

The End of All Things



The Revelation of St John the
Divine
Bible Notes April-June 2012

50p

April 1st Palm Sunday / April Fool's Day

Revelation 1¹

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The phrase the End of All Things could have either of two meanings. The end is the finish of something. It is also the purpose. Revelation deals with the End of All Things in both senses – what creation is for, how creation will finish up.

Today is April Fool's Day. *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God*, the psalmist teaches us. However God is. God is the beginning and the end. The revelation of God is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, Who is the Wisdom and Power of God. The Wisdom and Power of God is the King Who rides meekly into Jerusalem on a donkey, the King of Peace. He dies on a cross under the superscription *The King of the Jews*. The Wisdom and Power of God is the Love which conquers death and all the powers of darkness through the sacrifice of self.

April 2nd

Revelation 1¹

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.

Jesus reveals God to the world because Jesus is God. The world must choose whether or not to receive Jesus as the engrafted Word of God. Generally speaking, people reject Him and thereby judge themselves. But to those who do receive Him, He gives them the power to become the children of God. The baptised, therefore, have a special relationship with Jesus. We are one with Him. God makes known to those who are in Christ what is the End of All Things.

April 3rd

Revelation 1¹

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.

The primary meaning of angel is messenger. In heaven Jesus, God the Son, is also the Son of Man. In Him dwell all His servants, all Who believe in Him. He dwells in us. We, therefore, have a home in Heaven, though we dwell on earth, with all earth's hardships and temptations. God reveals Himself through Jesus, His plan for the whole of Creation. Jesus reveals God's purposes to His own by His angel.

April 4th

Revelation 1²

Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

These are loaded words. The word used for word of God is the same as the word used for Jesus when it says *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.* The word for bare record and the word for testimony of Jesus are the same word, the word which came to mean martyr. Jesus makes God known. The servants of Jesus make God known. God is made known in self-sacrificial love.

The write bears witness of what he saw. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.* We bear witness of what we have experienced in Christ.

April 5th Maundy Thursday

Revelation 1³

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein:

Isn't this true of all Scripture? The Bible is the Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. He is God the Son become Son of man, so that the sons and daughters of men should come into their inheritance as the children of God. The Bible (the Old and the New Testaments) bears witness of Jesus. To read the Bible, to hear it read to us, is a blessing. That is why we read it out loud in church. It is why we read it at home. It is why so much effort has gone into translating the Bible and distributing it even in places where bibles are forbidden. Really to hear the Bible is to act on, to live by the Word of God, to keep those things which are written therein. This is the engrafted Word which saves the souls of those who are doers of the Word.

On this Maundy Thursday think of what it means to act on the Word of God, to imitate Christ. He washed the feet of His disciples. He gave them the new commandment, to love one another as He has loved us. He gave them the Eucharist as a sign throughout time of His offering Himself on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, an offering which would open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers, a death which would open the gate of eternal life. And He said, *I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you.*

April 6th Good Friday

Revelation 1³

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Several times in St John's Gospel it says that His hour had not yet come. And then He was crucified. And just before He died, He said, *It is finished*. Jesus came to be crucified. He came to die, to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. And what a sacrifice that was. Think of the sins of the whole world – the wars, the crime, the greed and selfishness, the infidelities and lies, the indifference to the needs of others, the downright cruelties. Think of these sins in every generation. Think of the sin in your own heart. Think of the sin in your life multiplied by as many human beings as there are and have ever been or ever will be on this planet. What a sacrifice it must have been to be a *full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world*. Calvary changes everything. This was the hour, the time for which the eternal Son of God entered our world of time and space in order to set us free from sin and the power of the devil and death and to give to us the gift of eternal life, joy in abundance. It is in this eternal life that we who believe in Him now live.

And yet there is more to come. We are not yet in Heaven. The world is still a sinful place. The Victory has been won by perfect love but we await the final consummation. And yet, as always, *the time is at hand*.

April 7th Holy Saturday

Revelation 1⁴

John to the seven churches which are in Asia.

Today is the day we think of Jesus in the tomb. Can we imagine how His disciples were feeling? How do you feel the day after the death of someone you love? Relieved that the suffering is over? Numb? Bereft of their presence? Anxious about the arrangements you have to make? Shocked? These are all normal reactions. The disciples also had to confront the fact that their master and friend had been executed. Any beliefs about His being the Messiah must have been sorely shaken. They needed one another in their shared weakness, to be strong for each other in their bereavement. They needed the Christian family.

