slander of those who claim to be Jews and are not, but rather are members of the assembly of Satan.” This line is no justification for antisemitism, but is a recognition that some local Jews may have played a part in the trials of the Christians of Smyrna.

Fidelity to the crucified means persecution from the Roman or any empire. Now persecution may not be torture and death. It may mean things far less serious. The consequences of following Jesus come in many different forms such as not accepting a job that violates love of God and neighbor or being willing to endure insult as one criticizes the current administration.

ICE is already meting out such persecution. Catholic Social Teaching is clear about the need for justice for immigrants. ICE is not administering justice but terror. Agents are kidnapping people. They are not arresting immigrants with respect for due process. When others get in the way, ICE goes beyond acceptable standards of law enforcement. These agents are acting with cruelty and malice. They are smashing the faces of teenage girls into pavement. They are throwing tear gas into crowds, sometimes being so reckless as to throw it near schools. They are arresting citizens exercising their first amendment right to free speech. Agents wait outside immigration court proceeding to nab unsuspecting people who, we should note, are abiding by the law. Even worse, agents’ actions have led to the death of several people.

At the annual Mass for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Robert Cardinal McElroy, the archbishop of Washington, DC preached:

“We are witnessing a comprehensive governmental assault designed to produce fear and terror among millions of men and women who have through their presence in our nation been nurturing precisely the religious, cultural, communitarian and familial bonds that are most frayed and most valuable at this moment in our country’s history. This assault seeks to make life unbearable for undocumented immigrants. It is willing to tear families apart,

separating grieving mothers from their children, and fathers from the sons and daughters who are the center of their lives. It embraces as collateral damage the horrific emotional suffering that is being thrust on children who were born here, but now face the terrible choice of losing their parents or leaving the only country that they have ever known. Jesus demands that the central perspective we must bring to understanding the moral legitimacy of the campaign of fear and deportation being waged in our country today springs from the bonds of community that have come to tie us together as neighbors, not the question of whether sometime in their past individuals broke a law by entering or remaining in the United States. It is this perspective that must form our stance and action as people of faith.”

Opposing ICE does not mean using violence. It does mean seeking justice for the immigrant by calling out the injustice and standing with our sisters and brothers in solidarity. We may face persecution for our actions as the Christians of Smyrna did. But Jesus tells them and us: do not be afraid, have faith.

Praxis

Reflect on how you might follow Jesus more closely today. Pray a little longer and renew an intention to love those around you. How might I stand in solidarity with my immigrant brothers and sisters?

Friday, December 5: Message to Pergamum

Lectio Divina

Read the passage four times. Allow for contemplative silence in between the readings. Let your mind fall silent, then, in faith, rest in the Mystery of God without looking at, listening to, or talking to your thoughts.

Revelation 2:12-17

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum, write this: “The one with the sharp two-edged sword says this: “I know that you live where Satan’s throne is, and yet you hold fast to my name and have not denied your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was martyred among you, where Satan lives. Yet I have a few things against you. You have some people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak to put a stumbling block before the Israelites: to eat food sacrificed to idols and to play the harlot. Likewise, you also have some people who hold to the teaching of [the] Nicolaitans. Therefore, repent. Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and wage war against them with the sword of my mouth. ““Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I shall give some of the hidden manna; I shall also give a white amulet upon which is inscribed a new name, which no one knows except the one who receives it.””

Reflection

Pergamum was once the capital of the Asia Minor region. It was the first city in the area to build a temple for the worship of Augustus Caesar, the emperor, and the goddess Roma (the Roman empire itself). The imperial cult thrived in Pergamum. The associated

temple rested on a high mountain above the city. The Risen Jesus refers to these temples as “Satan throne’s” (Rev. 2:13).

Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther write, “The major cities that maintained temples in the first century—Pergamum, Smyrna, and Ephesus—were granted the title ‘Temple-Warden [of the Imperial Cult],’ a title of civic pride. The imperial cult is a good example of how the language of power in antiquity knew no real distinction between politics and cult, court and temple, rulers and gods” (Unveiling Empire).

Pergamum took pride in its imperial worship. The pull for Christians to accommodate to the general population’s worship was great. Indeed, so great was the pressure to join in emperor worship that if it was refused, death ensued. The Risen Jesus commends the Pergamum church and a local martyr: “you hold fast to my name and have not denied your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was martyred among you” (Rev. 2:13). “This is in recognition of his execution for the sake of his witness to God” (Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now).

Yet some in the Pergamum church mix their faith with both the imperial cult and the teachings of idolaters: Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Who those people are is less important than what the Risen Jesus is calling the church to do: repent, turn attention back to God alone. The imperial cult included the eating of meat sacrificed to imperial gods, including emperors. To participate in it was to participate in the idolatry and injustice of the empire. To acquiesce to the surrounding mentality and practice was the main temptation for the church in Pergamum.

