

04aa06-Letter-to-Smyrna

by "Sister Anne" | Jun 1, 2017 | 04aa Mary Unveils the Apocalypse | 0 comments



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Good evening everyone!

Greetings to our audio and YouTube listeners!

In the past five weeks we've been working our way down the central column of the seven-sevens motif. The Book of Revelation tells an epic story, something like a long ballad that covers epochs. Last week we listened to our Blessed Mother explain to us that the number 666 refers to three long eras that span centuries of Christianity. The culminating era is the triple 666 which calculates to the era around the year 1998, our very own time. In the past, this book was classified as a prophetic work about a mysterious future event. In the future, this book will be classified as a historical book because of the unique perspective it provides on what led up to that former event. But right now, Mary tells us that the book is a current event. It's a live newsfeed and we need to be watching this news, because it's Good News, consoling news, for those who love God above self, and Bad News for those who love God less than self.

There are some people, perhaps not a few, who attend Bible study classes on the Apocalypse because it's a fun challenge to try to discover the meaning of all the symbols. It can't be argued that it's a great story embedded in a big puzzle. It's fun to work a puzzle. We're a generation that loves to be entertained. Last year in 2016, citizens in the USA purchased about a billion and a half theatre tickets, generating over eleven billion dollars for the industry. And who can calculate how many people rented DVDs, or watched movies at home or on their I-pads? Printed books brought in two or three times the revenue of movies, not to mention the sale of e-books and used books. Part of the boost in last year's book sales was due to the fad of adult coloring books and the ongoing craze for cross-word puzzles. Then there's the exorbitant amount of money that goes into the restaurant industry. Yes, ours is a superficial generation, not unlike first century Rome where the government kept the people easily satisfied and distracted with bread and circuses. However, superficial entertainment brings its own special challenge: to keep up the thrill, the stimuli must be ever-increasing. Sporting events in the circuses had to get beefed up. Fights to the death among gladiators and slaves became the fashion. But after awhile, that thrill also began to wane. What a stroke of luck for the Romans that the nauseating religion of Christianity arrived on the scene with its code of morality, and its disturbing doctrine that every individual would face a final judgment. The death penalty for Christians allowed the citizens of Rome to use their imaginations for executing these despicable morons in their circuses.

The Romans had once been esteemed by the entire Mediterranean world. Cities freely allied with them because of their justice system and honorable moral code. But wealth and leisure gradually brought temptation and boredom. Roman women felt the need to dress more and more provocatively to keep their husbands' interest. Finally, it reached a point that upper class women were not ashamed to wear a man's toga tied at one shoulder and draped in such a way as to expose one breast.

I look around today and it seems to me that I see an entire generation of frogs sitting in a pot of water that's been heating up incrementally. Scarcely anyone realizes that they are in imminent danger of being scalded to death. I was in a cloister for thirty-three years with minimal contact with outer society. One of my Sisters has been in the cloister nearly sixty years. She still laughs today about a letter she received back in the 1980s from a relative. This mother had taken a job to help her son with college tuition. She told Sister that she was enjoyed her work in a fast food restaurant. Sister wrote back quite excited: "Oh how wonderful to think that so many people are *fasting* that they actually have special

restaurants for them!” True story. So, try to imagine how shocking it was for me to leave the cloister and re-enter mainstream society and observe the fashions in clothing and entertainment. I had seen mini-skirts in the 70s and early 80s, but good girls didn’t wear them. Yet today, even at Mass in the lines for Holy Communion, I see super mini-skirts, and it seem like every other woman is wearing, what Walmart calls, “shapewear.” Before I entered Carmel, when I was still a student, shapewear was called “tights.” Only two categories of persons wore tights: ballet dancers and prostitutes.

This virtually unconscious descent into decadence among good persons is what Saint Augustine saw in his student Alypius. When everyone around us is doing something, or dressing a certain way, it feels normal, and it’s hard to resist the tide—or using the alternate analogy—it’s hard to notice that the water is heating up and our souls are about to be snuffed out. Saint Augustine esteemed Alypius very highly because of his strong morals and keenness of mind. In their hometown of Carthage, Alypius despised the circuses and would never attend. But later on, he traveled to Rome. Augustine relates the story.

