

# St. Therese Catholic Church

## Book of Revelation *Overview*

October 29, 2024

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## St. Therese Parish

### Introduction

- Chapters 2-3 contain what are commonly called “the letters to the seven churches.”
- These prophetic messages from the risen Lord are addressed to the seven churches and reveal “what is happening” as a prelude to the lengthier section of the book devoted to “what will happen afterwards.” (56)
- From these letters, we get a window into first-century churches. Some churches face poverty and persecution, while others enjoy prosperity; some tolerate false teaching, while others firmly reject it; some make fatal compromises with the surrounding culture, while others resist and remain faithful (56).

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## Introduction

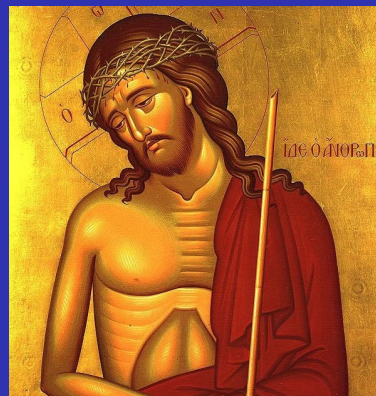
- The oracles to the seven churches invite all readers to consider themselves personally: "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (56).
- Taken together, these "letters" provide Spirit-inspired counsel for the Church in every age. Readers often find them the easiest part of Revelation to apply to their lives (56).
- Readers are challenged to examine themselves and repent. The letters are a summons to conversion and are akin to the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass that disposes people of God for the liturgy (57).

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## Structure

- The seven letters can also be seen in light of marriage – the marriage supper of the Lamb wherein Jesus, the Bridegroom, is preparing his Bride for himself (Rev. 19:7).
- Jesus is the Bridegroom, the one loving His bride, and speaks to the seven churches calling them all to nuptial fidelity to himself (McIlraith, 30-31).



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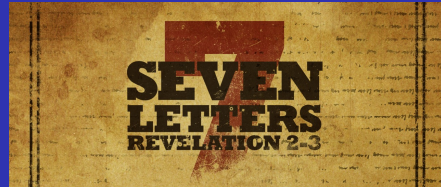


## Introduction

- There are six elements repeated in all seven letters.

### 1. *The Addressee and a Command to Write*

- Each letter begins with the formula: "To the angel of the church of...write." Every church has an angel (guardian angel or bishop). Regardless, each church has a transcendent dimension. Jesus assures each church of his closeness (McIlraith, 31).



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## Introduction

### 2. *Auto-Introduction*

- Jesus presents some aspect of his mystery that is relevant to the church. Telling those in Ephesus that he holds the seven stars, he reminds them of his power. He walks among the lampstands as God walked in Paradise.
- Jesus knows everything about them, and has the power to remove their lampstand, which he will do if they do not repent (McIlraith, 31).



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## St. Therese Parish

### Introduction

#### 3. *Analysis / Judgment*

- Jesus reveals his discernment of the church. "I know your works" open this section. "Good works" are those in harmony with God's covenant. "Evil works" are those that break the covenant. Churches must pay attention to their assessment.
- Two churches get unconditional praise from the Lord: **Smyrna** ("you are rich") and **Philadelphia** ("you have kept my word and not denied my name").
- The other five, while encouraged, all hear a "but:" "but I have this against you..." **Sardis** is at the bottom of the list: "you have the name of being alive, and you are dead." (McIlraith, 31)

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## St. Therese Parish

### Introduction

#### 4. *Remedy / Advice*

- After presenting them their problems, Jesus gives advice to each church that will help to solve its divisive issues. Five churches (or groups within them) are called to repent: Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea (McIlraith, 32).

#### 5. *Invitation to Listen to the Spirit*

- This section is the final section in the last four messages: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This formula is found unchanged in all the letters (McIlraith, 32).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Introduction

#### 6. *Overcoming / Conquering and its Rewards*

| The following is offered to those who conquer |                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| To eat from the tree of life                  | To be robed in white garments                                                          |
| Not to be hurt by the second death            | Not to be blotted out from the Book of Life                                            |
| Hidden manna                                  | To be a pillar in the temple of God                                                    |
| A white stone                                 | To have the name of God, the name of the new Jerusalem, and Jesus' name written on one |
| A new name                                    | Conquer as Jesus conquered                                                             |
| Power over the nations                        | To sit on his and his Father's throne                                                  |

~McIlraith, 33

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## St. Therese Parish

### Conquer

- For us, “conquering” is probably the most important word in the entire book (McIlraith, 33).
- Jesus has conquered through his loving self-sacrifice in surrendering himself to the Father on the cross. Consequently, he has freed us from our sins by his blood.
- There is an echo of the Passover lamb here. Jesus' victory of love spells disaster for all the forces of evil against him and us. Only love survives (McIlraith, 33).
- **Key:** It is only those conquering in the churches (persevering in love) that Jesus promises a future.

