

St. Therese Catholic Church

Book of Revelation

Chapter 14

February 18, 2025

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Overview

- After John's visions of the dragon, the beast, and the second beast, his readers are ready for a consoling message that will sustain their hope (239).
- In Revelation, we see scenes of fear and danger (seals and trumpets) with scenes of God's salvation and joy (144,000 sealed). It resembles the structure of reality – evils forces at large and God's power and protection for those who love him.



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The Lamb

- John's first vision recalls the 144,000 marked with the seal in Rev. 7:1-8.
- Lamb: The Lamb that opened the scroll in God's throne room (5:6-13; 6:1-12; 8:1) now stands on Mount Zion.
- Standing: Demonstrates that all evils the beasts have been allowed to carry out are ultimately powerless against him and his companions (240).
- Mount Zion: The hill of Jerusalem, on which both the temple, God's dwelling, and the palace of the king were located. Mount Zion is the place of God's presence and salvation (240).

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The Lamb

- According to Psalm 2, Mount Zion is the place where God has established his king, his Son, who will deal decisively with the rebellion of the kings and rulers of the earth “against the Lord and against his anointed.” (240)
- Key: Mount Zion is a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem, where the firstborn and innumerable angels worship Jesus (Heb. 12:22-24).
- Hebrews suggests that Christians enjoy communion with these heavenly realities when the Church is gathered for worship (Heb. 10:19-22) (241).

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The 144,000

- One hundred and forty-four thousand: The same group in 7:2 with the “seal of the living God.”
- This number symbolizes the totality of God’s faithful people, sealed with the Holy Spirit and summoned to engage in spiritual battle (241).
- Whereas “the inhabitants of the earth” in the preceding vision (13:14-17) bear “the stamped image on their right hands and foreheads,” these bear the Lamb’s name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.
- Key: The 144,000 enjoy God’s presence and protection.

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The 144,000

- It was on those conquering in Philadelphia (sixth church) that Jesus promised to write three names, his, his Father's, and that of God's city, the New Jerusalem (McIlraith, 131).
- Two of the names have now been written, identifying the 144,000 as indeed those conquering, now also called the saints. What of the third name? (McIlraith, 131).
- Jesus continues to write the name of the New Jerusalem on those conquering until the judgment. After that, they will be fully the New Jerusalem. But already they are the Holy City (11:2) and the beloved city (20:9). The New Jerusalem is a work in progress (McIlraith, 131).

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The 144,000

- Playing their harps: The harp, a stringed instrument, was used in temple worship (Ps. 33:2; 57:8) and is mentioned three times in Revelation in connection with heavenly worship (5:8, 15:2) (241).
- New hymn: Because she is redeemed and worships the true God, she – but she only – can learn this song. Here, we are being told that the songs of heaven which we have up to now heard sung only in heaven, can also be sung by the Wife on earth (McIlraith, 131).
- Key: The 144,000 sing a new song to God for new acts of salvation (241).

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The 144,000

- They are the virgins: The early Church had high esteem for celibacy as it provided a special closeness to the Lord (242).
- The “virgins” are best understood metaphorically as representing those who are faithful to the Lord (242).
- Here, the whole people of God, male and female, is represented symbolically as soldiers who keep themselves pure and the camp holy while engaged in a very different kind of warfare: worshipping, witnessing, and remaining faithful unto death.
- While ancient Israel’s soldiers (20 years and older) abstained temporarily from sexual relations, the Lamb’s companions are virgins who abstain permanently from the defilement of idols (243).

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The 144,000

- Follow the Lamb: The Greek word for "follow" is the same word used seventy times in the Gospels to refer to how disciples relate to Jesus (243).
- They conquer the same way he did, by love, obedience to God, and laying down their lives (243).
- Where he goes: They follow the way of the cross (243).



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The 144,000

- The first fruits: In the Old Testament, the first fruits are the first and best part of the harvest, given to God as his portion (243).
- No deceit: "No lie," is found in them, in contrast to the deception and lying of the false teachers of the devil, the beast, the false prophet, and the whore of Babylon (18:23) (243-244).
- Unblemished: A word used in the Old Testament to describe something worthy to be offered to God (244).
- Key: The 144,000 are compared to the espoused Wife who follows Jesus unwaveringly. They are an "offering," a "living sacrifice" that is holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 12:1).

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Two Armies

- A striking feature of Revelation is its presentation of two radically opposed possibilities for human beings: on the one hand, to keep God's commandments, bear witness to Jesus, worship the Lamb and follow him wherever he goes (244).
- On the other hand, to worship the beast, go along with those around us who reject God's teaching, and end up on the side of those persecuting God's people (244).
- Ultimately, there are two ways and no middle ground. In our daily choices, each of us is progressing toward belonging definitely to one or other of these two groups (244).
- Only saints, transformed people, will live with God forever (244).

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First Angel

- Now that all the actors in the final drama of human history have been introduced (except the harlot, 17:1), this vision symbolically depicts the proclamation of the gospel to the nations (245).
- Flying high overhead: Literally “in midheaven,” like the eagle who announced the three woes in 8:13, underscores that its message is directed to everyone, to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people (246).
- Everlasting good news: An “eternal gospel,” loudly, so all can hear (246).