Although he had been utterly opposed to such spectacles and detested them, one day Alypius met, by chance, a company of his friends and fellow students returning from dinner; and, with a friendly violence, they drew him into the amphitheater, though we were resisting and objecting vehemently because on this day there was a cruel and murderous show. Alypius protested to them: “Though you drag my body to that place and set me down there, you cannot force me to give my mind or lend my eyes to these shows. Thus, I will be absent while present, and so overcome both you and them.” When they heard this, they dragged him on in, probably curious to see whether he could do as he said. When they got to the arena, and had taken what seats they could get, the whole place became a tumult of inhuman frenzy. But Alypius kept his eyes closed and forbade his mind to roam abroad after such wickedness. Would that he had shut his ears also! For when one of the combatants fell in the fight, a mighty cry from the whole audience stirred him so strongly that, overcome by curiosity—but still prepared (as he thought) to despise and rise superior to it no matter what it was—he opened his eyes and was struck with a deeper wound in his soul than the victim whom he desired to see. Thus, Alypius fell more miserably than the one whose fall had raised that mighty clamor, which had entered through his ears and unlocked his eyes to make way for the wounding and beating down of his soul, which was more audacious than truly valiant—because he had presumed on its own strength when he ought to have depended on You O Lord. For, as soon as Alypius saw the blood, he drank in with it a savage temper, and he did not turn away, but fixed his eyes on the bloody pastime, unwittingly drinking in the madness—delighted with the wicked contest and drunk with blood lust He was now no longer the same man who came in, but was one of the mob he came with, a true companion of those who had brought him thither. He watched, he shouted, he was excited, and he took away with him the madness that would stimulate him to return again: not only with those who first enticed him, but even without them; indeed, dragging in others besides.

Confessions of Saint Augustine, Bk VI Chapter XIII

We have to examine our conscience about why we are “studying” the Book of the Apocalypse. We aren’t living in the early days of society, but the latter days of decadence. In many of Mary’s apparitions (such as at Paris and Lourdes and Fatima) She called us to work hard on our own personal holiness, and then when we had become spiritually strong, to offer prayer and works of penance to make up for those whose works of sin would otherwise lead to their personal damnation. What would have happened if her requests had been met with a positive response in large scale? It would have turned the tide of history. Just as the valiance of the Christians finally converted Rome so much that it became the seat of a new Christian empire, likewise the rise of Marxism among Christians could have been turned so that nations would have embraced a new economy cleansed of irresponsible greed, careful and merciful in paying just wages with a level currency. This would have converted the world because other religions would exclaim: “See how they love one another!” You can be sure that the last book of the Bible would have told a very different kind of story.

I mentioned earlier that the 22 chapters of the Book of Revelation contain some 430 references to the prophetic books of the Old Testament. God sent many Old Testaments prophets over a long span of time to try to urge the Israelites to convert. Some did convert, but not enough. In the fifth century the majority had engaged in so many compromises on points concerning the doctrine of monotheism and the morality of the Law of Moses that if God didn’t intervene, that entire religion of Israel would have morphed into something else. So Isaiah and Jeremiah announced that the time of conversion was about to pass into the time of punishment.

Something similar has been happening in Mary's apparitions. Although She still calls individuals to convert, She now implies that it's too late for society at large. Punishment is on the way. Mary now explicitly asks us to read the last book of the New Testament for a purpose.

Firstly, She wants us to be on our guard. The main feature of this Apocalyptic era is "deception." Mary calls us to study this Book so that we'll understand the strategies of the enemy lest we be tricked, like Alypius, and fall into a trap.

Secondly, She wants us to accept our vocation to live during a dangerous Biblical event. God could have caused each of us to be born in 2017 B.C., or A.D. 17, or in the Middle Ages, or three centuries into the future. No one today has the right to stand on the sidelines, to read commentaries on the Apocalypse out of curiosity, or for entertainment, enjoying the suspense of waiting to find out how all the characters will turn out. You are one of the characters in the book! You can't peek at the last page and say "Yay! Jesus' team wins! That's all I need to know! Everything will be okay." That attitude was fine in 1817, but it's not okay in 2017. You cannot be certain that you will end up on the right team. Deception and confusion will go on increasing until it's *extremely* prevalent. We must not end up like Saint Peter who had kept refusing to listen to Jesus whenever He prophesied that the chief priests would be coming to get Him and crucify Him. So, Saint Peter was completely surprised when the temple soldiers showed up. He abandoned his duty and his promise to protect Christ and the doctrine of Christ and shamefully ran away. Like Peter we can brush off Mary's talk about coming trouble. We can put our trust in ourselves, imagining that we would never fall away from Christ. We are holy because we live among fervent Christians, and perhaps like the Apostle Judas we have charismatic gifts and even work miracles. It doesn't matter. Mary warns us that we can fall into temptation and find ourselves standing against Christ, anti-of-Christ. We risk running away to the wrong team, unless we are grounded in deep humility and great trust in God. Peter was not brave enough to follow Jesus to Calvary. Mary urges us to be brave, to take up our cross and go forward to the new Calvary of the Church which the children of Fatima saw in a vision in 1917. Yes, after the coming Calvary, the Church will see a resurrection. Therefore, not every member will die during this Apocalyptic struggle, but some will be asked to lay down their lives to merit that coming resurrection.

