John, the Evangelist, brother of James the Martyr (Acts 12), was deported to Patmos island for the sake of faith. From there he sent us this “Revelation.” Skies opened, angels and tragedies, corruption of the well-to-do and the blood of martyrs: God’s judgment goes down the centuries. God’s glory has come near and only a curtain divides us. Everything is brought to an end in the heavenly city.

Why does Revelation have the reputation of being a mysterious book, hard to understand and why, for many people, does it have a terrifying meaning? Can it be because there, many seek secret figures and messages which might be adapted to current events as if John had announced them in detail?

If we want to avoid misunderstanding the images and the style of the Revelation of John we should first know that “revelations,” or “apocalypses” were a popular form of literature at the time of Jesus. There was an Apocalypse of Isaiah, one of Moses, and many others. It was a way of interpreting contemporary events wrapped up in formidable images, with visions and angels. The author of the book attributed it to a known prophet of the past, but only related events that were already known, trying to draw conclusions and showing what God wanted to achieve.

In writing this “Revelation of Jesus Christ,” John was expressing what the Lord taught him in many ways by means of his gifts as a prophet, but he also adopted the usual formulae of apocalyptic books. When he dealt with contemporary events, he placed them in his visions and fantastic illustrations. He did the same in the second part of his book, teaching us what history would be. He did not intend to relate future events (the Lord had not given him a video of them) but tells us what was at stake and who would be the real actors. We will better understand this Revelation if we interpret the visions, numbers and symbols according to the rules of apocalyptic literature. Then we shall see that the Revelation of Jesus Christ is neither difficult nor terrifying but full of joy and hope.
The risen Christ is the center of history; the world is the place of the struggle between
the church, headed by Christ, and Satan’s forces; Christians are called to give their witness
with courage.

In this book we can see seven series, each with seven elements, in four major parts:
– the seven messages to the churches, chapters 1–3;
– the fulfillment of the Old Testament, chapters 4–11;
– the Church faces the Roman Empire, chapters 12–19;
– the last days and the heavenly Jerusalem, chapters 20–22.
The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

God gave it to him to let his servants know what is soon to take place.

He sent his angel to make it known to his servant, John,

who reports everything he saw, for this is the word of God and the declaration of Jesus Christ.

Happy is the one who reads aloud these prophetic words,

and happy those who hear them and treasure everything written here,

for the time is near.

From John to the seven Churches of Asia:

receive grace and peace from him who is, who was and who is to come,

and from the seven Spirits of God which are before his throne,

and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has washed away our sins with his own blood,

making us a kingdom and priests for God his Father,

to him be the glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

See he comes with the clouds and everyone will see him, even those who pierced him; on his account all the nations of the earth will beat his breast. Yes. It will be so.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, he who is, who was and who is to come: the Master of the universe.

John, your brother, who shares with you, in Jesus, the sufferings, the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island of Patmos, because of the Word of God and witnessing to Jesus. On the Lord’s day, the Spirit took possession of me and I heard a voice behind me which sounded like a trumpet,

"Write down all that you see, in a book, and send it to the seven Churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

I turned to see who was speaking to me; behind me were seven golden lampstands and, in the middle of these, I saw someone like a son of man, dressed in a long robe tied with a golden girdle.

His head and his hair are white as wool or as snow and his eyes are like flames of fire. His feet are like bur-
I saw someone like a son of man. This is a symbolic vision of Christ dressed as a priest, and with a golden sash as a king. His white hair is a symbol of his eternity. His feet like bronze means that no one will defeat him. Christ appears in the same way as Daniel represents God as the universal judge (see 7:9).

It is I, the First and the Last. By these words, Christ identifies with God himself. In the Bible, this is characteristic of God’s way of speaking (see Is 44:6 and 12). The double-edged sword coming out of his mouth is the word of God that irresistibly penetrates the heart and is always fulfilled in events. It deals death as effectively as it saves.

There were more than seven churches in Asia. Seven represents fullness, and the seven churches then, represent all the Christian communities. Seven is the perfect number and this is why in the book of Revelation, Christ’s name is mentioned seven times, Jesus fourteen times, and the Lamb (who is Christ) twenty-eight times. There are seven prophecies of Christ’s victory with his people and seven beatitudes like those of the Gospel: “Happy those…”

The stars, the angels and the lampstands: these three images may complement one another to designate a church, its bishops and believers together.

2 1 The seven following messages all begin with the words I know. Christ sees, knows and loves his Church. He begins by underscoring what is positive, then he reprimands. Christ remains invisible, but is the Lord of the universe and of history.

The messages reveal the difficulties these churches of Asia are facing:

– On one hand, there are hostilities coming from the Jews as well as from the pagans: they are a test of the believers’ perseverance.

– On the other hand, we have the “Nicolaitans,” those Christians who, not wanting to be cut off from the pagans, accept participation with them in the banquets of the pagan temples where meat sacrificed to idols was eaten: this is a threat to faith.

– The last temptation is the one that comes with time: the love that was awakened in the first moments of conversion was growing cold.

Ephesus comes first since it is the mother Church. Paul preached there for two years (Acts 19:8). Later John lived there, thus extending his authority over the churches in the Asian province.

I know your works, your difficulties and your patient suffering. While the apostle was absent, the Church rejected the false prophets and preserved the true faith.

You have lost your first love. How many small things – difficult to pinpoint – make us feel...
8 Write this to the angel of the Church in Smyrna, “Thus says the First and the Last, he who was dead and returned to life: I know your trials and your poverty: you are rich indeed. I know how you are slandered by those who pretend to be Jews but are not, for they are, in fact, the synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what will happen to you. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you and there will be ten days of trials. Remain faithful even to death and I will give you the crown of life.

9 Let anyone who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches: The victor has nothing to fear from the second death.”

10 Write this to the angel of the Church in Pergamum, “Thus says the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword: I know where you live, where Satan’s throne is, but you cling firmly to my name; you have not renounced me, not even in the days when Antipas, my faithful witness, was killed in your place, where Satan lives.

11 Nevertheless, I have a few complaints against you: Some among you hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak how to make the Israelites stumble by eating food sacrificed to idols and committing adultery. Also, among you some follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore, repent; if not, I will come to you soon to attack these people with the sword of my mouth.

12 Let anyone who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches: To the victor I will give the hidden manna. And I will also give a white stone with a new name written on it which no one knows except the one who receives it.”

13 Write this to the angel of the Church in Thyatira, “Thus says the Son of God whose eyes are like flames of fire, ‘Because you have allowed Jezebel, the name of an impious woman, to teach false teaching, I have thrown her and her followers down to the earth. I will not bear with her teaching and the way in which she and her followers taught and taught others to commit adultery. Her lover and son are her followers. Idolatry is often called adultery or prostitution: the believing people belong to God as a

...
fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 I know your works: your love, faith, service, patient endurance and your later works, greater than the first.

20 Nevertheless, I have a complaint against you: you tolerate your Jezebel, this woman who calls herself a prophetess and is deceiving my servants; she teaches them prostitution and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent but she is unwilling to leave her prostitution.

22 So I am going to throw her onto a bed and inflict severe trials on her partners in adultery unless they repent of their evil.

23 I will strike her children dead and all the Churches will know that I am he who probes the heart and mind; I will give each of you what your conduct deserves.

