

St. Therese Catholic Church

Book of Revelation

Chapters 6-7

December 3, 2024

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Cycles of Judgment



Seven Seals



Seven Trumpets



Seven Bowls

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Seven Seals

- The Lamb, the Risen Christ, opens the seven (i.e., all) the seals in 6:1 – 7:17. The seventh seal contains seven trumpets, which is found in 8:1-11:14 (McIlraith, 72).

Seal	Symbol	Significance
First	White Horse	Conquest
Second	Red Horse	War
Third	Black Horse	Scarcity
Fourth	Pale Horse	Death
Fifth	Saints slain	Prayers offered
Sixth	Wrath waits	Prayers answered
Seventh	Angels Assemble	Judgment prepared

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Seven Seals



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Mini-Apocalypse and Seals

- In Luke 21, when referring to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (microcosm of the universe), Jesus speaks about the signs (labor pains) before the new creation.

Religious Deception (Luke 21:8)	Violence and Unrest (Luke 21:9)	Natural Disasters (Luke 21:11)
“I am he” (Messianic claim)	Wars and insurrections, nation against nation	Earthquakes, famines, plagues
<u>First Seal</u>	<u>Second Seal</u>	<u>Third Seal</u>
White Horse – Christ rides in victory (contra false messiahs)	Red Horse – takes peace, people slaughter one another	Black Horse – held scale (food is rationed) given famine

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Four Horseman



Four Horseman of Revelation
White, Red, Black, and Pale



Four Horseman of Notre Dame
"Outlined against a blue, gray October sky the Four Horsemen rode again."

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First Four Seals

- There are some ancient Greek manuscripts that have “ill-tempered cat” instead of horse.
- As each seal is broken, an ill-tempered cat (white, red, black, and pale green) is released wreaking havoc on a peaceful earth. It is truly awful.
- They are not the best Greek manuscripts, so horse is assumed as more accurate.



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First Four Seals

- In the Old Testament, horses are associated with war. In Exodus 14, Pharaoh's army pursued the Israelites with horses and chariots.
- The Prophet Joel speaks of the Day of the Lord wherein a vast army has the appearance that of horses, like horses they run (2:4).



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First Four Seals

- Each time the Lamb opens a seal it sets in motion a vision. One of the four living creatures next to the throne, whose every movement is in perfect harmony with the throne, issues a command with a voice like thunder, “Come forward” (121).
- For the first four seals, a horse (white, red, black, and pale) rides forth with frightening consequences on earth (121).
- Key: Christians can take comfort that the crucified and risen Lord “who loves us” (1:5) remains in control, no matter how dire the circumstances (121). In short, the Lamb, the Risen Christ, is totally in charge of the world.

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First Four Seals

- In the background, the Prophet Zechariah had two visions of horses of similar colors (1:7-17; 6:1-8).
- First Vision: Jewish people, returning from the Babylonian exile, are suffering from the hands of pagan nations. God will have mercy on his people by judging those who oppress them, rebuilding his temple, and restoring Jerusalem (1:7-17).
- Second Vision: God sends out four teams of diversely colored horses pulling chariots, to bring his judgment on the nations that have oppressed his people (Zech. 6:1-8).

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First Four Seals

- In this light, God is causing or allowing the peace to be disrupted, as a step toward his ultimate plan of saving the people and restoring Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22) (122).
- In Matthew 24, we see the same principle, i.e., there will a disruption of peace (false Messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes) – the beginning of labor pains – leading to persecutions and cosmic upheaval before the coming of the Son of Man.
- Key: In God's mysterious plan of salvation, tribulation (labor pains) come before the birth of something new.

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First Seal

- White horse: Roman generals wore white in triumphal processions up to Capitoline Hill as a sign of their victory. White is a sign of the Resurrection, victory, purity, etc.
- Bow: Speaking of God's coming judgment on his enemies, the Prophet Habakkuk says, "You readied your bow, you filled your bowstring with arrows" (Hab. 3:9).
- Crown: Signifies royal authority. The rider is given authority indicating that God permitted him to have power.
- Key: The first white horse and its rider are probably a symbol of the presence within history of the Risen Christ and of witnessing Christians (McIlraith, 75).