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## Conquer

- The Wife conquers when she keeps the first works to the very end, until death – and even beyond death, because we learn in 14:13 that for those who die in the Lord, their works follow them.
- This marriage goes beyond the grave. The individuals who make up the Wife become conquerors when they persevere in the spousal works to the very end (McIlraith, 35).
- The love, faith, service, and endurance by which the Wife conquers are all the gifts of Jesus to her (McIlraith, 35).
- **Key:** Through these letters, Jesus purifies his Bride through his Word. We have a kind of Liturgy of the Word.

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## Map of the Seven Churches



<https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/revelation/seven-churches-of-revelation/>

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## St. Therese Parish

### Overview

| Churches                     | Strengths                                                             | Failures                                   | Instruction                                                                  | Promise                                                                                       |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ephesus</b><br>"Loveless" | Hard Work:<br>Patient<br>Endurance,<br>Rejected evil,<br>perseverance | You have<br>forsaken<br>your first<br>love | Repent and<br>do the works<br>you did at<br>first                            | You will eat<br>from the<br>tree of life                                                      |
| <b>Smyrna</b><br>"Suffering" | Enduring your<br>suffering and<br>poverty – yet<br>you are rich       | None                                       | Remain<br>faithful even<br>when facing<br>prison,<br>persecution<br>or death | I will give<br>you the<br>crown of life:<br>You will not<br>be hurt by<br>the second<br>death |

<https://www.thelordsway.com/site19/custompage.asp?CongregationID=1202&CustomPageID=1451>

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## St. Therese Parish

### Overview

| Churches                               | Strengths                                                               | Failures                                                                        | Instruction | Promise                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Pergamos</b><br>"Worldly"           | Loyalty to<br>Christ: Refuse<br>to deny him                             | Tolerates<br>cults,<br>heresies,<br>idolatry and<br>immortality                 | Repent!     | Hidden<br>manna and<br>a stone with<br>a new name<br>on it                            |
| <b>Thyatira</b><br>"Wrong<br>doctrine" | Love, faith,<br>works: Patient<br>endurance:<br>constant<br>improvement | Tolerates<br>pagan cults,<br>idolatry and<br>immorality:<br>Judgment<br>coming! | Repent!     | Faithful will<br>hold fast<br>until I come:<br>I will give<br>you the<br>morning star |

<https://www.thelordsway.com/site19/custompage.asp?CongregationID=1202&CustomPageID=1451>

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## St. Therese Parish

### Overview

| Churches                                   | Strengths                                                        | Failures                       | Instruction                                                   | Promise                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sardis</b><br>"Spiritually dead"        | Only a faithful few have kept the faith: church spiritually dead | Repent and turn back to Christ | Strengthen what little faith remains                          | Faithful will walk with Jesus and not be blotted out of the book of life |
| <b>Philadelphia</b><br>"Spiritually alive" | Kept my word and have not denied my name                         | None                           | You have an open door: I will keep you from the hour of trial | I will make you a pillar of faith in the temple of my God                |

<https://www.thelordsway.com/site19/custompage.asp?CongregationID=1202&CustomPageID=1451>

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## St. Therese Parish

### Overview

| Churches                        | Strengths | Failures                                               | Instruction                        | Promise                                                      |
|---------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Laodicea</b><br>"Complacent" | None      | Neither hot or cold: Your riches make you impoverished | Turn from indifference and repent! | I will invite those who overcome to sit with me on my throne |

<https://www.thelordsway.com/site19/custompage.asp?CongregationID=1202&CustomPageID=1451>

- **Key:** The letters to the seven churches are akin to a Liturgy of the Word wherein Jesus encourages, strengthens, and purifies his Church.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Ephesus

- First church addressed by Jesus as it is the mother church of the region, located in the leading city of the Roman province of Asia (58).
- Located centrally between Jerusalem and Antioch in the east and Rome in the west, Christian missionaries and travelers would naturally visit there (59).
- With a population of about 200,000, it was the fourth largest city of the empire and a major center of commerce, government, and religion (59).
- Ephesus was the center of occult activity and famous for its temple dedicated to Artemis (goddess of nature).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Ephesus