April 8th Easter Day

Revelation 1⁴

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come;
Think about these words *which is, and which was, and which is to come*. John is speaking of God. We can only begin to conceive of the greatness of God, but I do find that these words help me as I reach up towards some understanding of the mystery of His Being.

God is all this. God is the reason for everything that there is and He gives John a message for the Church and that message begins *grace and peace*. Jesus is God's Word to the world, *grace and peace*. The world rejects Jesus and the peace He comes to bring. That proportion of the world which accepts Jesus, the engrafted Word, is the Church. The Church receives God's message, the One the world rejects, the message of grace and peace. This is the message the angels give to the women at the empty tomb. It is the message the women are entrusted with to give to the apostles. It is the message that the apostles are commanded to proclaim to the whole world – Jesus – because God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

April 9th Easter Monday

Revelation 1⁴

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne.

God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Revelation, the Spirit is the sevenfold Spirit of God. It is the Spirit Who comes into our hearts and teaches us to call God Father and Jesus Lord. It is the Spirit Who empowers the Church to recognise the Risen Christ and to proclaim the Risen Christ to the World. It is the Spirit Who enables the Church to be the Body of Christ and to complete the work God gave Jesus to do.

This is why in the Easter Season we have so many readings from the Book of Acts – the Acts of the Apostles, the Acts of the Holy Spirit, in which the Spirit of the Risen Christ, the sevenfold Spirit of God, constitutes the body of believers as the Body of Christ.

April 10th

Revelation 1⁵

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten from the dead, and the prince off the kings of the earth.

God is Trinity. This is not an obscure doctrine or a mathematical puzzle for hard-pressed clergy to decode on Trinity Sunday in front of uncomprehending congregations. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons and one God. So God is love. His three persons are aspects of His love. The three persons are one in love. The message of *grace and peace* is the Word of God the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This message of grace and peace is proclaimed to the whole world because God so loved the world. For those who receive it, it is the Word of life, through Whom we become the children of God. It is the Word in which we live eternally and the Word which we are commissioned to proclaim both by our words and actions and, above all, by being the people we are.

The faithful witness is the Martyr on the Cross. He is also the first-begotten from the dead. All who are Jesus' witnesses participate in His resurrection. He has overcome the world and is lord over all earthly powers. In Him we too have overcome the world and reign as a royal priesthood.

April 11th

Revelation 1^{5&6}

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

One of the characteristics of Revelation is worship. There are some pretty blood-curdling passages in Revelation, but there are also passages of sublime worship. It is what we were created for – to worship God. We are only fully human when we worship. In heaven the worship is eternal. In heaven, then, we shall be our true selves, *lost in wonder, love and praise*. It is sin which alienates us from God, sin which spoils our worship. Sin is our turning our backs on God and sin's consequence is death. The wonder is that God has redeemed us from sin and restored us to glory through Jesus offering Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. So we are kings and priests in His presence.

April 12th

Revelation 1⁷

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

The Christian religion is a reality. It is not an optional extra for people who are turned on by it. The reality is that God is and that human beings are made in His image. We are judged by how far we measure up to that image, which is love. God really did send His Son into the world. He was crucified as a matter of historical fact. It would have been a sin to crucify anyone. It was an incredibly wicked act to crucify the Son of God. We are all guilty of the crucifixion because we are all sinners. He was crucified for the sins of everyone of us. His Death also availed for all of us. He both shares the sufferings of all the victims of human sin and makes possible the reconciliation of all human sinners. Religion is not merely a matter of opinion. Faith is not a life style choice. The Gospel is the way things are and how we respond to the Gospel is crucial for our eternal destiny, as it is for the peace of this world.

Every eye shall now behold him robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at naught and sold him, pierced and nailed him
to the Tree,
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, shall the true Messiah see.

April 13th

Revelation 1⁸

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord, which is, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

I'm not sure whether this refers to Jesus or to God the Father, but, it doesn't really matter. Everything which is true of the Father is true of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus really is God in all the fulness of the Godhead. If He were not, He would not be a perfect revelation of God. Similarly, if He were not fully human, He could not completely redeem our humanity. Thus the Church's insistence that Jesus is fully God and fully man. God is Trinity in all eternity. Thus Jesus, our friend, our mediator and advocate, was present when time began and He will be present when time shall be no more. We shall dwell in Him eternally. We already dwell in Him eternally and our lives ought to reflect that reality.