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Second Angel

- Fear God and give him glory: Means to repent, worship God, and be joined to God's people (15:4; 16:9; 19:5-7) (246).
- Sit in judgment: God's judgment has a double purpose, to save the just and punish the evil. In our context, that means to save those who worship God and follow the Lamb, and to punish idolaters and those who follow the dragon (McIlraith, 133).
- Second Angel: Announces the fall of Babylon. The declaration of judgment is spoken in the prophetic past tense, as though it has already happened, to indicate its certainty. This is the first of six mentions of Babylon the great (246).

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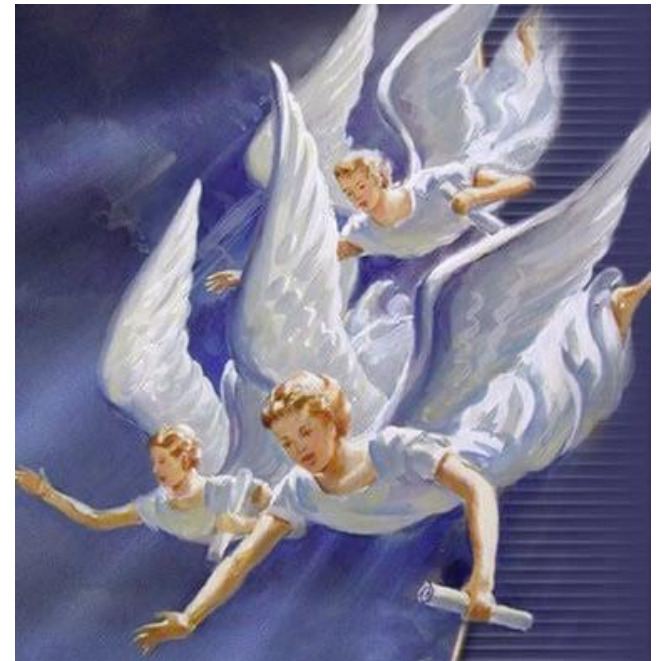
Babylon

- Babylon: The capital of the empire that destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of Solomon and thus stood as an archetype both of the enemy of God's people and of the land of exile (246).
- The Tower of Babylon symbolizes the proud ambition of a people that seeks independence from God.
- Key: To both Jews and Christians of the first century, ancient Babylon was a type of Rome, both as a persecuting power and as the place of their exile (1 Pet. 5:13) (247).
- Here Revelation uses "Babylon" to accuse a society that corrupts the world, adding the image of a prostitute (247).

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Third Angel

- Licentious Passion: In Revelation “fornication” can refer literally to sexual immortality, figuratively to idolatry, or both (247).
- Third Angel: His message is a solemn warning against worshipping the beast or accepting a token of allegiance to the beast (247).
- To worship the beast is to accept the claims of a ruler, government, or party to an authority that belongs uniquely to God, or to give the appearance of doing so, by accepting its mark (247).



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Third Angel

- Drink the wine of God's fury: Metaphor for God's fierce judgment (247).
- Key: For those open to God and his will, God's love is healing and life-giving. For those closed and who reject God's will, God's love becomes wrath (torment) for them.
- Burning sulfur: Literally "fire and sulfur"; "fire and brimstone" recalls the description of God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (247).
- Key: The eternal punishment reserved for the devil, the beast, and the false prophet is also reserved for those who follow them.

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Third Angel

- Before the angels and before the Lamb: God's judgment and torment of those who worship the beast or its image manifest how wrong they were, or perhaps to the perverse misery of those who hate the Lamb (247).
- Smoke of the fire: An echo of Is. 34:8-10, which promises God's "requital for the cause of Zion" against the nation of Edom, characterized by perpetual burning, sulfur, and rising smoke (247).
- No relief: No "rest" for those worshipping the beast or its image or accepting its mark, no "peace for the wicked" (Is. 48:22). Reminiscent of Jesus' Gehenna in the Gospels (247).

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Hell

- **CCC 1035:** The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity.
- Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, "eternal fire."
- The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

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Hell

- CCC 1037: God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end.
- In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want "any to perish, but all to come to repentance":
 - EP I: Father, accept this offering from your whole family. Grant us your peace in this life, save us from final damnation, and count us among those you have chosen.

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Hell

- *Poeni Damni* (Pain of loss): The eternal loss of the beatific vision in hell. It is the primary punishment of the evil spirits and of the souls who die rejecting God (Modern Catholic Dictionary).
- *Poeni Sensus* (Pain of sense): Suffering by some agent called "fire" in Scripture, external to the person and secondary to the main punishment, which is the loss of God (Modern Catholic Dictionary).
- Key: Those who say "no" to God (reject grace, use their freedom poorly) are not properly prepared for heaven. They would be in great pain if forced into the light, e.g., someone coming out of a dark room into the light would be in great pain.

