

St. Therese Catholic Church

Book of Revelation *Overview*

November 12, 2024

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Introduction

- Chapter 4 introduces a new section of the book. The risen Christ summons John into heaven so that he may see “what will happen afterwards” (98).
- Chapters 4 and 5 belong together. Chapter 4 reveals the beautiful and majestic creator of the universe, seated on a throne and receiving worship of his heavenly court (98). It is akin to a **liturgy of creation**.
- Chapter 5 reveals the slaughtered Lamb through whom God’s plan of salvation will be made known and accomplished (98). It is akin to a **liturgy of redemption**.

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Introduction

- The liturgical setting in heaven alludes to the cultic figures and fixtures of the Jerusalem Temple. The Temple of Jerusalem was a visible replica of the invisible sanctuary of God in heaven.

Revelation	Temple Fixture
Throne of God	Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 6:2)
The seven torches	Menorah (Ex. 25:31-39)
The winged creatures	Cherubim (Ezek. 1:10)
The 24 Elders	24 priestly divisions (1 Chron. 24:1-19)
The golden bowls	Vessels for incense (1 Kings 7:50)
The sacrificial Lamb	Passover (Ex. 12:21)

~Hahn & Mitch, 42

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Introduction

- Key:** John's visions of heavenly worship in Revelation inspired the liturgy of the early Church.
- Since Christian worship is a participation in the liturgy of heaven, it is not surprising that heavenly worship depicted in Revelation has exercised an immense influence on Christian liturgy and hymnody ever since (98).



<https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-apocalyptic-mass>

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Introduction

- In Revelation 4-5, many things puzzle us. Five things stand out:
 1. The throne and the one sitting on it.
 2. The seven spirits
 3. The four living creatures
 4. The scroll with seven seals in God's right hand
 5. The Lamb himself who is also called a lion (McIlraith, 62).

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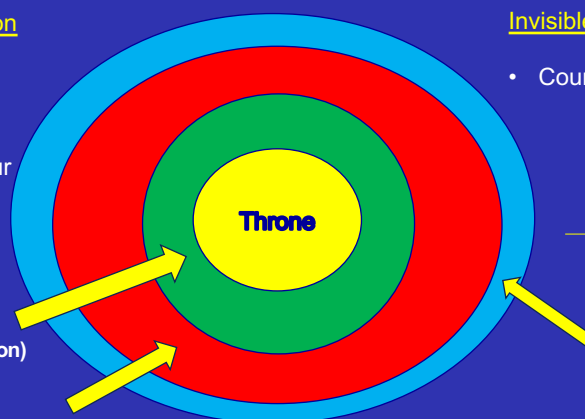
Introduction

Visible Creation

- Four Living Creatures
- Twenty Four Elders

**Four Living
Creatures**
(Lower Creation)

Twenty Four Elders
(All God's People)



Invisible Creation

- Countless Angels

**Countless
Angels**
(Spiritual
Messengers)

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Come Up Here

- **Open door:** God is making his heavenly dwelling accessible to the prophet (99).
- **Come up here:** After hearing about “what is happening” in chapters 2-3, John is shown “what must happen afterwards.” John will receive divine revelation.
- **Mass:** In the preface dialogue, the priest exhorts the faithful, “Lift up your hearts” and the faithful respond, “We lift them up to the Lord.”
- **Key:** At Mass, we participate in the heavenly liturgy with the angels, saints, and God-willing, our loved ones who have died.

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God's Throne

- **I was in the spirit:** Occurs three times in Revelation to indicate special moments of prophetic revelation (99).
- **A throne:** Revelation mentions God's throne forty times (99). A throne is only mentioned about 60 times in the New Testament. God's throne is the focus of nearly all activity in the book (Hahn & Mitch, 42).
- “From first to last John's vision is dominated by this symbol of divine sovereignty.” (99)
- **Key:** While the broader culture worshipped the emperor on his throne, Christians worship God on his throne.

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God's Throne

- For **atheists**, there is no throne. The universe does not answer nor is it directed by a seat of authority or power.
- For **agnostics**, there may be a throne but we cannot know anything about it or the One who sits on it.
- For **secular humanists**, there is a throne but we sit on it.
- The **Christian**, however, orders his or her whole life around the God's throne, which the supreme Good. In doing so, the Christian's life becomes rightly ordered.
- Either God or someone (or something) will sit on the throne.