April 14th

Revelation 1⁹

I John who am also your brother.

Who was this John? Some people think that he was the apostle John, brother of James, and that John also wrote the Gospel of John and the three letters of John which are found in the Bible. John was a common name in then as well as now. So these may not all have been the same John. The Gospel and the three letters are written in a very similar style, however, which suggests they were written by the same person or by the same group of people. Some scholars suggest a Johannine School. Revelation is written in a very different style, but it contains concepts found in the Gospel and letters of John, which are not emphasised in the same way in other parts of the New Testament. So the suggestion is that Revelation is not unconnected with the Johannine School, even if it is not written by the same John as the letters.

What I like is that whoever the writer is – apostle or other church leaders, a great man who is persecuted for his faith, a visionary and prophet, he addresses his hearers and readers (us) as brothers. Brotherly love is the characteristic of the Church.

Join hands, then, brothers of the faith, whate're your race may be;
Who serves my Father as a son is surely kin to me.

April 15th

Revelation 1⁹

I John who am also your brother, and companion in tribulation.

Do you think we have it too easy in the Church of England? No one persecutes us. Our worries are really just that there are too few people who can be bothered to come to church faithfully every week and that we haven't got enough money. But British Christians aren't poor. It's just that most of them think it is acceptable to give less each Sunday to God's work than they spend on cosmetics, alcohol, entertainment and fashion fripperies. Similarly there is not really anything stopping us coming to church every Sunday and holy day except that it is such a low priority in our lives relative to making or spending money, leisure activities, and even catching up on domestic chores. Some people think a bit of persecution would do us good as it would force us to decide on our priorities!

April 16th

Revelation 1⁹

I John who am also your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.

In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north,
But one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.

The Church is one throughout the world. We are one Body. So we ought to recognise our solidarity with those who are persecuted for their faith in Jesus in the world today. We are one with them in prayer, in the Eucharist and in that we share with them the engrafted Word. We ought to pray for them, help them in any other way that we can, and take them as an example of what it means truly to love Jesus. There is joy in abundance. This is the Kingdom of God. The word translated above “patience” implies endurance, steadfastness. It is what Jesus showed as He went to the Cross. It is what is required of us in the face of whatever the world throws at us. Our steadfastness is in fellowship with Christ’s steadfastness and the steadfastness of the Church throughout the world and of the saints in Heaven. We are all together in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and from this we draw our strength.

April 17th

Revelation 1⁹

I John who am also your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

You’ve heard of the person going on holiday who said, “I thought Chaos was a Greek island until I got to Gatwick.” That’s hardship for us, having our holiday plans disrupted by a strike or bad weather. And we demand compensation too. Hardship for John was exile to a Greek island, exile because he was loyal to Jesus. Plenty of people endure real hardship in the world today – not just those who are persecuted for their faith or their political beliefs, but those who are very poor or live in countries which are at war, homeless people, the really ill. There is genuine hardship about, but so many people whinge on about trivia. I think the reason is that they have nothing important to think about. They ought to get a life, get a faith and spend their efforts helping people who need help rather than helping themselves.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day.

John was at Sunday worship (or possibly worshipping on his own if was unable or not allowed to mix with other Christians). Sunday worship right from the very beginning. Sunday worship not to be missed even in the face of persecution. Sunday worship a duty owed to God (because God raised Jesus from the dead on a Sunday), a duty owed to the Church (your Christian brothers and sisters), a duty owed to the world (for which we pray and to which we bear witness), a duty owed to yourself (because it is through participating in worship that you become the person God created you to be). Sunday worship. The worship would have been: Eucharistic, Christ present with His people in the Breaking of Bread; the Word would have been studied and proclaimed; there would have been prayer and the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Everybody would have met together, young and old, male and female, people of every social class.

And what do we hear today? *You can be a Christian without going to Church... I haven't got time in my busy life.* The Church itself compromises. Services on other days instead of Sundays (rather than as well as Sundays). Services tailored to particular interest groups – young people, families, old people, women, men, and (while never admitting it) particular social classes. Non-Eucharistic services for people who won't make the commitment of taking up their cross and following Him. Holding back on the Bible because people find it boring or hard to understand. Music chosen more to entertain than to build up the congregation. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm in favour of all those things, but as a step on the way. If they create an opportunity for the hostile or the indifferent to hear the Gospel, I am all for them, but NOT as a substitute for the Sunday Eucharist with a Gospel sermon. This is what constitutes the Church. The future for a Church which insists on total commitment might be a future of small congregations. But I don't think there is any future at all for a Church, which asks nothing of its members and treats them like consumers or customers. We might fill our buildings with the uncommitted, but who then is going to do God's Work in the world, work which demands our self-sacrifice?