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Hell

Certain	Uncertain
Hell exists via Sacred Scripture and teaching of the Church.	Who is there and/or how many (or percentage) are in hell?
We have the freedom to say “yes” and “no” to God.	Why some people refuse to believe and be converted to God?
Those who die in mortal sin are definitively excluded from the kingdom of God (CCC 1033).	Are there levels of hell (e.g., <i>Dante’s Inferno</i>) as there are levels in heaven?
Chief punishment is the pain of loss (unfulfilled longing for infinite love); those in hell have no remorse.	How do those in hell view God and/or themselves? How do they experience their unfulfilled longing?
God predestines no one to hell, but rather desires the salvation of all.	Do those in hell see the graces they refused/squandered in this life?

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Perseverance of the Saints

- Sustains the holy ones: Three essential responses of Christians sustain them: faith, obedience to God's commandments, and perseverance (248).
- Write this: What follows is the second of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation, all of which focus on the proper response of readers to the message of the book (248).
- Die in the Lord: Those who die in a state of grace via faith and baptism.
- Faith in Jesus: Keep believing in Jesus or imitate his faithfulness (248).

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Perseverance of the Saints

- Find rest from their labors: Stands in contrast to the fate of those who follow the beast and will experience torment with “no relief.” (248)
- Their works accompany them: Literally “follow them.” The good deeds and faithful testimony of Christians on earth have a value and obtain reward that continues beyond the grave (249).
- Prayer: “Heavenly Father, I offer my prayers for N. Please forgive his sins, wipe away his tears, heal his wounds, and remember his good deeds. Through Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever.”

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Perseverance of the Saints



Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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Heaven and Hell

Heaven	Hell
God and the Lamb are central (Rev. 4 and 5)	Pool of fire with the Devil, beast, and false prophet (Rev. 20:10, 14-15)
Seal of the living God (Rev. 7:3-4)	Mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16-17)
Unity, singing, and purity (Rev. 4:11; 5:9-13; 7:10-12; 11:17-18; 14:3-4)	The unfaithful, licentious passion, deceivers, idol-worshippers (Rev. 2:20; 14:8; 21:8)
Find rest from their labors (Rev. 14:13)	No relief day or night (Rev. 14:11) Tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10)
God "loving us"; makes all things new (Rev. 1:5; 21:5)	Wine of God's fury (Rev. 14:10, 19)

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Balanced Faith

- Prior to Vatican II, there was a strong warning on God's judgment and the need for repentance and conversion.
- In reaction to earlier overemphasis on the fear of judgment, many Catholics since Vatican II have tended to present only Jesus' love and grace and to pass over human accountability to God and the grave consequences of disobedience (249).
- Evangelization must be a matter not of preaching *either* grace or judgment but of preaching *both*. Advance knowledge of impending judgment is a mercy if there is opportunity to avoid a negative outcome (250).

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Harvest of the Earth

- John is given a vision of the end of human history. It concisely depicts the final judgment in harvest imagery familiar to John's readers from the Old Testament and the sayings of Jesus (Matt. 13:37-41) (251).
- In this vision the grain harvest symbolizes the gathering in of the just and the grape harvest symbolizes the gathering of the unjust (251).
- Looked like a son of man: Represents Christ, already described as "like a son of man" in 1:13. The return of Christ on the clouds is what Christians have been taught to expect (251).

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Harvest of the Earth

- Gold crown: Represents kingship and authority (251).
- Sickle in his hand: The ordinary tool for harvesting grain, signals the end of the age, symbolized as a harvest (Matt. 13:30) (251).
- Time to reap has come: The Father has fixed the timing of the end.



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Harvest of the Earth

Sickle: Tool for
harvesting

Grain: Harvested for
God's kingdom

Grapes: Harvesting for
the wine press of God's
fury.



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Harvest of the Earth

- In the gospels, the harvest as an image of the final judgment has both a positive and negative connotation.
- On the one hand, it is the time when God will gather his own into his barn; on the other, it is the time when the wicked will be destroyed (Matt. 3:12; 13:30, 37-42) (252).
- Wine press of God's fury: This imagery of trampling the juice of grapes is drawn from Is. 63:1-6, which describes God's intervention to bring judgment on pagan nations in order to redeem his people (252).

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Harvest of the Earth

- Outside the city: The law of Moses directs that certain objects and activities connected with sin and death be symbolically excluded from the community by being placed outside the camp where God's holy people live (253).
- Blood poured out: The large number of people subject to this judgment is indicated by the amount of blood, signifying the lives of the wicked, that pours out of the winepress of God's wrath: to the height of a horse's bridle for two hundred miles (253).

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Harvest of the Earth

- The final image is a gruesome one of blood as high as horses flowing for two hundred miles.
- Such an image tries to capture the terrible consequences of sin. This wine press is trodden outside the city.
- There is probably an allusion to the death of Jesus and his saving blood here. Jesus does not war with the weapons of the beast, his is the way of the Lamb (McIlraith, 135-136).



Horse Bridle

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Next Time

- Tuesday, March 4th



Revelation 15

The Seven Last Plagues

15:1 – 8

Revelation 16

The Seven Bowls

16:1 – 21