Rendering of Temple to Artemis



Temple Ruins

**Key:** The temple dedicated to Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Ephesus

- Paul visited in Acts 19. The Apostle John resided there. May have been the home of the Blessed Virgin Mary (59)
- Paul spent more time in Ephesus than any other place – three years.
- Timothy was the pastor of Ephesus.
- **Key:** The Christians in Ephesus were blessed with good doctrinal teaching and great role models (the Blessed Virgin Mary, John, Paul, and Timothy).
- Unfortunately, while orthodox, they had grown weak in their live (intimacy) with Christ.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Ephesus

- Christ praises their labor, endurance (major theme in Revelation), and that they cannot tolerate the wicked.
- They have tested false teachers, have suffered persecution for his name, and have not grown weary.
- However, they have lost their first love. They no longer respond wholeheartedly to the one who loves them and shed his blood for them (61).
- **Key:** The church of Ephesus warns us that it is possible to remain doctrinally orthodox but fail for lack of love. Jesus says to “remember” then from where they have fallen (61).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Ephesus

- The church at Ephesus is promised the right to eat from the tree of life.
- The tree of life symbolized immortality.
- If they return to their first love, endure suffering, reject false teaching, they will eat from the tree of life in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 22:2).



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## St. Therese Parish

### Smyrna

- Smyrna, now called Izmir, is a thriving city and still have a Christian community.
- St. Ignatius of Antioch stated there as a prisoner on his way to Rome.
- The city had temples to Rome and to the emperors, just like Ephesus.



**Key:** Jesus is very pleased with the church in Smyrna.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Smyrna

- Smyrna was a harbor city located thirty-five miles north of Ephesus. It was a proud city with strong ties with Rome.
- Erected a temple to the goddess Roma in 195 BC and the first temple in Asia for the worship of the emperor Tiberias in AD 26 (64).
- It remained the center for the imperial cult and therefore, was hostile to the Jewish population and possibly Christians.
- The church in Smyrna was famous for its martyr-bishop St. Polycarp, who personally knew St. John.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Smyrna

- The church at Smyrna suffered persecutions, and as such, they were rich in the eyes of Jesus.
- He urges them to have courage and seek the strength that they need. This strength comes from prayer (Mk 14:38).
- They may be able to kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul (Mt. 10:28).
- **Key:** We do not know how we will act in the midst of persecution or suffering. Peter was prepared to go to prison of Jesus, but stumbled (Lk 22:33). Remaining faithful in our daily challenges will help us remain faithful for big ones (69).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Pergamum

- Lies forty miles to the north of Smyrna and fifteen miles inland.
- It was known for its library of two hundred thousand volumes, second in size only to Alexandria (69-70).
- From Pergamum we get the name “parchment.” (McIlraith, 41).



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## St. Therese Parish

### Pergamum

- The city was home to many temples, including Zeus (the savior), Athena (goddess of wisdom), and Dionysius (god of wine and merrymaking).
- Pergamum had a huge altar to Zeus that commemorated their defeat of the Celts (McIlraith, 41).
- The huge altar to Zeus looked down on the city, which looked like a throne. Hence, the Risen Christ says, “You live where Satan’s throne is...where Satan lives.” (70).
- Pergamum had a strong imperial cult (emperor worship). Christ commends the church for remaining faithful to him.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Pergamum

- **Key:** Part of Christian witness sometimes involves *not participating* in what the prevailing culture celebrates.
- In the 1970 British documentary *The World at War*, there is a scene of the Nuremberg rallies with overexuberance in celebrating the Nazi Party. A man says he could see it from the window and “never felt so alone” in that he refused to participate.
- **Key:** Christians lived in a totally non-Christian environment where the entire population was involved in worshipping one god or another. If one belonged to a guild and the entire guild worshiped a certain god and offered sacrifices and held banquet in honor of that god, it was extremely difficult to survive economically or socially without taking part in these sacrifices (McIlraith, 42).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Pergamum

- **Balaam:** Reference to Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness (Num. 25:12) where the people profaned themselves by prostituting themselves with women. The Israelites were invited to the sacrifices of their gods and ate of the sacrifices and bowed down to their gods - moving from immorality to idolatry (72).
- **Nicolaitans:** Little is known about the Nicolaitans, but being mentioned together the Balaam people, it is likely they were involved in idolatry (McIlraith, 42).
- **Note:** With the exception of actual adultery, sexual immorality, including prostitution, concubinage, and homosexual behavior, was common and accepted in Greco-Roman culture (72).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Pergamum

- Paul and other New Testament authors consistently teach against pagan sexual mores as incompatible with God's law and Christian holiness (72).
- Abstaining from these practices on grounds of conscience made Jews and Christians stand out from their neighbors (72).
- The Christians in Pergamum are told to repent and to hold their ground. If so, they will be given the **hidden manna** (interior spiritual nourishment that the Eucharist contains), **a white amulet** (or white stone – tickets for admission to feasts and other events – admission to the messianic banquet), and **a new name** (new identity in Christ) (74).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Thyatira

- Lies inland from Pergamum and halfway to Sardis.
- The local god was Tyrimmus, the sun god.
- There were no imperial temples in the city (McIlraith, 44).