Thirdly, Mary wants you to see yourself as personally engaged, like Jesus was, in this valiant contest Why did Jesus sweat blood? In medical history, people sweat blood *not* when they are afraid, but when they are struggling. When the evangelists reported that Jesus was "in agony" the Greek word "*agone*" referred to a place where people gather to see a battle or a contest Jesus was struggling with his desire to save sinners—against his disgust with sin, and the natural desire to drive his enemies away from him. To love to the point of death requires a mighty love. The time of the Apocalypse is an epic event for Christians as a body. The Bride of Christ is about to imitate her master by engaging in a great contest where the victory prize is the conversion of the whole world. Mary calls us to *fight!*

172k-The time has now come for you to emerge from your hiddenness . . .

207b-This is your hour. I am calling you all to fight along with me the final phase of the battle. . .

172l-Fight, sons of light, few though you still be! Many will follow in your footsteps and will become part of my cohort, because the hour of my battle has now come.

254g-You must fight against the Evil One, against sin, against error and infidelity.

254e-In my Church a false spirit, which is not that of Jesus the Son of God, is seeking to spread itself about. Like a cloud of invisible poison gas, this spirit jumbles the things of God with those of the world . . .

604v-Fight, children of the light, because the hour of my battle has now arrived. In the harshest of winters, you are the buds which are opening up from my Immaculate Heart and which I am placing on the branches of the Church . . . the most beautiful springtime is about to arrive.

172g-It will still be the very same Church, but renewed and enlightened, made humbler and stronger, poorer and more evangelical through her purification, so that in her the glorious reign of my Son Jesus may shine forth for all.

408d-Satan unleashes himself against you, because you form my heel, that is, the weakest and most fragile part of me, and because you are my offspring. Thus, today he lies in ambush for you in a powerful manner, and he unleashes himself against you with every sort of temptation and persecution.

408g-The days foretold by the Gospel and the Apocalypse have arrived. . . . You must . . . fight with me against the powerful force of him who manifests himself as the enemy of Christ.

To the Priests, Our Lady's Beloved Sons

The Book of Revelation talks about enlisting numbers to be attached to the false Lamb, who only looks like a lamb, and those who are attached to the true Lamb of Zion. When you are enlisted you get some kind of insignia. It might be a badge or a uniform or a membership card or a tattoo. Those who follow the Lamb-Beast get a “mark.” Those who follow the Lamb of Zion get a “seal.” In either case, it’s a matter of membership, but the two words carry certain connotations. Let’s listen to what Mary has to say about the “Mark of the Beast.”

MMP #410 –The Mark on the Forehead and on the Hand

Italy, September 8, 1989

410d–These are the times when the followers of him who opposes himself to Christ are being signed with his mark on the forehead and on the hand.

410e–The mark on the forehead and on the hand is an expression of a total dependency on the part of those who are designated by his sign. The sign indicates him who is an enemy of Christ, that is to say, the sign of the AntiChrist. And his mark, which is stamped, signifies the complete belonging of the person thus marked to the army of him who is opposed to Christ and who fights against his divine and royal dominion.

410f–The mark is imprinted on the forehead and on the hand.

410g–The forehead indicates the intellect, because the mind is the seat of the human reason.

410h–The hand expresses human activity, because it is with his hands that man acts and works.

410i–Nevertheless it is the person who is marked with the mark of the AntiChrist in his intellect and in his will.

410j–He who allows himself to be signed with the mark on his forehead is led to accept the doctrine of the denial of God, of the rejection of his law, and of atheism which, in these times, is more and more diffused and advertised. And thus, he is driven to follow the ideologies in mode today and to make of himself a propagator of all the errors.

410k–He who allows himself to be signed with the mark on his hand is obliged to act in an autonomous manner and independently of God, ordering his own activities to the quest of a purely material and terrestrial good. Thus, he withdraws his action from the design of the Father, who wants to illumine it and sustain it by his divine Providence; from the love of the Son who makes human toil a precious means for one’s own redemption and sanctification; from the power of the Spirit who acts everywhere to interiorly renew every creature.

410l–He who is signed with the mark on his hand works for himself alone, to accumulate material goods, to make money his god and he becomes a victim of materialism.

410m–He who is signed with the mark on his hand works solely for the gratification of his own senses, for the quest of well-being and pleasure, for the granting of full satisfaction to all his passions, especially that of impurity, and he becomes a victim of hedonism.

410n–He who is signed with the mark on his hand makes of his own self the center of all his actions, looks upon others as objects to be used and to be exploited for his own advantage and he becomes a victim of unbridled egoism and of lovelessness.

To the Priests, Our Lady’s Beloved Sons

Now She talks about the seal,

410o–If my Adversary is signing, with his mark, all his followers, the time has come when I also, your heavenly Leader, am signing, with my motherly seal, all those who have consecrated themselves to my Immaculate Heart and have formed part of my army.

410p—I am imprinting my seal on your foreheads with the most holy sign of the Cross of my Son Jesus. Thus, I am opening the human intellect to receive his divine word, to love it, and to live it. I am leading you to entrust yourselves completely to Jesus who has revealed it to you. And I am making of you today courageous witnesses of faith. Against those signed on the forehead with the blasphemous mark, I am opposing my children signed with the Cross of Jesus Christ.