24 Listen to me now, the rest of you in Thyatira. You do not hold with this teaching and have not learned ‘the secrets,’ as they are called which are, in fact, those of Satan. So I have no cause to reproach you, 25 only hold on to what you have, until I come. 26 To the victor who keeps to my ways to the end, I will give power over the nations, 27 to rule them with an iron rod and shatter them like earthen pots; he will be like me, who received this power from my Father. 28 Moreover, I will give him the Morning Star.

29 Let anyone who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches.”

1 Write this to the angel of the Church in Sardis, “Thus says he who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

I know your worth: you think you live but you are dead. Wake up and strengthen that which is not already dead. For I have found your works to be imperfect in the sight of my God. Remember what you were taught; keep it and change your ways. If you do not repent I will come upon you like a thief at an hour you least expect.

Yet, there are some left in Sardis who have not soiled their robes; these will come with me, dressed in white, since they deserve it. The victor will be dressed in white and I will never erase his name from the book of life; instead, I will acknowledge it before my Father and his angels.

6 Let anyone who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches.”

7 Write this to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, “Thus says he who is holy and true, who holds the key of David; if he opens, nobody shuts and if he shuts nobody opens.

I know your worth; I have opened a door before you, which nobody can close, because you have kept my Word and not renounced me, in spite of your lack of power. I am giving you some of the synagogue of Satan who call themselves Jews but they are only liars. I will

the book of Revelation, white means joy, strength, victory and eternal glory.

7. This is a message of consolation and optimism for those who work faithfully with the Holy Spirit, but who are troubled by the thousand difficulties of their ministry.

The one who holds the key of David (see Is 22:22). Christ has absolute power over the “house of David,” namely, his people. He prepares a fruitful ministry for those who were able to persevere in hard times when the fruits of their labors were not seen.

I have opened a door before you (v. 8) means: I have prepared a successful ministry. There is one condition: keeping the Word of God and being faithful to him.
make them fall at your feet and recognize that I have loved you.

10 Because you have kept my words with patient endurance, I, for my part, will keep you safe in the hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world, to test the people of the earth. 11 I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, lest anyone take your crown.

12 I will make the victor into a column in the sanctuary of my God where he will stay forever. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God in heaven, and my own new name. 13 Let anyone who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches.”

14 Write this to the angel of the Church in Laodicea, “Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation:

15 I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! 16 You are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold so I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 You think you are rich and have piled up so much that you need nothing, but you do not realize that you are wretched and to be pitied, poor, blind and naked.

18 I advise you to buy from me gold that has been tested by fire, so that you may be rich, and white clothes to wear so that your nakedness may not shame you, and ointment for your eyes that you may see. 19 I reprimand and correct all those I love. Be earnest and change your ways.

20 Look, I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my call and open the door, I will come in to you and have supper with you, and you with me. 21 I will let the victor sit with me on my throne just as I was victorious and took my place with my Father on his throne.

22 Let anyone who has ears listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches.”

A LOOK AT THE PAST: CHRIST AND ISRAEL

The throne in heaven

1 After this, I looked up to the wall of the sky and saw an open door. The voice which I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here and I will show you what will come in the future.”

2 Immediately I was seized by the Spirit. There, in heaven, was a throne and one sitting on it. 3 He who sat there

- In chapters 4–11, John delivers the meaning of the history of Israel up to the preaching of the Gospel.
- In chapters 12–21, he prepares us to understand the history we are living and the struggles of the Church.
- To begin with, we need to know where we are going and why we are struggling. Those without goals will soon be swept away by conflicting currents. Therefore, before developing his vision of history, John shows us the unchanging center in which things and events have their origin and to which they return.

A door opened in the sky (v. 1). This figure of speech had at the time a precise meaning: that of a vision granted to the prophet (compare with: “He saw the heavens opened” (Mk 1:10)).

In heaven was a throne, and one sitting on it. That invisible someone from whom light and life radiate is the divine Being contemplated in its
looked like jasper and carnelian and round the throne was a rainbow resembling an emerald.

4 In a circle around the throne are twenty-four thrones and seated on these are twenty-four elders, dressed in white clothes, with golden crowns on their heads. 5 Flashes of lightning come forth from the throne, with voices and thunderclaps. Seven flaming torches burn before the throne; these are the seven spirits of God.

6 Before the throne there is a platform, transparent like crystal. Around and beside the throne stand four living creatures, full of eyes, both in front and behind. 7 The first living creature is like a lion, the second like a bull, the third has the face of a man and the fourth looks like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures has six wings full of eyes, all around as well as within; day and night they sing without ceasing,

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, master of the universe, who was, and is and is to come.

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to the One on the throne, he who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him and worship the One who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns in front of the throne and say,

Our Lord and God, worthy are you to receive glory, honor and power! For you have created all things; by your will they came to be and were made.

The coming of the Lamb

5 1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written on both sides, sealed with seven seals. 2 A mighty angel exclaimed in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open this and break the seals?”

3 But no one in heaven or on earth or in the netherworld was found able to open the book and read it. 4 I wept much when I saw that no one was found worthy to open the book and read it. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Shoot of David, has conquered; he will open the book of the seven seals.”

6 And I saw next to the throne with its four living creatures and the twenty-
four elders a Lamb standing, although it had been slain. I saw him with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out to all the earth.

7 The Lamb moved forward and took the book from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 8 When he took it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed before the Lamb. They all held in their hands harps and golden cups full of incense which are the prayers of the holy ones.

9 This is the new song they sang:

You are worthy to take the book and open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood you purchased for God people of every race, language and nation;

10 and you made them a kingdom and priests for our God and they shall reign over the land.

11 I went on looking; I heard the noise of a multitude of angels gathered around the throne, the living creatures and the elders, numbering millions of millions, 12 crying out with a loud voice:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor, glory and praise.

13 Then I heard the voice of the whole universe, heaven, earth, sea and the place of the dead; every creature cried out:

To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor, glory and power for ever and ever.

14 And the four living creatures said, Amen, while the elders bowed down and worshiped.

The seven seals

6 1 I saw the Lamb opening the first of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures cry out with a voice like thunder, “Come and see!”

2 A white horse appeared, and its rider had a bow. He was crowned, and he went out as a conqueror and he will conquer.

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature cry out, “Come!”

4 Then another horse the
color of fire came out. Its rider was ordered to take peace away from the earth, that people might kill one another; so he was given a great sword.

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third creature cry out, “Come!” This time it was a black horse, and its rider held a balance in his hand.

6 Then from the midst of the four living creatures a voice was heard: “A measure of wheat for a piece of silver, and three measures of barley for a piece, as well! Do not spoil the oil or the wine.”

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard a cry from the fourth living creature, “Come!” A greenish horse appeared, its rider was called Death, and the Netherworld rode behind him. He was allowed to utterly destroy by sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts a fourth of the inhabitants of the earth.

8 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the spirits of those who proclaimed the word of God and were slain for its sake. They began to cry aloud, “Holy and righteous Lord, how long will it be before you render justice and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?”

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the spirits of those who proclaimed the word of God and were slain for its sake. They began to cry aloud, “Holy and righteous Lord, how long will it be before you render justice and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?”

10 Then each one of them was given a white garment, and they were told to wait a little while, until the number of their brothers and sisters and fellow servants who would be killed as they had been would be completed.

11 And my vision continued. When the Lamb opened the sixth seal, there was a violent earthquake. The sun became black as a mourning dress, and the whole moon turned blood-red, and the stars in the sky fell to the earth like dry figs falling from a fig tree shaken by a hurricane. The sky was folded up like rolled parchment; there was no mountain or continent that was not removed from its place. The kings of the earth and their ministers, the generals, the rich and the powerful, and all the people, slaves as well as free persons, hid in caves or among rocks on the mountains, saying, “Fall on us, mountains and rocks, and hide us, for we are afraid of him who sits on the throne, and of the wrath of the Lamb. The great Day of his wrath has come, and who can endure it?”