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## St. Therese Parish

### Thyatira

- This commercial and manufacturing town was the least significant among the seven mentioned (77).
- Paul's convert in Philippi, Lydia, who was a merchant of purple goods was from Thyatira.
- The town was known for its trade guilds; shoemakers, the makers and sellers of dyed cloth, and the bronze smiths (77).
- The guilds were centers of social and religious life, each having its own pagan gods as patrons, whose festive meals involved idolatrous worship and often sexual immorality (77).
- **Key:** Faithfulness to Christ affected their livelihood.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Thyatira

- Apollo was the chief god of the city. Hence, presented Christ as the Son God contradicts the claims made for Apollo (77).
- While the church in Thyatira is praised for its love, faith, service and endurance (the virtue most frequently commended in Revelation), they tolerate a false teacher.
- **Key:** The four works of **love**, **faith**, **service**, and **endurance** make a Christian. It is these that characterize the Wife. The Wife's task is to prepare her wedding robe, and it is with these four that she weaves her gown. Love comes first (Christ loves us first and we respond). Love presupposes faith, holding fast to Christ. The Wife expresses her love by service to neighbors. Marriage is forever so love must endure (McIlraith, 45).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Thyatira

- **Jezebel**: The foreign wife of King Ahab promoted idolatry in the northern kingdom of Israel, the worship of the pagan god Baal (1 Kgs. 16:31-33; 21:25-26; 2 Kgs 9:22).
- Elijah battled four hundred prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Those false prophets had led the Israelites astray (adultery).
- Our Catholic tradition recognizes a “Jezebel spirit” (thirst for power) that does whatever it takes to gain and maintain power.
- If they remain faithful to the end, Jesus will give the **morning star** (Venus) – last star to be seen in the morning and first star to be seen at night (80). Christ will share his light and victory.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Sardis

- Located 25 miles southeast of Thyatira.
- The city was a fortified citadel and acropolis were atop seemingly impregnable cliffs.
- Twice, when the city was under siege, a soldier scaled the cliffs, found nobody on guard, and the city fell (McIlraith, 47).



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## St. Therese Parish

### Sardis

- Sardis was a city of about 100,000 had the usual local and imperial temples. It was well to do with extensive trading relationships and the fertility of the surrounding farmland (84).
- The church at Sardis receives a devastating diagnosis. They have the reputation (literally “name”) of being alive, but according to Christ they are dead (85).
- **Key:** A self-diagnosis of our spiritual condition may not be reality! God’s truth lays everything bare.
- While they are on the point of death, there is hope. Christ calls them to repent. If not, he will come like a thief in the night.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Sardis

- **Few have not soiled:** While the majority of the church wore dirty clothes, there were a few faithful members.
- **Dressed in white:** At Roman triumph celebrations, citizens wore white robes in celebration of the victory. In the Bible white clothing signifies purity, victory, and resurrection, or belonging to the heavenly world (85). White garments are the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev. 19:8). They symbolize the presence of divine life.
- **Note:** Bishops, priests, and deacons wear white albs for liturgical celebrations as a symbolize of baptism and cleansing of Christ.
- **Book of Life:** The place where the names of all God’s chosen and faithful are written (86).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Philadelphia

- The city was located 30 miles southeast of Sardis.
- It was a prosperous commercial center, located at the intersection of two important trade routes (88).
- The temples were dedicated to local and Greek gods: Artemis, Zeus, and Dionysius (McIlraith, 49).



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## St. Therese Parish

### Philadelphia

- Along with Smyrna, Philadelphia receives only encouragement and no reproof (88).
- **Note:** All seven cities in Asia Minor were eventually overrun by Islam. Philadelphia lasted the longest.
- **Key:** Despite their limited strength, meaning their low social status and limited ability to determine their own destiny in Philadelphia, the Christians have kept Jesus' word, the gospel, and have not denied his name (89).
- **Rocky:** "Yo, Adrian, I did it!"