April 19th

Revelation 1¹⁰

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet.

What do we experience when we come to Church? At its best, I do feel a sense of the presence of God. The words of the readings do sink down into the heart. Maybe there is some new insight into their meaning, or a recovery of what I once knew but have more recently neglected or forgotten. Prayer can be very moving. In the Eucharist one may be very conscious of the Presence of Christ and of all that He has accomplished on the Cross. The music and words of the hymns and psalms and spiritual songs are sometimes wonderfully inspiring. There may be a sense of deep fellowship with other members of the congregation and with those *whom we love but see no more*, and indeed with the angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven. Confession and Absolution are sometimes a wonderful liberation.

And there are times when I am tired or bored or anxious. There are times when I'm irritated with other members of the congregation. There are times when I can't or won't concentrate. The readings don't mean much to me. The prayers are a formality. Even the Eucharist degenerates towards being no more than a ritual, which scares me because St Paul warns that those who take Communion unworthily, eat and drink their own damnation. Sometimes it's me and sometimes it's a world I can't always overcome, but I have to admit that sometimes my experience of worship falls short.

The point, however, is to remain faithful and to worship whatever. There are times when we feel very close to God and times when we don't, but whatever we feel, He is actually close to us. We need to remain faithful whatever we feel. There are a few "tips" for if you want to worship to the best of your ability. Remember the worship God desires is that we worship in spirit and in truth.

Before you even come to Church, be reconciled to anyone you may have quarrelled with. Confess your sins to God. Put right any broken human relationships.

Read the Bible readings before you come and think about the people and issues you want to remember in prayer.

Do the best you can in singing or reading out loud or serving or whatever, but don't find fault with other peoples' efforts, not even the Rector's.

When prayers say "we" and "us", don't just think of "I" and "me".

Really try to imagine in your heart what the readings are about and the event commemorated and proclaimed in Holy Communion.

Be open to the Spirit.

April 20th

Revelation 1¹¹

Saying I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.

Now this definitely is Jesus speaking. This is Jesus who walked about in Galilee and Judaea and was seen to have died on the Cross. John's first letter (1¹) speaks of that *which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which he have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life*. Now we see clearly this same Jesus God in Heaven. Jesus is not just another great teacher like Mohammed or the Buddha or even like Moses or one of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus does not only preach or teach the Word of God. He is the Word and He is God and, yet, He is as human as you and I. *Great is the mystery of faith!*

April 21st: Read Psalm 2

April 22nd

Revelation 1¹¹

What thou seest, write it in a book and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia.

Religion has been a tremendous impetus towards literacy. God wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. The Mosaic Law comes in five books. The prophets and their disciples wrote down their words. Faith is about relationships, relationships between people and God and between people and people. Relationships depend on communication. We pray to God. God makes Himself known to us. We engage in conversation. We listen to sermons and lectures. But writing enables us to preserve the Word and to transmit the Word from place to place. So the Church has played an enormous part in the development of language, translation, manuscript writing, printing and teaching literacy. Now we have the electronic media too, exciting new ways to communicate the Word of God.

April 23rd St George

Revelation 1¹¹

Send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia.

These seven churches are in what we now call Turkey. As far as I can make out, this is roughly where St George was born. People are often a bit horrified to learn that the flag of St George represents his blood spilt on a white pavement. Our patron saint is a man who was prepared to go the whole way in sacrificing himself for Jesus and for God's love for the world. Worth remembering when we think of the flag of St George as representing us.

April 24th

Revelation 1^{12&13}

John has this vision of Heaven. In heaven he sees One *like unto the Son of Man*. The phrase *Son of Man* has at least two meanings in the Old Testament. Generally speaking, it is simply a fancy way of saying “man”, just as we might speak of “every mother’s son.” Sometimes *Son of Man* means a specific figure who represents the whole people of God before the Throne of God. In the New Testament, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man and sometimes He seems to mean the one meaning and sometimes the other. In the writings of the Johannine School, it often happens that, where a word has more than one meaning, you can actually have both of them – and so you can here. Jesus is a human being like you or me standing in Heaven. He has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. And He is also the One Who represents the entire people of God before the Throne.