410q—And then I am directing all your activity to the perfect glorification of the Most Holy Trinity. For this, I am imprinting upon your hands my seal which is the sign of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. With the sign of the Father, your human activity becomes directed towards a perfect cooperation with the plans of his divine Providence, which still today arranges all things for your good. With the sign of the Son, all your actions become profoundly inserted into the mystery of his divine redemption. With the sign of the Holy Spirit, everything you do becomes open to his powerful force for sanctification, which breathes everywhere like a powerful fire, to renew from its foundations the whole world.

410r—My beloved children, allow yourselves all to be signed on the forehead and on the hand with my motherly seal, on this day when, gathered with love about my cradle, you celebrate the feast of the earthly birth of your heavenly Mother.

To the Priests, Our Lady's Beloved Sons

In another locution, She explains that the seal is a sign, the sign of the Cross

MMP #458 –The Great Sign in Heaven

England, October 13, 1991

458a—Look to me, beloved sons and you who are consecrated to me, in the great battle which you are fighting, under the orders of your heavenly Leader. I am the Woman clothed with the sun.

458b—I am the great sign which appears in heaven.

458e—You are preparing to live through the most difficult hours and the greatest of sufferings. It is necessary that all of you come as quickly as possible to form part of my army. For this, I again invite my children to consecrate themselves to my Immaculate Heart and to entrust themselves to me as little children.

458f—Today, I am extending this invitation of mine above all to the little ones, to the poor, to those who are least, to the sick and to the sinners. Come, all of you, to fight beneath the sign of your Immaculate Mother, because it is with the weakness of the little ones, with the trust of the poor and with the suffering of the sick that I am today fighting my great battle.

458g—I am a great sign of victory.

458h—I am the victorious Woman. In the end, the power of Satan will be destroyed, and I myself will bind him with my chain and I will shut him up within his kingdom of death and of eternal torment, from which he will not be able to get out.

458i—In the world, there will reign the one and only Conqueror of sin and of death, the King of the entire created universe, Jesus Christ.

458j—Let yourselves be now signed with my seal.

458k—In these times, the angels of light are going about the world to mark, with the sign of the Cross, all those who form part of my victorious army. Against these, the star of the abyss will have no power, even if they will be called to great sufferings, and some to shed their own blood.

458l—But it will be with the great sufferings of these children of mine that I will obtain my greatest victory.

458m—Today, I am inviting you to look to me, as to the great sign which is appearing in heaven, in order to live in trust and in serenity, as you are enlightened by my own light and signed by my motherly seal.

To the Priests, Our Lady's Beloved Sons

Where else do we hear about the sign on the forehead? Yes, the famous vision of Ezekiel before the fall of Jerusalem

Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, “Draw near, you executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.” And lo, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, every man with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his side. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house; and he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his side. And Yahweh said to him, “Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.”

And to the others Yahweh said in my hearing, “Pass through the city after him, and smite; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one upon whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who were before the house.

Then Yahweh said to them, “Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go forth.” So they went forth, and smote in the city. And while they were smiting, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, “Ah Lord Yahweh! wilt thou destroy all that remains of Israel in the outpouring of thy wrath upon Jerusalem?” Then he said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice; for they say, ‘Yahweh has forsaken the land, and Yahweh does not see.’ As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity, but I will requite their deeds upon their heads.”

And lo, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his side, brought back word, saying, “I have done as thou didst command me.” Then I looked, and behold, on the firmament that was over the heads of the cherubim there appeared above them something like a sapphire, in form resembling a throne. And he said to the man clothed in linen, “Go in among the whirling wheels underneath the cherubim; fill your hands with burning coals from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city.”

Ezk 9:1–10:2

The Hebrew, word for “mark” was the letter “tau.” Before the Hebrew alphabet was codified it was drawn as a /\ or X or T in various regions of the diaspora. The early Christians used it as a mark in baptism and for protection. This scene from Ezekiel before the fall of Jerusalem compares with Rev 7:2-4

I saw an angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.” And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel.

Rev 7:2-4

Baptism did not involve a visible mark, but Christians referred to baptism as a spiritual circumcision in which one is sealed as belonging to God [cf Rom 4:11, 2Cor 1:22]. Last week we talked about the number 144,000 being a symbolic number, the perfect number twelve multiplied by a thousand. It is not literally only 144,000 persons, but a select number of Christians who were especially close to the Lamb as to form one identity with Him. After these persons from all the nation-tribes of the world are sealed:

I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm

branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lambkin!"

Rev 7:9-10

These are Christians who are distinct from the specially "sealed." This uncountable multitude has been saved through the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, and through the sacrifices of those who were specially consecrated to the Lambkin.