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God's Throne

- John compares the figure sitting on the throne with precious jewels and light (100).
- **Around the throne was a halo:** The halo is brilliant as an emerald. The halo signifies the majesty of God (100).
- The rainbow around the throne shows that God is a God of the covenants (McIlraith, 62).



- The rainbow calls to mind the new creation following Noah's flood.

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God's Throne

- **Creation:** The throne symbolizes God's sovereignty, power, authority, and glory over all creation. God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe.
- **History:** The rainbow symbolize the covenant with Noah, which was God's promise never again to destroy creation. God acts in history making covenants to grow his family through mercy, faithfulness, and love.



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Twenty-Four Elders

- **Twenty-four Thrones:** Some think these are angels but more likely they are symbols of those conquering during the Old Testament (twelve for the twelve tribes) and the New Testament times (twelve for the twelve apostles) (McIlraith, 62).
- **Key:** The entire people of God are represented – those of the Old and New Covenants - in worshipping God's throne (100).
- **Elders:** Greek is *presbyteros* – priests. 1 Chron. 24-25 lists 24 divisions of priests to serve and sing in the temple. John sees priests serving in the heavenly temple (Cavins).

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Twenty-Four Elders

- The twenty-four elders represent the saints, who are dressed like priests (in white) and kings (with crowns).
- Their number symbolizes the 24 priestly rotations that David established to minister in the Temple (1 Chron. 24:1-31).
- In Jewish tradition, the heads of the 24 divisions were called "elders."
- Some see the elders representing the fullness of the royal priestly people of God: the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel (saints of the OT) plus the 12 apostles of Christ (saints in the NT) as in the vision of 21:12-14 (Hahn & Mitch, 42).

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Twenty-Four Elders

- **White garments:** Indicate the holiness of the ministers in God's heavenly throne room (100).
- **Gold crowns:** Show that they share in God's kingly rule (like martyrs and saints in 20:4) (100).
- **Key:** The elders epitomize the fullness of dignity that Christ bestowed on God's people as a "kingdom, priests for his God and Father" (1:6) (100).



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God's Presence

- **Flashes of lightening:** A booming thunderstorm calls to mind God's awesome greatness, which human beings are powerless to resist (101).
- **Mount Sinai:** When God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, there were peals of thunder and lightening, and a heavy cloud over the mountain (Ex. 19:16).
- **Seven flaming torches:** Recall the flames atop the seven-branched lampstand, the menorah, that stood in the sanctuary of the temple in Jerusalem (101).
- **Seven Spirits:** Represent the Holy Spirit (McIlraith, 101).

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God's Presence

- **Sea of glass like crystal:** Probably alludes both to the large bronze basin of water, called the "sea," in Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 7:23-26) and to the waters above the "dome" (Gen. 1:7), the firmament that covers the earth and on which God's throne rests in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 1:26) (101).



<https://latterdaysaintmag.com/the-molten-sea-in-solomons-temple/>

- **2 Chron. 4:2-5:**
Molten sea made for priests to wash before they entered the Holy Place to serve God.

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God's Presence

- Ezekiel has a vision at the beginning of his book wherein he sees a throne and below the throne is the firmament (sky or dome) shining like crystal (Ezek. 1:24).
- **Key:** The opening verses of this vision evoke awe and wonder at the majesty of God.
- They help John's readers realize that this is a revelatory moment like that of Moses and the elders of Israel at Sinai (Exod. 24:10), like that of Ezekiel (1:26-28). John is gazing upon God in his heavenly throne room (101).

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God's Presence



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb6bd7oAb14>

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God's Presence

- **Four living creatures:** These creatures resemble the four living creatures, called "cherubim," that Ezekiel saw in his visions (1:13-15, 19-22, 10:1-22) (102).
- In Ezekiel's vision, these creatures have wheels with eyes all around, are animated by the Spirit of God, and move in unison as the Lord's flying chariot (102).
- **Eyes front and back:** Indicates vigilance and boundless awareness of everything that takes place in creation, but remaining stationed by God's throne, lead the praises of heaven, and in the heavenly liturgy announce important divine interventions on earth (6:1, 3, 5-7; 15:7) (102).

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Four Living Creatures

- In Ezekiel, each creature had four faces (1:10). However, here the angelic beings differ from one another, each having a single face, that of a **lion**, a **calf** (or "ox"), a **human being**, or an **eagle** (102).
- Many commentators believe the living creatures "represent the whole of animate creation....the noblest, strongest, wisest, and the swiftest." (103)
- **Gospels:** Since the second century, these four living creatures have been used as symbols of the evangelists: Mark (lion), Luke (ox), Matthew (man), and John (eagle).