144,000 from Israel and the great crowd from every nation

7 After this, there were four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds to prevent their blowing against the earth, the sea and the trees. I saw another angel ascending from the sunrise, carrying the seal of the living God, and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels empowered to harm the earth and the sea, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.”

Then I heard the number of those marked with the seal: a hundred and forty-four thousand from all the tribes of the people of Israel:
from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed; from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand; from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand.

After this I saw a great crowd, impossible to count, from every nation, race, people and tongue, standing before the throne and the Lamb, clothed in white, with palm branches in their hands, and they cried out with a loud voice, “Who saves but our God who sits on the throne and the Lamb?”

All the angels were around the throne, the elders and the four living creatures; they then bowed before the throne with their faces to the ground to worship God. They said, “Amen. Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power and strength to our God forever and ever. Amen!”

At that moment, one of the elders spoke up and said to me, “Who are these people clothed in white, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, it is you who know this.”

The elder replied, “They are those who have come out of the great persecution; they have washed and made their clothes white in the blood of the Lamb.

This is why they stand before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his sanctuary.

He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.

Never again will they suffer hunger or thirst or be burned by the sun or any scorching wind.

For the Lamb near the throne will be their Shepherd, and he will bring them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away their tears.”

fullness when it refers to the Jewish people. There were twelve tribes and this is why Jesus chose twelve apostles and we have to understand that the number of elect was the maximum, and that God was not disappointed.

Who are these elect? On one hand, they are the Jews who followed Jesus. They are also those who did not believe in him, through no fault of their own, but who were saved through his death and his resurrection.

Thus we have an inventory of the saved among God’s people, Israel. Then a huge crowd that no one could count immediately appears.

After this I saw a great crowd. There are the new people gathered by the Messiah, the followers of Christ coming from all the nations of the world, who join the believers of the Old Testament.

A great crowd, impossible to count (v. 9). The salvation of humanity will be an incredible success, despite appearances that discourage us so often: the people of God are being formed everywhere.

They are those who come out of the great persecution (v. 14). This multitude of the saved are obviously not all martyrs, and yet John sees them depicted as martyrs. It is because every believer has a model in the martyrs who gave even their lives for their faith. Besides, John is speaking for Christians on the eve of the first great persecution.

Praise, glory and wisdom to our God (v. 12). This is another hymn to God our Savior. Those who sing God’s praises may have already seen, during their lives, that all wisdom, power and strength could only come from above.
8.1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I looked at the seven angels standing before God who were given seven trumpets.

3 Another angel came and stood before the altar of incense with a golden censer. He was given much incense to be offered with the prayers of all the holy ones, on the golden altar before the throne: and the cloud of incense rose with the prayers of the holy ones from the hands of the angel to the presence of God. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with burning coals from the altar, and threw them on the earth: and there came thunder, lightning and earthquakes.

The seven trumpets

6 The seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. When the first angel blew his trumpet, there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, which fell on the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up with a third of the trees and the green grass.

7 When the first angel blew his trumpet, there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, which fell on the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up with a third of the trees and the green grass.

8 When the second angel blew his trumpet, something like a great mountain was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea was turned into blood.

9 When the second angel blew his trumpet, something like a great mountain was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea was turned into blood. At once, a third of the living creatures in the sea died and a third of the ships perished.

10 When the third angel sounded his trumpet, a great star fell from heaven, like a ball of fire, on a third of the rivers and springs. The star is called Wormwood, and a third of the waters was turned into wormwood and many people died because of the water which had turned bitter.

12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun, the moon and the stars was affected. Daylight decreased one third, and the light at night as well.

13 And my vision continued: I noticed an eagle flying through the highest heaven and crying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the land when the last three angels sound their trumpets.”

9.1 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet. I then saw a star fall from heaven to earth. The star was given the key to the depths of the abyss. He opened the abyss, and a cloud of smoke rose as if from a great furnace which darkened the sun and the air.

3 Locusts came from this smoke and spread throughout the earth. They only because it extends further but also because it is the theater of a tragedy in which humans are not the only ones involved. The spirits who serve God have a place in history and even in our relationship with God (Rev 3:3). We remember Luke’s reproach to the Sadducees – materialists – “They believe neither in the angels nor the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:8).

6. These paragraphs intend to show the punishment of the Jewish people who did not welcome Christ: they contain images taken from the plagues of Egypt, from Ezekiel 38–39, and from other popular writings. With the first four trumpets punishment is shown in the very forces of nature, which later will turn against the guilty people. The third one shows the evil forces of the devil crashing down to earth from the sky. The fifth one may refer to foreign invasions: this is the time of the Jewish war of the years 66–70, which culminated in the capture of Jerusalem.

This chapter is without doubt one of those that
were given the same harmful power as
the scorpions of the earth. 4 Then they
were told not to harm the meadows,
the green grass or the trees, but only
the people who do not bear the seal of
God upon their foreheads. 5 They were
not to kill them, but only torture them
for five months. This pain is like the
sting of scorpions. 6 In those days,
people will look for death but will not
find it; they will long to die, but death
will elude them. 7 These locusts look
like horses equipped for battle; they
wear golden crowns on their heads,
and their faces are like those of human
beings. 8 Their hair is like women’s hair,
and their teeth like lion’s teeth; 9 their
chests are like iron breastplates; and
the noise of their wings like the roar of
an army of chariots and horses rush-
ing for battle.
10 Their tails are like those of scori-
pons and have stings; the power they
have to torture people for five months is
in their tails. 11 These locusts have a
king, who is the angel of the abyss
whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon or
Apollyon in Greek (Destruction).
12 The first woe has passed. Two oth-
ers are to come.
13 The sixth angel blew his trumpet.
Then I heard a voice calling from the
corners of the golden altar before God.
14 It said to the sixth angel who had just
sounded the trumpet, “Release the four
angels chained at the banks of the great
river Euphrates.”
15 And the four angels were released
who had been waiting for this year, this
month, this day and this hour, ready to
utterly destroy a third of humankind.
16 The number of the soldiers on horses
was two hundred million; this is the
number I heard.
17 In my vision, I saw those horses
and their riders: they wear breastplates
the color of fire, hyacinth and sulfur.
The heads of the horses look like lions’
heads, and fire, smoke and sulfur come
out of their mouths.
18 Then a third of humankind was
killed by these three plagues: fire,
smoke and sulfur which the horses re-
leased through their mouths, 19 for the
power of the horses was both in their
mouths and in their tails. Their tails, in
fact, look like serpents, and their heads
are able to inflict injury as well.
20 However, the rest of humankind
who were not killed by these plagues
did not renounce their way of life:
they went on worshiping the demons,
keeping those idols of gold, silver,
bronze, stone and wood that cannot
see, hear or walk. 21 No, they did not
repent of their crimes, or their sor-
cery, or their sexual immorality or
their theft.

What has been proclaimed by the
prophets is fulfilled

1 Then I saw another mighty
angel coming down from heaven
wrapped in a cloud. A rainbow was
around his head, his face was like the
sun and his legs like pillars of fire. 2 I
could see a small book open in his
hand. He stood, his right foot planted
on the sea and his left on the land, 3 and
called in a loud voice like the roaring of

attract curiosity and which gives to the word
“apocalypse” the meaning many attribute to it:
all the calamities on a world-scale. The Book of
Wisdom already showed (Wis 5:20-23) that
nature turns against sinners. Ecological move-
ments began rather late to discover that our sins
against creation lead us to death and the media
informs us that hundreds of millions of humans
live this apocalypse. It is not by chance that God
created the world, and it is not by chance that
Adam’s race could feasibly disappear.