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## St. Therese Parish

### Philadelphia

- The church in Philadelphia was famous for athletic competitions in which the victors would receive crowns of leaves honoring their success (90).
- **Take your crown:** Jesus is saying, "You are winning, you are headed for the victor's circle., Don't give up. Keep doing what you're doing, and you will win the prize." (90)
- They will become a pillar in the temple of my God, where they will remain forever. In other words, their presence in the place where God dwells will be absolutely secure (91).
- **Rocky:** It's not how hard you can hit, but how hard you can get hit and keep going.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Laodicea

- Laodicea lay forty miles to the southeast of Philadelphia, in the region of Phrygia.
- It was located near Colossae (ten miles to the east) (92).
- Laodicea completes the circle of churches and is about 90 miles east of Ephesus (McIlraith, 52).



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## St. Therese Parish

### Laodicea

- Paul mentions Laodicea in his letter to the Colossians (Col. 2:1; 4:12-16). The city was known for its wool – a manufacturer of clothing and carpets of the native glossy-black wool (92).
- The city was destroyed in AD 60 and because of its wealth, it was able to rebuild without Roman aid.
- In many respects, Laodicea is the wealthiest city with its banking, medical, and textile industries. Unfortunately, their wealth led to spiritual lukewarmness.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Laodicea

- Christ reproves the church in Laodicea for being lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. The nearby city of Hierapolis was known for its hot healing springs, while Colossae was not for its cold freshwater (92).
- Given that Laodicea had no water supply, it had to receive lukewarm water from an aqueduct whose source was near Hierapolis (92).
- Christ says that he will spew (the Greek word *emeō* is the word from which get the word “vomit”) them out of his mouth. The lukewarm cultural Christians at Laodicea are making Jesus sick. They are smug in their complacency (92).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Laodicea

- They are self-sufficient and perhaps enjoyed respectability in the eyes of their fellow citizens because they lived their faith in a moderate manner that neither offended nor challenged anyone (93).
- In response, Jesus describes their condition: you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Jesus' stern warning is harsher toward the church at Laodicea than any other church (93).
- However, there is still hope. If in humility they recognize their inability to provide for themselves, Christ will provide **gold refined by fire** (faith in Christ that has been purified by enduring trial), **white garments** (pure and righteous conduct), and **ointment to smear on your eyes that you may see** (Holy Spirit) (94).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Laodicea

- When we sin against the Lord, he invites us to *humility* and admit the wrong and accept the responsibility for whatever we did and not blame others.
- We should show *sorrow for sin* (contrition) by remembering God's love for us and love for the person we have wronged, as well as our future judgment on our wrongdoing.
- We must also demonstrate *renunciation* or firm purpose of amendment to avoid the sin or the temptation to sin.
- We should ask for forgiveness from God and, unless it would cause more harm than good, from the person we have wronged. Of course, we should always have recourse to the Sacrament of Confession to receive God's forgiveness and needed grace (96).

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## St. Therese Parish

### Summary

- The seven letters in chapters 2-3 in the Book of Revelation are easier chapters to understand.
- However, they are truly challenging for us in that the letters are a call to self-reflection, somewhat like an examination of conscience before confession.
- The Lord always reproves those whom he loves. He will point out the things that are **good** and encourage you to continue. He will also point out areas where **repentance** is needed. And he will always provide hope in that he offers his merciful gaze to you like he did for the Apostle Peter.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Summary

- Additionally, the seven letters are a great testimony to the challenges that the great Apostle St. Paul and his companions faced on their missionary journeys.
  - **Significant idolatry:** Each of the seven churches battled significant idolatry – temples built to local deities or the imperial cult (worship of the emperor).
  - **Heresies:** Churches wrestled with syncretism or the blending of the Christian faith with heretical teachings and immoral ways of living (often sexual immorality).
  - **Errors in Perception:** Churches who believe they are rich in faith but in reality are lukewarm or poor.

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## St. Therese Parish

### Next Time

- Next time we will look at chapter 4, which along with chapter 5, gives us a glimpse of the heavenly throne room.
- Chapter 3 ended with Jesus standing at the door and knocking. Chapter 4 begins with an open door and the invites to “Come up here and I will show you what must happen afterwards” (Rev. 4:1).
- We are given the blessing of being “lifted up” to participate in the heavenly liturgy at every Mass. In his book *Spirit of the Liturgy*, Pope Benedict says that Revelation is the book of the heavenly liturgy. Our earthly liturgy is based on the eternal worship of God in the heavenly liturgy.

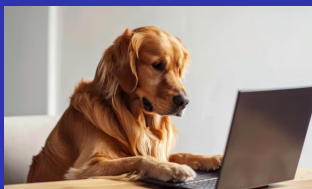
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## St. Therese Parish

### Next Time

- Tuesday, November 12<sup>th</sup>



| Revelation 4           |           |
|------------------------|-----------|
| God's throne in Heaven | 4:1 – 6a  |
| The Heavenly Worship   | 4:6b - 11 |

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