The case is different for those marked with the 666:

I saw another beast which . . . had two horns like a lamb, it spoke like a dragon . . . it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. . . its number is six hundred and sixty-six. Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

Rev 13:1-14:1

The text implies that everybody else would have their forehead marked with the 666, even those who will eventually repent and be saved by those whose forehead had been sealed. The Book of Revelation does not explicitly say that the seal is in the form of the Tau, or Cross. Jesus says in another part of the Book that he will write three names, on the victorious:

He who conquers . . . 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 out of heaven, and my own new name.

Rev 3:2

This is certainly an image of a priestly people. Aaron and all the High Priests

You shall make a plate of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to Yahweh.' . . .It shall be upon Aaron's forehead, and shall bear the iniquities of those things, which the children of Israel have offered and sanctified, in all their gifts and offerings. And the plate shall be always on his forehead, that the Lord may be well pleased with them.

Ex 28:36,38

So now we have concluded our meditation on the first five of the Seven Signs in the central column. Mary says little or nothing about the sixth sign the harvest of the good souls, the wheat and the tragic end of the grapes of wrath but that doesn't take rocket science to understand. As for the seventh sign, we'll talk about the sea of glass later on.

At the beginning of this conference I was trying to convey that we need to make an active effort to understand our times through the lens of the Book of Revelation, not only to avoid the risk of becoming deceived, but so as to be worthy to be sealed or enlisted among the 144,00 who defeat the dragon and help save a great multitude of souls. The Book does not call them chosen. We have been predestined to live in this era, but the Bible suggests that we have it in our own power to choose good or evil, to belong to one side or the other.

Saint John wrote the Apocalypse in a form of Greek that contains many Hebraisms. The expression Lord God Almighty is a Greek equivalent for Yahweh Sabaoth. This expression is very familiar to English ears as Lord God of hosts. The normal Anglo-Saxon word hosts, refers to someone who practices hospitality. The English word hosts in the Bible is an attempt to transliterate the Latin word *hostis* which meant army or enemy. The Latin was an accurate translation of the Greek. The English expression God of hosts got lost in the translation. Sabaoth means armies in the Hebrew and it can refer to angelic armies, but primarily it refers to non-professional military volunteers. In a time of war every man is up for the draft, if only he will be brave enough and patriotic enough to present himself. The Book of Revelation is all about an Apocalyptic battle that is won by ordinary hosts who love the Church. The most humble layman, can fight giants, as did the young David who left his flock to strike Goliath in the name of the Lord of Hosts.

What are our weapons? Whatever we have at hand. We might not have professional weapons. David had no training with sword and military armor. But he was good with his slingshot. We are to use spiritual weapons of prayer and penance, but we will have to employ other practical weapons: the internet, the press, and maybe bullets, whatever it takes to save souls from an enemy leading them to eternal damnation. David turned his back on the security of living near his parents and of his work as a shepherd, his only known means of livelihood. We must not be afraid to make material sacrifices and step out bravely when God opens doors before us and we feel called to move forward.

So now we turn our attention to another column, the seven letters to the seven churches. We know quite a lot about these seven cities thanks to archeology and the efforts of Biblical scholars of the past two centuries, Protestant and Catholic. All seven were in a circuit route in the peninsula we know as modern Turkey. They were real cities in the first century and there were real Christian communities living there. Today these are Muslim cities, but I hope there are some Christians living in these ancient places. Irenaeus tells us that:

The Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, had [the Apostle] John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan (A.D. 98-117)

Irenaeus Adv. Haer., III.3.4.

As one of the twelve, John was chief or patriarch over other bishops in the area. Ephesus was the head seat, or see in Latin.

John was therefore spiritually responsible for these bishops. Documents are not clear but it seems that Paul was imprisoned in the 50s, and the Apostle John took over and remained there. Dr. Scott Hahn makes the case, and I don't think it's his original idea, that John wrote the Apocalypse shortly before A.D. 70, under divine inspiration, for the two-fold purpose of warning the Church that the old Jerusalem was about to be destroyed so all Christians should get out of the city, and to warn lax Christians to repent or they would also be punished eventually, just as God was about to do the Jews in Jerusalem. He gave them forty years after Jesus' ascension, to ponder on the life and words of Jesus and to see the witness of Jesus' followers. Many, many Jews came to recognize Jesus as having truly been the Messiah, but there was a stubborn remnant who would have none of it, because they wanted a Messiah who would free them from the Romans and give them a materialistic heaven on earth. The contemporary Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote a detailed Latin account for his Roman friends of what went on in Jerusalem, the factions, the politics, the anger, the desperation, the frenzy. One rabbi after another was hailed as a political messiah, and finally in A.D. 67 they drove out the Romans and set up a siege. David had been a brilliant commander to capture Jerusalem which was surrounded by seven hills. I can't give you the references since I listened to Dr. Hahn's tapes in the refectory many years ago, but I remember him saying that the Jews kept it as a secret tradition that David brought his men up the cisterns and surprised the city from inside. A lot of the landscape is gone today, but in A.D. 70 it was still an impressive natural and man-made fortress. The Romans didn't know about David's secret entry, so the siege went on for 3-1/2 years. It might have gone on for half a century because the Temple was stocked with grain from tithes and the mountain springs provided water. But there was strife in the city among the Jews themselves and someone set fire to all the food. This led to total famine, with unmentionable scenes, until some men tried to escape the city and this breach was what the Romans were waiting for.