Just as in the Gospel prophecies about the end
of the world, the first event was an image of the
second one, so too here, the sixth trumpet
announces a punishment extended to all the
pagan people.

• 10.1 Once again, the end of everything
was expected with the seventh trumpet. Yet,
before it is sounded, suddenly the seven thun-
ders proclaim a mysterious word for human-
kind and it is said that: The mysterious plan of
God will be fulfilled just as it has been pro-
claimed (v. 7).
Then the seven thunders sounded their own message.

I was about to write what the seven thunders had sounded, when a voice from heaven said to me, “Keep the words of the seven thunders secret and do not write them down.”

And the angel I saw standing on the sea and land, raised his right hand to heaven, swearing by him who lives for ever and ever, and who created the heavens, the earth, the sea and everything in them.

He said, “There is no more delay; as soon as the trumpet call of the seventh angel is heard, the mysterious plan of God will be fulfilled according to the good news he proclaimed through his servants the prophets.”

And the voice I had heard from heaven spoke again, saying to me, “Go near the angel who stands on the sea and on the land, and take the small book open in his hand.”

So I approached the angel and asked him for the small book; he said to me, “Take it and eat; although it be sweet as honey in your mouth, it will be bitter to your stomach.”

I took the small book from the hand of the angel, and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, it turned bitter in my stomach. Then I was told, “You must again proclaim God’s words about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings.”

The two witnesses

Then I was given a staff like a measuring stick, and I was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count those who worship there. Do not bother to measure the outer courtyard, for this has been given to the pagans who will trample over the Holy City for forty-two months. Meanwhile, I will entrust my

The secret word (v. 4) may very well be the news that the Word of God became human. As to the small book, it contains new events that will accompany the spread of the Gospel. This means that Christ’s coming does not put an end to history, nor does it bring heaven on earth.

John must eat the book, an expression that we already found in Ezekiel (2:8–3:4). It is both sweet and sour: the voice is sweet, but the task is difficult. Thus we understand that the history of Israel, imaged by the book of the seven seals (5:1), was not all of sacred history but only its first part, the Old Testament.

The two witnesses:

1 This is the beginning of Gospel times. During the forty years between Christ’s departure and the end of Jerusalem, Christ’s witnesses proclaimed the Gospel throughout the pagan world. This beginning of the time that Paul calls “time of the nations” was characterized in Palestine by continual crises. While God protects his true worshipers (those who are measured or set apart), the pagan Romans pressure and trample upon the outer courtyard representing most of the people of Israel who did not join the Church.

This page glorifies the Christian apostolate: its struggles, its martyrs and its reward.

The two witnesses personify Christian apostles of all times. Do not forget that Jesus sent his disciples two by two. The fact that there are two is also a reminder that there are a variety of ministries in the Church. The two witnesses are also the two most famous apostles, Peter and Paul, both killed in the Great City, Rome, between the years 64-67. Peter, the first head of Jesus’ Church, and Paul, the apostle to the pagan nations.

To understand what is said about them, it is useful to know that all the comparisons used are taken from the Bible, especially from the texts that glorify the great prophets Moses and Elijah:

– They will proclaim my word dressed in sackcloth. The apostle preaches repentance and a more austere life.

– One thousand two hundred and sixty days, that is to say, three and a half years, meaning a time of trials. Let us recall the three and a half years of drought in Elijah’s time (Lk 4:25; James 5:17), the three and a half times of Daniel (7:25; 12:7).

– These are the two olive trees, meaning: they are precious in the eyes of God: see Zechariah 4.

– They have the power to close the sky, like Elijah, that is to say that God allows them to work miracles.

– When they have fulfilled their mission. The forces of evil will not overpower them before God allows it. Only then will martyrdom come.

– After three and a half days (again the symbolic figure for trials) they will be raised. They are already glorified by the Church that has its apostles and martyrs as mediators in heaven.
Word to my two witnesses who will proclaim it for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, dressed in sackcloth."

These are the two olive trees and the two lamps which are before the Lord of the earth. If anyone intends to harm them, fire will come out of their mouths to devour their enemies; this is how whoever intends to harm them will perish. They have the power to close the sky and hold back the rain during the time of their prophetic mission; they also have the power to change water into blood, and punish the earth with a thousand plagues, any time they wish.

But when my witnesses have fulfilled their mission, the beast that comes up from the abyss will make war upon them, and will conquer and kill them. Their dead bodies will lie in the square of the Great City which the believers figuratively call Sodom or Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. And their dead bodies will be exposed for three days and a half to people of all tribes, races, languages and nations who will be ordered not to have them buried.

Then the inhabitants of the earth will rejoice, congratulate one another and exchange gifts among themselves because these two prophets were a torment to them.

But after those three and a half days, a spirit of life coming from God entered them. They then stood up, and those who looked at them were seized with great fear. A loud voice from heaven called them, “Come up here.” So they went up to heaven in the midst of the clouds in the sight of their enemies.

At that moment, there was a violent earthquake which destroyed a tenth of the city and claimed seven thousand victims. The rest were overcome with fear, and acknowledged the God of heaven.

The second woe has passed. The third is coming soon.

The seventh angel blew his trumpet, then loud voices resounded in heaven: “The world has now become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. He will reign for ever and ever.”

The twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God bowed down to worship God, saying,

We thank you, Lord God, Master of the universe, who are and who were, for you have begun your reign, making use of your invincible power.

The nations raged but your wrath has come, the time to judge the dead and reward your servants the prophets, the saints and those who honor your Name – whether great or small – and destroy those who destroy the earth.

Then the sanctuary of God in the heavens was opened, and the Ark of the Covenant of God could be seen inside the sanctuary. There were flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a violent hail-storm.
12.1 Here begins the second part of John’s vision. The Church has left the Jewish world and the horizon is expanded. The Church is going to win over the nations, by struggling against the power of the devil. We have the beginning of a series of seven signs or visions in the sky. The first two present the protagonists of sacred history, the Woman and the Dragon, the People of God and the Devil.

A woman appeared. She seems surrounded with glory, but she is suffering labor pains. This represents humanity. At the beginning of the Bible, it was represented by Eve, the woman who sinned. Now we see humanity the way God wanted it to be: suffering birth pains because our entire history is the painful preparation for our salvation. She gives birth to a boy, who is Christ himself. The Savior is the fruit of God’s love for humankind. Salvation comes from God and from people at the same time.

The woman represents humanity cooperating with God’s plans; it is also Mary who gives birth to Jesus; it is also the Church fleeing to the desert, that is, living spiritually withdrawn from the world and nourished by the Word of God during the persecutions: one thousand two hundred sixty days, or three and a half years (see 11:11).

The snake is the one of the first sin, except that it is better clothed. The seven heads indicate the multiplicity of its inventions; the ten horns (imperfect number) state that its power is surmountable. It was defeated in heaven, even though it managed in its fall to drag down a number of angels (a third of the stars). See 8:10.

As to the male child, Satan was preparing to destroy him on the cross, but when he rose he escaped from the evil of the serpent.

7. God’s plan for the world has just been revealed: the Son of God must become a human and rise as the Savior of all people. This mystery causes a double crisis: in the world of spirits (or angels) and in humankind.