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Second Seal

- Red horse: Signals bloodshed. The rider is permitted by God to take peace away from the earth. The consequence is that people slaughter one another in wars between nations, civil wars, or other forms of social unrest (122).
- Huge sword: Symbol of war, general and civil, and of human violence – clearly a negative force (McIlraith, 76).
- The red color is that of the of Dragon, indicating perhaps a demonic influence here. A certain resemblance to Mark 13:8 is found, with nations warring against nations (McIlraith, 77).

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Third Seal

- Black horse: A symbol of social injustice and famine (McIlraith, 76).
- Scale in his hand: Used for measuring, weighing, etc.
- The ordinary things in life (wheat and barley) cost a fortune to buy. There is a hint of Amos here suggesting social injustice. This price fixing can lead to a certain level of famine when ordinary people cannot access their everyday food (McIlraith, 76).
- Wars often bring impoverishment, food shortages, and famine. The oil and wine are not damaged. The shortages affect the poor the most as they can only afford wheat and barley (122).

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Fourth Seal

- Pale green: This is the worst and sums up the evils of the previous three. Its pale green suggests decay, and its rider is named Death (122)
- Hades: John says that Hades had accompanied him (literally, “followed with him”). In Greco-Roman thought, Hades was the shadowy place that the dead inhabit, comparable to Sheol in the Hebrew Bible (123).
- The image is Hades on foot gathering up the corpses left by Pestilence and Death as they struck victim after victim (123).
- A quarter: A quarter (seals) will become a third (trumpets), then to all the earth (bowls) (Cavins).

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Fourth Seal

- Calamities of Jerusalem and Temple (70 AD)
- 1.1 million Jews were killed or starved to death; corpses were stacked in the streets; thousands were crucified around the city, and thousands more sold into slavery (Healy, 268)
- Famine was so bad that Jewish mothers actually ate their children (Cavins).



Destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD)

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Fourth Seal

- Without denying the role of Satan's malice, what characterizes the specific evils mentioned here – conquest, violence, economic problems that lead to food shortages, disease, and death by all these means – are for the most part disasters that result from sinful human actions rather than divine intervention (123).
- The indication that power was “given” to these riders suggests that God has allowed the human will to power, violence, and selfishness to run its course, an expression of God's permissive will rather than his positive will (e.g., Ps. 81:11-17; Rom. 1:24-32) (123).

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Fourth Seal

- First, in the mystery of his divine providence, God allows the suffering that evil produces to bring human beings to their senses. It is akin to an alcoholic "hitting bottom" to deal with his or her drinking problem. It is a "severe mercy" (123-24).
- Second, God allows the wicked to do what they please to reveal just how wicked they are so that the justice of their final condemnation is obvious. As one writer puts it, "God will not judge them until they are fully and thoroughly deserving of it." (124)
- Key: The calamities of war, famine, and death that occur in every age will intensify before Christ's second coming (126).

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Fifth Seal

- Fifth seal: With the fifth seal, we see the positive powers at work in the world, the prayers of the martyrs and of the saints. Those killed for their witness to Christ cry out to God for justice and judgment on their enemies (McIlraith, 77).
- The martyrs must wait for the fall and judgment of Babylon for justice. God will bring about justice in his own time.
- Underneath the altar: In the Old Testament, when the animal was sacrificed, its blood was poured at the base of the altar or splashed on its sides to indicate that the life or the “soul” of the animal was offered to God as a gift (128).

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Fifth Seal

- God accepts the sacrifice by bestowing blessing, whether an answer to prayer, forgiveness of sin, deliverance from enemies, or whatever the need may might be (128).
- In Catholic, Orthodox, and other ancient churches, the Mass or Divine Liturgy is celebrated over the relics of one or more martyrs (128).



Altar Stone with Relics

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Fifth Seal

- Key: The blood of the martyrs, like the Blood of the Lamb, is received by God as a sacrifice and will move him to intervene, to bless and save his people, to hear their prayers, and to bring about his reign on the earth (129).
- How long: They offer the cry of the psalmists and prophets (Ps. 6:4; 13:2-3; 35:17; Hab. 1:2) suffering affliction as they wait for God's justice (129).
- White robe: A sign of their share in the divine life of the Resurrection. In the prayers of the martyrs, we have a striking example of the power of prayer to influence history (McIlraith, 77).