Some theologians, I think rightly, say that the seven letters were actually delivered to seven church communities, and that the entire Book of the Apocalypse was received by the early Christians as an instruction to remain firm, and as a pledge that they would be victorious in a world that wasn't always welcoming of the Good News. Apocalyptic literature already existed among the Jews, full of lively imagery and symbols. However, it doesn't work to say that the latter part of the book is separate from the letters. The symbols mentioned in the letters pervade the entire book, so much so, that any meaning that they had for the original first century communities has to be regarded as incidental to the full message of the Apocalypse. Yet, the symbols employed in the letters refer to actual events or characteristics of the city and this helps us to decode the symbols where they appear elsewhere in the book.

Pope Saint John Paul made a mysterious allusion to the Seven Letters in his fabulous Encyclical on the Holy Spirit.

We can say that the rich variety of teachings of the Second Vatican Council contain precisely all that "the Spirit says to the Churches" with regard to the present phase of the history of salvation [cf. Rev 2:29; 3:6, 13,22]

Dominum et vivificantem

I knew that I wouldn't need a full hour today so I wanted to begin with one of the Letters that didn't require extensive commentary. Last night I ended up reviewing all my notes on the Church of Smyrna. Since our pastor is on retreat, I

rose early this morning and drove to the nearest church, Saint John the Evangelist in Clonmel. I opened my breviary to pray Matins and saw that today is the feast of Saint Polycarp, bishop and martyr of the Church of Smyrna, personal disciple of Saint John the Apostle. I hope we can conclude from this that tonight's conference is inspired from on high.

Although Polycarp suffered martyrdom at Smyrna that Holy Saturday on 23 February in the year 155 about two o'clock in the afternoon, with eleven other Christians from the nearby city of Philadelphia, early accounts said that "Polycarp's name is universally remembered by preference, so much so that even the heathen speak of him in every place." Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John and John personally ordained him bishop of Smyrna. He was regarded as the patriarch of all the Churches of Asia, because he had as teachers several of the Apostles and of others who had seen the Lord. We know a lot about him. Polycarp's martyrdom was described in detail in a letter from the Church of Smyrna, to the Church of Philomelium "and to all the brotherhoods of the holy and universal Church" besides alluded to in other documents. Here is a summary compilation.

Polycarp was persuaded by his friends to leave the city and conceal himself in a farm-house. Here he spent three days in prayer. In a vision he saw his pillow burning with fire. And he said to those that were with him, 'I shall be burned alive.' When his pursuers were on his track he went to another farm-house. Finding him gone they put two slave boys to the torture, and one of them betrayed his place of concealment. Herod, head of the police, sent a body of men to arrest him on Friday evening. Escape was still possible, but the old man refused to flee, saying, "the will of God be done." He came down to meet his pursuers, conversed affably with them, and ordered food to be set before them. While they were eating, he prayed, "remembering all, high and low, who at any time had come in his way, and the Catholic Church throughout the world." Then he was led away.

He was met by Herod and his father Nicetes and taken up into their carriage they seated themselves beside him and tried to persuade him, saying: "Really, what harm is there in saying, 'Lord Caesar' and offering incense in order to be saved?" At first Polycarp gave them no answer, but when they persisted, he said: "I shall not do as you advise me." Having no hope of persuading him, they began to speak bitter threats against him and cast him from the chariot so that he hurt his leg in his descent.

He followed on foot till they came to the Stadium, where a great crowd had assembled, having heard the news of his apprehension. "As Polycarp entered into the Stadium a voice came to him from heaven: 'Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man'. No one saw the speaker, but those of our people who were present heard the voice."

It was to the proconsul, when he urged him to curse Christ, that Polycarp made his celebrated reply: "Fourscore and six years have I served Him, and he has done me no harm. How then can I curse my King that saved me? If you wish to learn the teaching of Christianity, set a date and I will explain."

It was too late to throw him to the beasts, for the sports were closed. It was decided, therefore, to burn him alive.

The crowds, including Jews, hurriedly gathered logs and firewood from the shops and baths.

And being bound like a distinguished ram taken out of a great flock for sacrifice, and prepared to be an acceptable burnt-offering to God, he looked up to heaven, and prayed aloud, thanking God:

The fire, shaping itself in the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, surrounded the martyr, his body in the center of it, not as burning flesh, but as bread that is baking. We even caught a sweet aroma such as the scent of incense or of some other precious spice.

At length, seeing that his body could not be consumed by the fire, those wicked men ordered an executioner to approach him and pierce him through with a dagger. The executioner was ordered to stab him, thereupon, "there came forth a quantity of blood so that it extinguished the fire."