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Four Living Creatures

- **Matthew:** Begins with a genealogy – Jesus is fulfillment of God's promises.
- **Mark:** John the Baptist cries out in the desert, roaring like a lion (1:3).
- **Luke:** Begins in the temple with Zechariah serving as priest (1:8-9).
- **John:** Soars high with the prologue giving us a divine perspective of the Word or Christ's divinity (1:1-18).



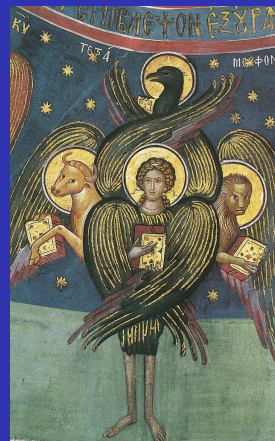
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Four Living Creatures

- The animals symbolize the glory of God expressed in creation, e.g., divine authority (lion), strength (ox), intelligence (man), and swiftness (eagle) (Hahn & Mitch, 43).
- The living creatures also refer to the whole Church. Her courage is seen in the lion, her sacrificial service in the ox, her humility in the man, and sublimity in the flying eagle (Hahn & Mitch, 43).



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Four Living Creatures

- **Six wings:** The living creatures resemble the seraphim that Isaiah the prophet saw in his temple vision.
 - I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple.
 - Seraphim were stationed above; each of them had six wings: with the two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they hovered (Is. 6:2).



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Four Living Creatures

Isaiah 6	Revelation 4
Six seraphim proclaim God's holiness	Four "living creatures" sing day and night
Have six wings	Have six wings
	Covered with eyes inside and out
All the earth is filled with your glory	Who was, and who is, and who is to come
Worship of God is their chief task	Worship of God is their chief task

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Sanctus

- John's vision of the angels differs from Ezekiel's cherubim and Isaiah's seraphim, indicating that angelic beings closest to God cannot be depicted adequately in any vision or in any single formulation of words (104).
- **Holy Holy Holy:** Proclaiming God thrice-holy indicates that God is the "most holy" or "holiest" (superlative); it also hints at the Trinity of Persons (104).
- Hebrew does not have superlatives (e.g., holiest) as in English. Instead, repeating "holy" three times indicates that God is the most holy or the holiest.

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Sanctus

- **Sanctus:** At every Mass, the faithful sing *Holy Holy Holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory.*
- **Key:** The faithful sing the song sung in the heavenly courts. Singing the *Sanctus*, the liturgy signals to us what is about to happen – we are about to enter into and participate in the heavenly liturgy.
- It is a great gift and blessing to be able to participate in the heavenly liturgy while here on earth in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass!

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Sanctus

- Whereas the seraphim in Isaiah announce that God's glory fills the earth (Is. 6:3 - all the earth is filled with your glory), the four living creatures ceaselessly proclaim God as eternal (Rev. 4:8 – who was, and who is, and who is to come).
- **Sits on the throne...who lives forever:** God has authority over all creation and is eternal.
- The worship of the living creatures elicits a liturgical response from the twenty four elders, presbyters, who represent God's people of the Old and New Testament (104).

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Sanctus

- **Throw down their crowns:** The elders humble themselves before God and declare his unique worthiness to receive glory and honor and power. They *acknowledge* his supreme power (104).
- **Created all things:** They acknowledge that God created all things visible (rocks, plants, animals, people) and all things invisible (angels).



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Sanctus

- Verse 11: *Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created.*
- The prayers offered in heaven to God harken back to David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10: "Blessed art thou, O Lord, the God of Israel our Father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all" (Barber, *Coming Soon*, 88).

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Heavenly Worship

- **Midst of the lampstands:** In the Mass, Christ is the center of the celebration – in Word and Sacrament (1:14).
- **Penitential Act:** Christ calls five of the seven churches to repent or he will remove their lampstand (chapters 2-3).
- **Liturgy of the Word:** Christ speaks to the churches via his Word, including the blessings and challenges within their respective communities (chapters 2-3).
- **Holy, Holy, Holy:** The four living creatures day and night exclaim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come (4:8).

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Next Time

- Tuesday, November 19th



Revelation 5	
John sees the scroll	5:1-5
The Lamb receives the scroll and the worship of heaven	5:6-10
The whole universe worships God and the Lamb	5:11-14