The Jews imagined the angels were a huge army and they called their head Michael. Similarly, the devil is presented as the head of the army of rebellious angels, the stars fallen from heaven.

The following chapters will reveal the devil at
13 Then, I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns. On each head was a title challenging God. 2 The beast I saw looked like a leopard, with paws like a bear and a mouth like a lion. The dragon passed on his power, his throne and his great authority to the beast.

3 One of its heads seemed to be fatally wounded but this wound healed. The whole earth wondered and they followed the beast. 4 People prostrated themselves before the dragon who had given such authority to the beast and they prostrated themselves before the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who can oppose it?”

5 The beast was given speech and it spoke boastful and blasphemous words against God; it was allowed to wield its power for forty-two months. 6 It spoke blasphemies against God, his name and his sanctuary, that is, those who already dwell in heaven.

7 It was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over people of every work in history. He uses disguises and many substitutes. However, those who are ready to suffer for the truth will recognize him: they triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by their courage in proclaiming him (12:11).

— 13. Sin and rebellion against God began in the world of spirits. Being rejected from that world, the devil attacks those who keep the word of God, beginning with the best and most outstanding people in the Church. The struggle will never end. Those who dream of achieving peace in this world are forgetting the presence of the Evil One.

— 13.1 The devil tries to stop Christ’s victory and to convince people that, in practice, Christ is not the master of life. If they wish to live, they must surrender their freedom and their conscience to another lord, namely, political power.

First generation Christians lived in the Roman empire that, after two centuries of conquests and organized action, managed to bring under one ruler many different peoples. People were marveling at the “Roman peace” and the prosperity that followed. They did not know the dangers of a totalitarian society; when John was writing, the emperor Domitian had just imposed on all his subjects the obligation to honor him as a god.

Under these circumstances, Christians had to make painful choices. By confessing Christ, the Lord of life, they would face persecution. John points to their responsibility: to remain faithful to Christ and refuse to worship Caesar. A handful of Christians would victoriously face the totalitarian state: the Church would conquer by the blood of its martyrs.

This is the point of the present vision. The two animals represent the two powers that join forces in service of the Dragon, namely, the devil against the Church.

The first beast looked like a leopard (v. 2). It represents the persecuting power of the Roman empire, through images taken from Daniel 7:3-7. It comes from the sea, or the West, from Rome. The vitality and power of the Roman empire are like a caricature of the resurrection.

Then I saw another beast like the Lamb (v. 11). This beast comes from the continent, from the East, from Asia. It represents the religions that were competing with Christianity. They pretended to offer a heavenly salvation, but they did not condemn the sins of the Roman world, especially the corruption of society.

Speaking like the beast. These Asian religions were used, as are many religious groups in the world today. It is a fact that the agents of political pressure in the prosperous countries spend a great deal in the religious domain, and very often in the Third World; it is to paralyze the Church.

Persuading them to make a statue of the beast (v. 14). There was a religious movement behind the divinization of Rome and emperor
tribe, language and nation; this is why all the inhabitants of the earth will worship before it, those whose names have not been written in the book of life of the slain Lamb, since the foundation of the world.

9 Let anyone who has ears to hear, listen: If your lot is the prison, to prison you will go; if your lot is to be killed by the sword, by the sword will you be slain. This is, for the holy ones, the time of endurance and faith.

11 Then I saw another beast rise out of the earth, with two horns like the Lamb but speaking like the dragon. 12 This second beast is totally at the service of the first one and enjoys its authority. So it makes the world and its inhabitants worship the first beast whose fatal wound has been healed. 13 It works great wonders, even making fire descend from heaven to earth, in the sight of all.

14 Through these great wonders which it is able to do on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of the earth, persuading them to make a statue of the beast which, although wounded by the sword, is still alive. 15 It has been allowed to give a spirit to this statue; the statue of the beast speaks and those who refuse to worship it are killed. 16 So this second beast makes everyone – great and small, rich and poor, free and enslaved – be branded on the right hand or on the forehead, 17 and no one can buy or sell unless he has been branded with the name of the beast or with the number of its name.

18 Let us see who is wise! If you are clever, you can interpret the number of the Beast; it is 666 and it is the name of a certain person.

144,000 on Mount Zion

14 I was given another vision: The Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, surrounded by one hundred and forty-four thousand people who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

The 144,000 point to the Christians in the Roman empire who remain firm in their faith. They are “the first redeemed” and they represent the believers of future centuries.

Some people who take everything literally state that the saved will number 144,000. Why do they not read 7:9 where 144,000 represents the elect “of the Jewish people,” without mentioning a great crowd, impossible to count, from among all the other peoples?

They were chaste. In 7:9 the Christians were represented by martyrs; here John says virgins, and the word has two meanings, the same as the word adultery elsewhere: on one hand, they did...
not worship the Beast; and on the other hand, they were freed from the tyranny of sex.

They sing a new song before the throne, in the presence of the four living creatures and the elders, a song which no one can learn except the hundred and forty-four thousand who have been taken from the earth. They are those who were not defiled with women but were chaste; these are given to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They are the first taken from humankind who are already of God and the Lamb. No deceit has been found in them; they are faultless.

6 Then I saw another angel, flying high in the sky, sent to proclaim the definitive good news to the inhabitants of the earth, to every nation, race, language and people. He cried out with a loud voice, “Give God glory and honor, for the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and all the waters.”

8 Another angel followed him, crying out, “Fallen is Babylon the great, fallen the prostitute who has made all the nations drunk with her unleashed prostitution!”

9 A third angel then followed, shouting aloud, “If anyone worships the beast or its image or has his forehead or hand branded, he will also drink the wine of God’s anger which has been prepared, undiluted, in the cup of his fury: he will be tortured by fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb.”

11 The smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; for there is no rest, day or night, for those who worshiped the beast and its image, and for those who were branded with the mark of its name.

12 This is the time for patient endurance among the holy ones, for those who keep the commandments of God and faith in Jesus. I heard someone from heaven say, “Write this: Happy from now on are the dead who have died in the Lord. The Spirit says: Let them rest from their labors; their good deeds go with them.”

14 Then I had this vision. I saw a white cloud and the one sitting on it like a son of man, wearing a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. An angel came out of the sanctuary, calling loudly to the one sitting on the cloud, “Put in your sickle and reap, for harvest time has come and the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

17 Then another angel, who also had a sharp sickle, came out of the heav-
enly sanctuary. 18 Still another angel, the one who has charge of the altar fire, emerged and shouted to the first who held the sharp sickle, “Swing your sharp sickle and reap the bunches of the vine of the earth for they are fully ripe.” 19 So the angel swung his sickle and gathered in the vintage, throwing all the grapes into the great winepress of the anger of God. 20 The grapes were trodden outside the city and blood flowed from the winepress, to the height of the horses’ bridles and over an area of sixteen hundred furlongs.

Then I saw another great and marvelous sign in the heavens: seven angels brought seven plagues which are the last, for with these the wrath of God will end. 2 There was a sea of crystal mingled with fire, and the conquerors of the beast, of its name and the mark of its name stood by it. They had been given the celestial harps and they sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

Great and marvelous are your works,
O Lord,
God and Master of the universe.
Justice and truth guide your steps,
O King of the nations.
Lord, who will not give honor and glory to your Name?
For you alone are holy,
All the nations will come and bow before you,
for they have now seen your judgments.