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Fifth Seal

- Full number: This is a biblical way of saying that the answer to their prayer for justice awaits the completion of God's plan, which foresees the martyrdom of other fellow servants and brothers, fellow Christians like themselves (129).
- The martyrs will be vindicated but not until history reaches its goal. They walk in the steps of the Lamb, whose acceptance of an unjust death was accepted by God as a sacred offering (130).



<https://thefounding.net/tag/essential/>

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Sixth Seal

- Sixth seal: The sixth seal introduces the Day of the Lord and the beginning of the tribulation. The “How long” of the martyrs begins to be answered (McIlraith, 79).
- The cosmic convulsions (black sun, etc.) are traditional Old Testament motifs that accompany the coming of God. His creation quakes, indeed, is dissolved when God arises, preparatory to the coming into being of the New Creation. Now the coming is that of the Lamb. (McIlraith, 79).



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Sixth Seal

- De-creation: Judgment in the sixth seal is the seven things in the Book of Genesis – sun, moon, stars, firmament (sky), earth, land, and human beings.
- The cosmic imagery (sun turning black, moon became like blood, stars falling from the sky) is a kind of “uncreation.”
- Like a clock being smashed, there is symbolic imagery of time (sun – day, moon – month, stars – seasons) or creation coming to an end.



- Key: The tools of navigating space and time are ending. A new world is emerging.

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Sixth Seal

- The Church's Ultimate Trial: The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection.
- The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to come down from heaven.
- God's triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world (CCC 677).

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Sixth Seal

- Seven classes of people estranged from God cried out to the mountains and the rocks. The people who face judgment because they have not repented are not restricted to the wealthy or to those who wield power (134).

Seven Classes of People						
Kings	Nobles	Military Officers	The Rich	The Powerful	Every Slave	Every Free Person

- The one who suffered as a Lamb for the sin of the world now comes as judge of all (134). Caves and mountain crags were places of refuge. There will be no place to hide.

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Sixth Seal

- Christ's first coming as the Suffering Servant and Lamb of God brought the good news of grace and an offer of salvation to the human race (134).
- The Messiah's second coming will be marked by salvation for his faithful followers and judgment for those who obdurately refuse to repent in spite of warnings and witnesses Christ has sent them (134).
- Who can withstand it: Echoes Old Testament passages that speak of God's irresistible judgment (Ps. 76:8; Nah. 1:6; Mal. 3:2) (134).

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Sixth Seal

- John's visions in Revelation do not provide us with a simple preview of events arranged in chronological order.
- Rather, these visionary vignettes portray facts about the troubles of the time in which we live (the first four seals), about the seemingly unrequited evil that Christ's faithful witnesses endure in the present (fifth seal), and about the impending judgment (sixth seal) (135).
- The calamities of the four horseman serve as invitations to conversion. Martyrs will continue to be killed until this age comes to a close. When that day comes, it will arrive as a terrifying force against all, great or small, who persist in doing evil (135).

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Revelation 7

- Revelation 7 answers the cry, “who can stand?” that we find at the end of seal six and shows that the saints, the espoused Wife of Christ, symbolized now as the 144,000, can indeed stand, can survive the tribulation (McIlraith, 81).
- This answer is given in two: firstly 7:1-8 which shows the sealing of God’s people and secondly 7:9-15, where, in a surprising development, we are shown God’s people – now countless – as they will be “before the throne of God.” (McIlraith, 81).
- The 144,000 sealed and great multitude in heaven will stand.



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An Interlude

- Two visions interrupt the revelation of present calamities and future judgment in an interlude that nourishes the hope of John's Christian reader. These visions depict God's faithful people before and after their trials (137).
- In the first (7:1-8), a kind of flashback, God acts to protect his people in advance of the distress they are about to experience or are experiencing (137).
- In the second (7:9-17), a preview of what awaits God's people on the other side of the great tribulation of this life, God shelters his people in his presence while the Lamb shepherds them and leads them to springs of life-giving water (137).

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Angel Sealing

- Four corners: In the Bible as in other ancient literature, the four corners, or the four points of the compass, represent the whole earth (138).
- Another angel...holding seal: A seal is a device for impressing an emblem or other identifying mark onto something to indicate ownership (138).
- Seal on foreheads: In the Book of Ezekiel, God commanded an angel to mark the Greek letter *tau*, shaped like a cross, on the forehead of all the righteous Israelites so that, when God's angels brought judgment on Jerusalem, those who disapproved of the evil done in the city would be spared (Ezek. 9:3-6) (139).