Saint Polycarp pray for us and help us understand the Seven Letters to the Churches!

Smyrna today is known as Izmir. For some of my information on this city, I'll be drawing upon a classical work: *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their place in the plan of the Apocalypse* by W. M. Ramsay, 1904. It's available as a free PDF on the internet. Another source I found helpful is *The ABC of Biblical Archeology: Archeology, the Bible and Christ*, a survey presented by Dr. Clifford Wilson, Former Director of the Australian Institute of Archaeology ©1995.

Here is the letter:

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: Thus, says the first and the last, who died and came to life. I know your affliction and your poverty—but you are rich—and the slander uttered by those that say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Fear not the things which you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you shall have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches! He that conquers shall not be harmed by the second death.

Rev 2:8-11

All the letters have the same structure

- 1) They are addressed by Jesus to the angel of the church
- 2) The Lord refers to himself by some special title in reference to this church:
- 3) The church is usually praised for something, if Jesus can find something to praise:
- 4) The church is advised:
- 5) The church will be rewarded:

1) Each Letter is addressed by Jesus to the angel of the church

To the angel of the church of Smyrna write:

Rev 2:8

In #390 to Father Gobbi, Mary said that the angels of churches are bishops. That's not a common term in Catholic parlance, but it can't be argued that angels are watchers and bishops are watchmen.

2) The Lord refers to himself by some special title in reference to this church:

Thus says the first and the last

Rev 2:8

Further below we'll see that Smyrna was renowned as the first city of Asia Minor to show itself a loyal friend to the rising power of Rome.

Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh, the first, and with the last; I am He.

and:

Many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

Isa 41:4; Mt 19:30

The implication might be that the present-day churches of this region symbolized by the ancient city of Smyrna, will be reckoned among the first, even though they were among the last to have received the Gospel.

who died and came to life.

Rev 2:8

The One who was dead and rose” urges Smyrna to die the first death for the faith and then be crowned with life. The phrase “was died” is not an exact equivalent of the Greek. It would be more precise to render the phrase as “who became dead” or “who became a corpse.” All Smyrnaean readers would at once appreciate the striking analogy to the early history of their city. The Lydians destroyed the ancient city of Smyrna, and for four hundred years there was no “city,” but merely a state composed of villages scattered over the plain and the hillsides around. Smyrna “became dead and yet lived.” An inscription belonging to the fourth century B.C. testifies that Smyrna was still existing but not as a city. Then a new period began, and it was restored as an autonomous, self-governing Greek city, electing its own magistrates and administering its own affairs according to the laws which it made for itself.

3) The church is praised for something

I know your affliction and your poverty, but you are rich.

Rev 2:9

Poverty evidently applies to the Christians who were ostracized economically by the powerful, yet they were rich in grace and in the sight of God. Smyrna/Izmir is about 40 miles north of Ephesus currently the third city of Turkey, with a population of almost 3 million. It is believed that in Roman times the city’s population was over 100,000. It’s been one of the principal mercantile cities of the Mediterranean Sea for much of its 4000-year history. Under the Roman government Smyrna enjoyed the eventless existence of a city which suffered few disasters and had an almost unbroken career of prosperity.

And the slander uttered by those that say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Rev 2:9

Jews were an important element of the population; various inscriptions indicate that there was definitely a Jewish synagogue in the city. In A.D. 155 Jews took part in gathering fuel to burn Saint Polycarp at the stake, even though they broke the Law of Moses to do so because that day was a “Great Sabbath”, a Sabbath within the octave of Passover.

A century later, at the time of the persecutions by Emperor Decius, about A.D. 250, the elder Pionios died bravely by crucifixion rather than deny his Lord. His last words were addressed to those who boasted about Smyrna’s beauty, those who revered Homer, and the Jews who were evidently still a prominent part of the populace.

Nevertheless, the word *synagogue* merely means assembly and is often translated as assembly. “Soon-ag-o-gay” occurs 55 times in the New Testament, sometimes referring to Jewish assemblies, sometimes Christian. Mary never once accuses Jews in her locutions. Instead She constantly complains that the big enemy is the Lamb with two horns: Catholics who adhere to the doctrine of Freemasonry. They are “Jews” in the sense that they reject the true Messiah and worship a worldly Messiah, the false prophet who will deceive the world.

4) The church is advised

Fear not the things which you are about to suffer.

Rev 2:10

Jesus finds nothing to criticize in only two churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia.

Instead he utters a prophesy to strengthen and prepare them.

Behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried

Rev 2:10

Satan will imprison Christians of Smyrna, then Satan himself will be imprisoned

And I beheld an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, which he locked and sealed over him, that he might no more lead the nations astray.

and:

Ye shall have tribulation!

Rev 10:1-3; 2:10

“Ye” indicates the plural, not just the angel or bishop of Smyrna as in the time of Bishop Polycarp.