The seven cups

• 5 Then the sanctuary of the Tent of Divine Declarations was opened, and the seven angels bringing the seven plagues came out of the Sanctuary, clothed in pure and bright linen, with their waists girded with golden belts. 7 One of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden cups full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever. 8 Then the sanctuary was filled with smoke that wraps God’s glory and power, so that no one could enter until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

16 I heard a loud voice calling from the sanctuary to the seven angels, “Go and empty on the earth the seven cups of the wrath of God.”

2 The first angel went to empty his cup on the earth, and malignant and painful sores appeared on the people who bore the mark of the beast and had bowed before its image. 3 The second angel emptied his cup into the sea which turned into blood like that of the dead, and every living thing in the sea died. 4 The third angel emptied his cup into the rivers and springs that turned into blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, “You who are and who were, O Holy One, you are just in punishing them in this way; 6 since they have shed the blood of your holy ones and the prophets, you have made them drink blood; they rightly deserved it.” 7 I heard another cry from the altar, “Yes, Lord and God, Master of the universe, your judgments are true and just.”

8 The fourth angel poured out his cup on the sun and its heat began to scorch people. 9 They were severely burned and began to insult God who has power over those plagues, instead of acknowledging him. 10 The fifth angel emptied his cup on the throne of the beast, and suddenly his kingdom was in darkness and the

be complete at the resurrection: Phil 1:23 and 2 Cor 5:8.

• 15.5 Here we return to the awaited fall of Rome to see its religious meaning in a more developed form. The seven bowls combine images from the plagues of Egypt and various prophetic texts.

The Tent of Divine Declarations reminds us of
people bit their tongues in agony. 11 They insulted the Most High God for their pain and wounds, but they did not repent.

12 The sixth angel poured out his cup on the great river Euphrates; then its water was dried up, leaving a free passageway for the kings of the east. 13 I saw coming from the mouths of the monster, the beast and the false prophet, three unclean spirits which looked like frogs. 14 They are, in fact, spirits of demons that perform marvelous things and go to the kings of the whole world to gather them for battle on the great day of God, the Master of the universe.

15 “Beware! I come like a thief; happy is the one who stays awake and does not take off his clothes; so he will not have to go naked and his whole body be exposed for all to see.”

16 Then they assembled them at the place called Armageddon in Hebrew (or the Hills of Megiddo).

17 The seventh angel emptied his cup into the air. Then a voice came forth from the throne and was heard outside the sanctuary, saying, “It is done.”

18 And there were flashes of lightning, peals of thunder and a violent earthquake. No, never has there been an earthquake so violent since people existed on earth. 19 The Great City was split into three, while the cities of the nations collapsed. For the time had come for Babylon the Great to be remembered before God and to be given the cup of the foaming wine of his anger.

20 Then the continents withdrew and the mountain ranges hid. 21 Great hailstones from heaven, as heavy as stones, dropped on the people, and the people insulted God because of this disastrous hailstorm, for it was truly a terrible plague.

The judgment of Babylon

17 Then one of the seven angels of the seven cups came to me and said, “Now I will show you the judgment of the sovereign prostitute who dwells on the great waters. 2 She is the one who let the kings of the earth sin with her; and with the wine of her lewdness the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk.”

3 The angel brought me to the desert: it was a new vision. There a woman was seated on a red beast. The beast, which had seven heads and ten horns, covered itself with titles and statements that offend God. 4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, with ornaments of gold, precious stones and of being invincible and divine, is pure illusion, for the Beast, the evil one who supports it, passes away, unlike God who is and will come. Rome is described as a possessed woman. The purple, color of the emperors, and the gold, sign of their wealth, cover up its impurity and cruelty. At the same time it brings people to serve false gods and to murder martyrs.

To describe the near future of Rome, John uses symbols: some of them are easy to interpret. The seven hills point to Rome without a doubt. The seven kings are a figure symbolic of the emperors. The ten horns are the kings of the barbarian people allied with Rome. These satellites will be God’s instruments in destroying it. Nevertheless, they will continue as forces hostile to the Church.

The Lamb and his followers will conquer them (v. 14). From now on, every believer is associated with Christ’s victory, as long as she remains constant in her faith.
pearls. She held in her hands a golden cup full of loathsome idolatry and impure prostitution. Her name could be read on her forehead, written in a mysterious way: Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of the loathsome idols of the whole world. And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the holy ones and the martyrs of Jesus.

What I saw greatly surprised me, but the angel said to me, “Why are you surprised? I will reveal to you the secret of this woman and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that she mounts. The beast you saw has been, though it IS not. It will come up from the abyss and then go to perdition. What a surprise for the inhabitants of the earth whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world! They will marvel on discovering that the beast who has been IS not and passes away.

Let us see if you guess: the seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. And they are also seven kings, five of which have already fallen, one is in power, and the seventh has not yet come but will remain only a short while. The beast that has been but IS not can be considered as the eighth though it takes place among the seven; and it goes to perdition.

The ten horns are ten kings who have not yet received power but will have authority for an hour with the beast. They all have only one aim and they place their authority and power at the service of the beast. They will fight against the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings; and with him will be his followers who have been called and chosen and are faithful.

The angel went on, “Those waters you saw, on which the prostitute is seated, are peoples, multitudes and nations of every language. The ten horns, and the beast itself, will plan evil against the prostitute. They will destroy her and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and set her on fire. God makes use of them to carry out his plan, so he has inspired them with their common purpose and they will place their power at the service of the beast until the words of God are fulfilled. A last word: the woman you saw is the Great City which reigns over the kings of the whole world.”

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. So great was his authority that the whole earth was lit up with his glory. In a strong voice he cried out:

“Fallen is Babylon the great! Fallen! This is what the prophets shouted when they announced the fall of the oppressive city (see Jer 50 and 51). In prophesying the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus said: “Rejoice…” (Lk 21:28).

Depart from her, my people! Live in the world without being of the world, do the impossible to convert this society, its aspirations, its culture, but do not alienate your soul. When God’s judgment is made on these diseased structures, be ready to leave all and return to the desert, to poverty, rather than lying down among the dead of history (see Phil 3:20).

MUST WE LOOK FOR A GREAT BABYLON IN THE WORLD TODAY?

John saw the rule of the Beast in the Roman empire and he prophesied its fall. He said very little about what would come after.

In speaking about the empire that he knew, John teaches us how to view the empires of this century, for our world also is the theater of the struggle of the Dragon against the Woman. This Roman Empire created a civilization and a culture that we have inherited. The fact that John condemned it does not mean that everything in it was bad; let us remark, incidentally, that Christ wanted his apostles to establish the center of his Church precisely in Rome.

The great Babylon is of all times and is recognized in every power which pretends to give people a total solution to their problems while enclosing them in their net. We are leaving a century where many have identified it according to their personal point of view, be it international
capitalism, or materialist socialism. It would be false to think that only one of these systems served the plans of the devil: the master of this world respects no frontiers and plays equally well on both sides. Atheist governments persecute the Church but very often the Church confronts violent or subtle persecution from the liberal classes or from dictatorships that pretend to be attached to Christian principles. A Church in which the best “good news” is for the poor will necessarily be persecuted by systems that produce millions of marginalized people.

We are used to a liberal style of life where no moral values exist any longer: what remains is the search for maximum pleasure in life with each one a “prostitute” to the gods he has fabricated or chosen. The apparent triumphs of our liberal world these last years may let us forget for a time its “ignorance of God” (Rom 1), as was the case of Rome. We must be sufficiently alert to foresee and hope for the judgment to come.

SHALL WE RELATE OUR LADY’S APPARITIONS TO APPROACHING JUDGMENT?