The Book of Revelation does not want any Christian to allow culture and any imperial myth to mix with and then usurp simple faith in the God revealed in Jesus. In this message, the Risen Jesus affirms that culture is not the standard of faith. Culture has to do with ingrained habits and ideas that everyone just accepts regarding, for instance, what we think family should be or how we think power dynamics should work. Culture here is the herd mentality, the way everyone thinks and what everyone accepts about life without much question – we accept as normal the system in which we live. It is anything but the way we should live.

Reflecting on the false self we all construct, Trappist monk Thomas Keating says, “During the socialization period from ages four to eight, we absorb unquestioningly the values of our parents, teachers, and peer groups. We draw our identity or self-worth from what others in the particular group to which we belong think of us. Hence, we have to measure up to their expectations” (Invitation to Love).

Once the president sent the National Guard into DC, the homeless became a target. ICE and other federal agents started working with DC police to detain immigrants. It appears our culture's mentality is willing to accept cruel, aggressive behavior towards the poor and the immigrant. Racism and sexism appear to be out in the open once again (at least it seems to those of us not on the receiving end of these grave social ills).

We confront the herd mentality, especially when it is turning monstrous, by love and faith in the God of gratuitous love. This same God, through the Risen Jesus, calls us to denounce a slide toward cruelty and the structural sins of favoring one group over another.

Praxis

Try to examine some assumptions about our culture. Who is excluded? Who is on the bottom of society? Who is suffering right now? Jesus says, "by their fruits you will know them." What do our culture's actions towards the poor and vulnerable tell us about that very culture?

Saturday, December 6: Message to Thyatira

Lectio Divina

Read the passage four times. Allow for contemplative silence in between the readings. Let your mind fall silent, then, in faith, rest in the Mystery of God without looking at, listening to, or talking to your thoughts.

Revelation 2:18-29

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira, write this: “The Son of God, whose eyes are like a fiery flame and whose feet are like polished brass, says this: “I know your works, your love, faith, service, and endurance, and that your last works are greater than the first. Yet I hold this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, who teaches and misleads my servants to play the harlot and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her harlotry. So I will cast her on a sickbed and plunge those who commit adultery with her into intense suffering unless they repent of her works. I will also put her children to death. Thus shall all the churches come to know that I am the searcher of hearts and minds and that I will give each of you what your works deserve. But I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not uphold this teaching and know nothing of the so-called deep secrets of Satan: on you I will place no further burden, except that you must hold fast to what you have until I come. ““To the victor, who keeps to my ways until the end, I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. Like clay vessels will they be smashed, just as I received authority from my Father. And to him I will give the morning star. ““Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

Reflection

The Risen Jesus issues the longest and most severe challenge to the church at Thyatira. The Christians here were putting their trust in Jezebel; likely this is a symbolic name for someone who is leading the people astray into idol worship. Jezebel was the name of the Queen of Israel, married to King Ahab, who introduced idol worship to Israel. The royals were opposed by a fierce defender of true worship: the prophet Elijah. Jezebel instituted a program of violence against any who prophesied against her and almost destroyed the worship of YHWH by slaughtering all God's prophets except Elijah. Jezebel is a symbol of imperial ruthlessness and control. But through the fiery prophet, God brought Israel back to true worship with its resulting restoration of justice.

Elijah means "YHWH is my God." This was the main message to the church at Thyatira. The Risen Jesus confronted them with their obvious worship of false gods, which was likely the imperial cult. Furthermore, the Christians likely knew about the persecution happening in Smyrna and Philadelphia and wanted to avoid them. All of these churches in Asia Minor not only wanted to avoid persecution but also the deleterious economic penalties that came with persecutions.

The livelihood of all in Thyatira depended on trade guilds, metalworkers and wool-dyers, for instance. Membership in these guilds included pagan worship; for the sake of economic and social survival, a Thyatiran had to be in one of these guilds and, therefore, had to participate in some form of emperor worship.

Jesus utters a severe denunciation to this church and any church that acquiesces to the imperial cult because false worship ruins the happiness humans are meant to enjoy. Even more, false worship is a political act. "Worship is so important in the book of Revelation, because John rightly understood that worship is a political act. Through worship one declares one's allegiance, one's loyalty...a statement to the world that the church will bow to no other gods" (Mitchel Reddish, Revelation). If allegiance goes to an emperor, or president, over God then only injustice can follow.

Jesus tells us we cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). He warns us because we become the god we worship; our center, main desire, life goal, and therefore our worship, determine our reality. If all one cares about is money, greed follows. If all one cares about is power, pride will follow. If one is consumed with resentment and feelings of being hurt, revenge will follow. Each of these scenarios inevitably unleashes some kind of violence on others because the god being worshipped or appeased is, ultimately, one's ego.

Praxis

What idols do we as a society worship? What preoccupies you? What dominates your consciousness? That might be your idol. Bring awareness to the idol or idols in your life. Pray even more today.