These Christians are like fresh clay that needs to be hardened in the furnace of tribulation.

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

and:

for ten days.

Lk 22:31, 33; Rev 2:10

Ten days was the first test in Babylon for Daniel and the young men [cf Dan. 1:12-14]

They refused to eat food sacrificed to idols.

Will this be a test regarding the Holy Eucharist?

Be faithful!

Rev 2:10

The ancient city was so faithful to Rome that it earned the title “*pro singulari fide*” (Livy, xxxviii, 39). Its services were rewarded in A.D. 26 by the permission granted to it, in preference even to Ephesus and Sardis, to dedicate a temple to the reigning Emperor Tiberius and his family. Smyrna had been the very first city of Asia Minor to show itself a loyal friend to the rising power of Rome, long before Rome had become pre-eminent. Smyrna supported the Roman Republic before 146 B.C. in the Third Punic War against Carthage and sent help to Rome for her domestic wars in Italy. When Sulla’s army was in peril from winter cold and this fact was announced in the assembly at Smyrna, the citizens spontaneously stripped off their own clothes to donate them to the Roman soldiers.

Since 1402 Smyrna has been a Turkish city; but the Christian element remained strong. In 1904 Christians outnumbered the Moslems three to one; so, the Turks called it Giaour Ismir, meaning, Unfaithful Smyrna.

Unto death!

Rev 2:10

Even the name of the city reminded the Christians of suffering, for “Smyrna” means “myrrh.”

And I will give you the crown of life!

Rev 2:10

The Greek geographer Strabo, who died a decade before Jesus died, described Smyrna as the finest of the Ionian cities, “the ornament of Asia.” It was famous especially for its beautiful paved streets. Apollonius of Tyana, a Greek philosopher, a contemporary of Polycarp, also commented on the beauties of the city of Smyrna. Two centuries later, around A.D. 175 Aelius Aristides, the famous Roman orator could hardly find language strong enough to describe the beauty of Smyrna as the ideal city on earth. He likened Smyrna to a statue of Ariadne of Greek mythology sitting with her feet on the sea, and her head rising to heaven and

crowned with a circlet of beautiful buildings, battlements and towers. Her image was one of the most frequent types on the coins of the city.

cf. "The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their place in the plan of the Apocalypse" by W. M. Ramsay (1904). "The ABC of Biblical Archeology: Archeology, the Bible and Christ, a survey presented by Dr. Clifford Wilson, Former Director of the Australian Institute of Archaeology" (1995)

Because Smyrna was also crowned with the special fame of its allegiance to Rome, the city characteristically employed a crown as its emblem. Coins of the city very often featured a crown or a laurel wreath design.

Smyrna was crowned in another sense by the fame of her great citizens such as Homer. The Homereion was a small bronze coin which showed the poet sitting, holding a scroll on his knees, and supporting his chin on his right hand.

The crown or garland was usually a circlet of flowers; and the mention of a crown immediately aroused in the ancient mind the thought of a flower. Crowns were worn chiefly in the worship of the gods. The worshiper was expected to have on his head a garland of the flowers or foliage sacred to the god whose rites he was performing. The guests at an entertainment were often regarded as worshipers of Bacchus and wore the sacred ivy: frequently, also, the entertainment was a feast connecting with the ritual of some other deity, and the crown varied accordingly.

5) The church will be rewarded:

He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches!

He that conquers shall not be harmed by the second death.

Rev 2:11

Today the population of Izmar is 99% Muslim. According to the International Religious Freedom Report issued in 2009, U.S. Department of State, Washington D.C., there are approximately 90,000 Christians in Turkey. Vatican sources claim a total of 30,000 Catholics.

At the end of 2009, Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople, appeared on CBS's 60 Minutes and shocked Turkey's political establishment. The patriarch reported no significant improvement in conditions for the church. Instead, he argued that Turkey's Christians were second class citizens and that he personally felt "crucified" by a state that wanted to see his church die out. Asked whether Erdoğan had responded to the petitions submitted to him in the course of many meetings, Bartholomew answered, "Never."

In 2006 Father Andrea Santoro was killed. On June 3, 2010, the successor of Polycarp, the head of Turkey's Catholic church, Bishop Luigi Padovese, was brutally murdered. The 62-year-old bishop, who spearheaded the Vatican's efforts to improve Muslim-Christian relations in Turkey, was stabbed repeatedly at his Iskenderun home by his driver and bodyguard Murat Altun, who concluded the slaughter by decapitating the bishop and shouting, "I killed the Great Satan. Allahu Akhbar!" He then told the police that he had acted in obedience to a "command from God." [cf *Asia News* (Bangkok), June 7, 2010 <http://www.meforum.org/2907/turkey-christians>]

Pray for us Bishop Padovese! Pray for us Saint Polycarp! Help us to bear witness to Jesus and convert the world!

Next week we'll begin identifying the seven global regions represented by the seven churches of Asia Minor.