We have tried to show that the Revelation is not a description of what must precede the end of the world, but rather that it unveils the sense of history, either at the beginning or the end. Nevertheless, the sudden acceleration of the march of humanity is a fact: more has been achieved in a century than in thousands of former centuries and more in fifty years than in the course of the preceding century.

From another perspective, the density of human beings (more than 5,000 million!) and the multiplication of materials they use have made human life increasingly complex and tense. Each day offers more effective means of doing evil and submitting it to Satan. The important apparitions of Mary in the course of the last century are for some people further signs that we are approaching the end: should we agree with them?

With regard to the annunciation (Lk 1:26) we have shown that not only did God give Mary a mission but that he loved her in a special way. Mary and the Church are two expressions of God’s plan of salvation. To both may be applied the sign of the Woman and the Dragon in chapter 12.

The plan of salvation however is constantly in danger: the greatest obstacles and delays come from the Church herself, so often blind to the demands of the Gospel while she intends to conquer the world. Why these heavy and alienating structures which finally make the Church a benefit mainly for clerics and learned people while closing it to the poor or to the masses?

It is not then surprising that the Virgin Mary uses the grace received from the Lord and intervenes from time to time to visit the poor. She does not bring a new message or revelation that many people expect (that is why many such revelations are forged and do very well). Mary re-speaks the words of the Gospel and in such a forceful way as to multiply conversions. The apparitions infer a failure of the Church: Mary comes to the help of her forgotten children. It is one of the channels through which the Holy Spirit is heard – the Spirit who has never finished repeating the Gospel through prophets and wonders.

If these apparitions have become more frequent it is perhaps because the Church is more threatened today; but if Satan is more active, it is probably because the end is near.
O Babylon, seat of power!
Your doom has come in a single hour!"

11 The merchants of the world will
mourn over her, for they will lose a
market for their goods – 12 their cargoes
of gold and silver, precious stones and
pearls, fine linen and purple garments,
silk and scarlet cloth, fragrant wood,
ivory pieces and expensive furniture,
bronze, iron and marble, 13 cinnamon
and spices, perfume, myrrh and frank-
incense, wine and olive oil, fine flour
and grain, cattle and sheep, horses and
carriages, slaves and human lives.
14 They will say:
"Gone is the fruit you longed for.
Gone are your luxury and splendor.
Never will you recover them, never!"

15 The merchants who dealt in these
goods, who grew rich from business
with the city, will stand at a safe dis-
tance for fear of her punishment. Weep-
ing and mourning, 16 they will cry out:
"Woe, woe to the great city,
to the linen and purple and scarlet
you wore,
to your gold and pearls, your finery,
your great wealth destroyed in an
hour!"

Every captain and navigator, every
sailor and seafarer, will stand afar,
crying out on seeing the smoke going
up as the city burns to the ground.
"What city could have compared with
this one?" 19 They will pour dust on their
heads and cry out in mourning:
"Alas, alas, great city,
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich through her trade!
In an hour she has been devastated."
20 Rejoice over her, O heavens!

Rejoice, prophets, saints and
apostles!
God has rendered justice to you.

21 A powerful angel picked up a boul-
der the size of a large millstone and
threw it into the sea, saying:
"With such violence will Babylon,
the great city, be thrown down, never
again to be seen.

22 Never again will tunes of harpists,
minstrels, trumpeters and flutists be
heard in you. Never again will an arti-
san of any trade be found in you. Never
again will the noise of the mill be heard.

23 Never again will the light of a lamp
shine in you. The voice of bridegroom
and bride will never again be heard in
you.

Because your traders were the
world’s great and you led the nations
astray by your magic spell. 24 In this city
was found blood of prophets and saints
– yes, the blood of all who have been
slain on the earth."

Songs in heaven

1 After this I heard what sounded
like the loud singing of a great
assembly in heaven:

Alleluia! Salvation, glory and might
belong to our God,
2 for his judgments are true and just.
He has condemned the great harlot
who corrupted the world with her
adultery.

He has avenged his servants’ blood
shed by her hand in harlotry.

3 Once more they sang: Alleluia! The
smoke from her goes up for ever and
ever!

4 The twenty-four elders and the four
living creatures fell down and wor-
deeds of the “saints” – heroic actions or humble
service – shine brightly.

At the end of the paragraph John criticizes the
excessive interest in angels that was threatening
to replace the worship of pagan gods; it is
perhaps a new warning against the cult of
personality in the Church itself (compare 19:10;
22:8; Acts 10:26).
shiped God seated on the throne. And they cried: *Amen! Alleluia!*

5 A voice came from the throne: “Praise our God, all you his servants, all you who revere him, both small and great!”

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great crowd, like the roaring of the waves, like peals of thunder, answering:

> *Alleluia! The Lord now reigns,*
> *our Lord, the Master of the universe!*  
> *Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!*  
> *This is the time to celebrate the wedding of the Lamb,*  
> *his bride has made herself ready.*  
> *Fine linen, bright and clean,*  
> *is given her to wear.*

This linen stands for the good works of the holy ones.

9 Then the angel told me, “Write: Happy are those invited to the wedding of the Lamb.” And he went on, “These are true words of God.”

10 As I fell down at his feet to worship him, he said to me, “Beware, I am but a servant like you and your brothers who utter the testimonies of Jesus (these testimonies of Jesus are proclaimed through the spirit of the prophets). Worship God alone.”

The triumph of the word of God

11 Then I saw heaven opened and a white horse appeared. Its rider is the *Faithful and True:* he judges and wages just wars. 12 His eyes are flames of fire; he wears many crowns and written on him is his own name, which no one can understand except himself. 13 He is clothed in a cloak drenched in blood. His name is *the Word of God.*

14 The armies of heaven clothed in pure white linen follow him on white horses. 15 A sharp sword comes out of his mouth. With it he will strike the nations for he must *rule them with an iron rod.* He treads the winepress of the burning wrath of God, the Master of the universe. 16 This is why this title is written on his cloak and on his thigh: *King of kings and Lord of lords.*

17 I also saw an angel standing in the sun. He cried out with a loud voice to all the birds of the air, “Come here to the great feast of God. Come and eat the flesh of kings, of generals and of the mighty; come and devour the soldier and his horse, flesh of all, both free and slaves, both small and great.”

19 Then I saw the beast with the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to fight against him who rides on the horse and his army. 20 But the

This page is John’s prophecy concerning the destruction of the persecuting Roman empire. It was fulfilled and that empire disappeared. In reading this page we are reminded of the defeats of the invincible Roman armies, and the breakdown of this huge body, whose soul was faith in the divinity of Rome and its Caesar-Emperor. Christ did not come to do battle against the Roman armies: a certain number of soldiers were already converted to the Christian faith. (Many young Christians enlisted in the army were the missionaries of Christ wherever they went and even had martyrs among them).

Instead, the victory announced by the Apocalypse was the victory of Christ and the martyrs who, through their sacrifice, destroyed the cruelty, injustice and immorality of the pagan world. A believer’s daily struggle was the victory of Christ. The day came, however, when the Lord brought justice before the sight of everyone: *Come; eat the flesh of kings and generals* (v. 18).
beast was captured with the false prophet who served it and performed signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its statue. The two were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, and all the rest were killed by the sword which comes from the mouth of the rider who mounts the horse. And all the birds were fed with their flesh.

The thousand years

20. 1 Then an angel came down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the Abyss and a huge chain. 2 He seized the monster, the ancient serpent, namely Satan or the devil, and chained him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the abyss and closed its gate with the key, then secured it with locks, that he might not deceive the nations in the future until the thousand years have passed. Then he will be released for a little while.