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One Hundred Forty-Four Thousand

- In contrast, the followers of the “beast” will bear the mark of the beast on their hands and foreheads (13:16; 14:9; 20:4). God’s seal on his servants before the judgments begin indicates that they belong to God, are under his protection, and are enlisted as his soldiers (139).
- One hundred forty-four thousand: A symbolic number: twelve times twelve times one thousand. Twelve symbolizes God’s people – the twelve tribes of the old covenant and the twelve apostles of the new (139).
- The figure one thousand, besides symbolizing a large number, was also the largest military unit under a single commander in biblical Israel’s army (e.g., Num. 31:14, 48, 52, 54) (139).

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One Hundred Forty-Four Thousand

- Judah: Placed first because of Christ; the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5).
- Dan: Omitted and replaced by Manasseh because Dan is frequently associated with idolatry (141).
- Key: The seal provides spiritual protection rather than physical. Because of Jesus' promise of eternal life, Christians need not fear those who can kill the body but cannot harm the soul (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4) (142).
- CCC 1121: The three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders confer, in addition to grace, a sacramental "seal" by which the Christian shares in Christ's priesthood.

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One Hundred Forty-Four Thousand

- Sealing often meant the owner's name was put on an object. In 14:1 we are told that two of these three names are the foreheads of the 144,000: the name of God and that of Jesus. The name of the New Jerusalem is still missing (McIlraith, 82).
- The 144,000, then, are those Christians, the saints, the espoused Wife of Jesus, who dwell among humankind at any one time. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit, imbued with the divine nature, and so given the ability to persevere through the tribulation (McIlraith, 82).

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The Multitude

- While the previous vision (7:1-8) reassures readers by means of a *flashback* indicating God has placed his seal of protection on his people before their trials began, this vision reassures by means of a *preview* of what awaits God's people after death (145).
- While the sealing of twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes symbolizes the assembly of the Church militant, the vision of the great multitude rejoicing depicts the Church triumphant (145).
- The great multitude endured trial and washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb - namely, the blessedness of eternal life (145).

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The Multitude

- White robes: White is the color of victory and resurrection.
- Palm branches: A symbol of victory and of the Feast of Tabernacles, the great fall harvest festival that recalled God's provision during Israel's wilderness sojourn and that Jewish tradition understood as foreshadowing the end of history and the coming of God's kingdom (146).
- The countless multitude is engaged in liturgical worship, loudly crying out, salvation comes from our God...and from the Lamb (146).
- Key: All of heaven (angels, elders, four living creatures) – everyone who survived the great tribulation – worship God.

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The Multitude

- In chapter 1, we heard in the greeting how Jesus Christ “is loving us” and freed us from our sins by his blood (1:5). His love called the seven churches to repentance (chapters 2 – 3).
- The Risen Jesus is constantly present to and available for the community going through the tribulation. Jesus continues to use his “blood” for his community. He continues to apply his redemptive power to them when they request it (McIlraith, 85).
- The great multitude in Revelation 7:9-17 are those who have “conquered” – immersed themselves in the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Jesus – allowing the power of Jesus’ blood to imbue them with divine life (McIlraith, 85).

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The Multitude

- Saved by the blood of Christ, the redeemed enjoy the presence of God and the final three verses explain what this entails: they are now before the throne and worship God constantly. God's tenting over them means that he shares his presence with them (McIlraith, 85).
- The concluding vv. 18-17 present the Lamb as a shepherd. The Lamb will shepherd them to the springs of living water and, in John's paraphrase of Isaiah 49:10, the Lamb will ensure that they will no longer hunger or thirst or be damaged by the sun or the scorching heat, and God himself will wipe away all their tears. Heaven is the end of all sorrow (McIlraith, 85).

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The Lamb – the Center of the Throne



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Next Time

- Tuesday, December 10th



Revelation 8

The Seven Trumpets	8:1 – 2
The Gold Censor	8:3 – 5
The First Four Trumpets	8:6 – 13

Revelation 9

The Fifth Trumpet	9:1 – 12
The Sixth Trumpet	9:13 - 21