4 There were thrones and seated on them were those with the power to judge. I then saw the spirits of those who had been beheaded for having held the teachings of Jesus and on account of the word of God. I saw all those who had refused to worship the beast or its image, or receive its mark on the forehead or on the hand. They returned to life and reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection. 5 The rest of the dead will not return to life before the end of the thousand years.

6 Happy and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection, for the second death has no power over them; they will be priests of God and of his Messiah and reign with him a thousand years.

7 At the end of these thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison; then he will set out to deceive the nations of the four corners of the world, namely Gog and Magog, and gather them for war. What an army, so numerous like the sand of the seashore! 9 They invaded the land and surrounded the camp of the holy ones, the most beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

10 Then the devil, the seducer, was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet already were. Their torment will last day and night for ever and ever.

The last judgment

11 After that I saw a great and splen-
did throne and the one seated upon it. At once heaven and earth disappeared, leaving no trace. 12 I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before the throne while books were opened. Another book, the Book of Life, was also opened. Then the dead were judged according to the records of these books, that is, each one according to his works.

13 The sea gave up the dead it had kept, as did death and the netherworld, so that all might be judged according to their works. 14 Then death and the netherworld were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. 15 All who were not recorded in the Book of Life were thrown into the lake of fire.

The new heaven and the new earth

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had passed away and no longer was there any sea. 2 I saw the new Jerusalem, the holy city coming down from God, out of heaven, adored as a bride prepared for her husband. 3 A loud voice came from the throne, “Here is the dwelling of God among mortals: He will pitch his tent among them and they will be his people; he will be God-with-them.

4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death or mourning, crying out or pain, for the world that was has passed away.” 5 The One seated on the throne said, “See, I make all things new.”

And then he said to me, “Write these words because they are sure and true.”

6 And he said to me: It is already done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I myself will give the thirsty to drink without cost from the fountain of living water. 7 Thus the winner will be rewarded: For him I shall be God and he will be my son.

8 As for cowards, traitors, depraved, murderers, adulterers, sorcerers, and

A new heaven and a new earth. The risen body of Christ was the principle of the new spiritual and material universe we were hoping for. Now, the power of his resurrection has transformed the whole world. It will not be a paradise for isolated “souls,” nor for pure angels, but a city of human beings: humans have fully become God’s children: he will be my son.

He will wipe every tear: God dwells among people and he pours his own happiness into them. The sufferings that filled so many lives, the martyrs’ tortures, the inner pain of repentant sinners, all this is over. Such joy and peace, as cannot be found in any place on earth, are finally found in the heart of God.

The second death (v. 8). Before this happens, eternal condemnation. Being forever deprived of God, locked in one’s sin and aloneness: a mystery for us. Human freedom is something so great and so real that God himself cannot force us to love him: those who have consciously and definitely left the path to life, will inherit the lake of burning sulphur.

The new Jerusalem comes down from God. Somehow, people tried to build the human community. At the end of history, they discover that along with them, God was building something much greater: a humanity gathered in the very life of God.

From now on. God, beginning and end, will never cease to give the water of life (Is 55:1; Jn 4:10). Our eternity in God cannot be immobile: which would soon bore us. God is pure creativity

• 21.1 First vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

The Bible began with a vision of the first creation in which God was conversing with Adam, his friend, in the garden of Eden. The Apocalypse ends with a more beautiful vision in which there is overflowing delight in God. Now I make all things new. The holy and permanent City of people has been built.
of Eden: all is guarded and enclosed within the
divine mystery. The wall of holiness and truth
rests upon the apostles: the truth of the New
World was already contained in their words,
namely, the testimony of Jesus’ apostles. The
final city is the goal of humankind’s long pilgrim-
age; without knowing it, the just, the poor, the
merciful, and those who are sorrowful have been
longing for it:
The nations will walk in its light.

There was a fountain of life in paradise. Lost
through sin, people were always searching for it.
Ezekiel had already written that the living water
is the Spirit of God and Jesus promised it to the
Samaritan woman. Now it flows from the heart
of God-Trinity, from the throne of God and of
the Lamb.
And they will reign forever (22:5). This is the
final word and it is the seventh time it is said in
Revelation.

...
whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

He then showed me the river of life, clear as crystal, gushing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of the city, on both sides of the river are the trees of life producing fruit twelve times, once each month, the leaves of which are for healing the nations.

No longer will there be a curse; the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the City and God’s servants will live in his presence. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of lamp or sun for God himself will be their light and they will reign forever.

I am coming soon

Then the angel said to me, “These words are sure and true; the Lord God who inspires the prophets has sent his angel to show his servants what must happen soon.”

“I am coming soon! Happy are those who keep the prophetic words of this book.”

I, John, saw and heard all this. When I had seen and heard them I fell at the feet of the angel who had shown me everything, to worship him. But he said, “No, I am a fellow servant like you and your brothers, the prophets, and those who heed the words of this book. It is God you must worship.”

He then said to me, “Do not keep secret the prophetic words of this book because the time is near. Let the sinner continue to sin and the defiled remain in his defilement; let the righteous continue to do what is right and he who is holy grow holier.”

“I am coming soon, bringing with me the salary I will pay to each one according to his deeds. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

Happy are those who wash their robes for they will have free access to the tree of Life and enter the city through the gates. Outside are the dogs, sorcerers, the immoral, murderers, idolaters and all who take pleasure in falsehood!

“I, Jesus, sent my angel to make known to you these revelations concerning the Churches. I am the Shoot and Offspring of David, the radiant Morning Star.”

The Spirit and the Bride say, • 22.6 I, John, saw and heard all this. Thus the Bible concludes, and we can recall the parable of the workers hired for the Lord’s vineyard (Mt 20). The work in which prophets and writers participated in the course of a day is over. In the first hour the visions with which Genesis begins, and which briefly present the divine vocation of people and the purpose of the world, were written. In the final hour, John, after knowing Christ, the morning sun, has just seen humanity preparing to share the glory of God.

It is the final hour, the expected coming of Christ. We know, however, that the final hour may be extended and that the Groom may come late in the night. Christians are watchful, firm in their hope, even as they face the power of darkness.

• 17. Whoever thirsts, let him approach. We already read in 21:6 these words taken from Isaiah 55. The child becomes an adult when he gives up his unlimited wishes and accepts the limitations of reality. God sends us back to childhood when he stirs up within us infinite desires. “Let it be done to you as you have asked,” that is, what you were able to desire and hope for and believe.

Desire is the way God prepares us for the great things he wants to give. It is our first consciousness of his work within us. Desires that are like the seeds of the parable. Many are sown that soon vanish, or we ourselves cut off their wings: “This is not for me, it is enough and safer to imitate the good common Christians.”

Yes, it is safer to live with limited desires, because desire can develop into thirst. Many experience thirst for God but few are those who can bear it. We call it boredom, incapacity to share social life, and the remedy that people of goodwill usually offer to us is to plunge again into activity and to “come back to the onions of Egypt” (Num 11:15) or, in other words, to love the world. Better keep your thirst and let it grow, and reject any satisfaction that is less than the infinite of God. The time is coming when it will be said: Let him approach.
“Come!” Whoever hears let him say, “Come!” Whoever thirsts let him approach, and whoever desires, let him freely take the water of life. 18 As for me, I warn everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will pile on him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes away words from this book of prophecy, God will take from him his share in the tree of Life and the holy city described in this book. 20 He who has declared all this says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”  

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus. 21 May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all –