April 25th (St Mark)

Revelation 1^{14&15}

The description given here of Jesus draws on the descriptions of God you find in the Old Testament. As is so often the case, you can really only understand the New Testament in the light of the Old. There is a major difficulty here, however. We are commanded not to make images of God. Any image that we might imagine would be so much less than God that it would be a blasphemy. And yet it is hard to imagine how we could worship Someone Whom we could not even imagine at all. So these pictures in the Bible point us towards the glory of God. They do not encapsulate God. They do not describe Him. They direct us towards Him. Mark’s Gospel is (1¹) *the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. It is in Christ alone that we can approach God.

April 26th

Revelation 1¹⁶

Surveys show that a favourite picture of Jesus is the one which shows Him wearing a white robe but standing, not in Heaven as He is here, but in a flowery meadow, surrounded by happy children. No stars in His hand. No sword of judgment in His mouth. His face lit up with a kind smile, not with the strength of the sun at noon. And both pictures are correct – the one here in Revelation, the one in Victorian Sunday School book. There is so much to Jesus, so much more than we can conceive. He meets all our needs whoever we are. Worship Him.

April 27th

Revelation 1^{17&18}

God Almighty or God Allmately? This was how some people rudely summed up the debate about what form of service we should use in Church. On the one side, there are the people who expect a worship service to be awe-inspiring. On the other hand, there are people who think the Church should be homely. Too much awe, you might think, and ordinary mortals will be put off even trying to worship. Too much homeliness and you might think there is nothing in worship worth bothering with. The Lord's Prayer begins, *Our Father, which art in heaven*. God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) transcends our understanding. His majesty, His beauty, His holiness, His purity are infinitely greater than we can comprehend. If we are not awed by God, if we do not fear Him, there must be something wrong with us. We can't have much idea at all about Who God is if we are not consumed with awe and the thought of our own unworthiness at the thought of being in His presence. I think that this must be where we start when we stand before God, the *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the Mystery which both inspires terror and fascinates us. Yet God in Heaven is our Father. He is *Abba*. Jesus is our friend and brother. John falls down before Jesus in awe and worship and Jesus tells him to fear not. And I think it must be that way round. First we must have some sense of the *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Then it is revealed to us that this Almighty God is our Father, Brother and friend.

It is easy to see how our public worship can err in either direction. It is not so much a matter of old or new, formal or informal, music and speech or silence. It is a question of how we approach God. He is not to be treated as if He didn't matter (cutting across peoples' prayers with our chat for example). Neither is He so far above us that only a select few are welcome in His Presence. He is so far above us, but He exalts all those (however humble) who come into His Presence in faith.

April 28th

Revelation 1^{19&20}

It's an interesting thought that individual churches might have their own designated angels. I wonder if St John's and St Michael's do. It is an interesting thought and I think quite likely. We know that children have guardian angels. Why not adult individuals and corporate bodies?

April 29th

Revelation 2¹⁻⁷

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

We're in difficulties here in that we don't know much about the seven churches which receive these messages from God. We can only guess at what they're being commended for and what they're being warned about. Most frustratingly, we don't know who the Nicolaitanes were or what they had done wrong. But Bible Study isn't a history lesson. What we're trying to discover is what the Spirit is saying to the Churches today. What is the Spirit saying to the churches we belong to? I guess the Ephesians have faced discouragement, possibly persecution, and they have come through it. They have had to deal with false teaching. So, when there are disagreements in the Church, how do you recognise who is right? And how do you deal with people you believe to be wrong? The Ephesians appear to have got this right, but how can we? I would look to Scripture, but the Bible isn't clear on every matter we might argue over within the Church. I would respect the leadership – but no human leader (even church leader) is infallible. I would be sorry if people left or if churches divided. Unity is an underlying principle of the Body of Christ. But I recognise that it is not always possible all the time to keep everybody on board. One thing we are sure about is that love is the guide and what is not of love is not of God. The Ephesians have left their first love. Love can grow cold whether in a marriage or in matters of faith. Love must develop. You won't be on honeymoon for all your married life. Love develops but it need not become any less.

April 30th

Revelation 2⁸⁻¹¹

The Smyrnans are poor in material terms, but rich in what matters, the knowledge of God. (Better than the other way round!) They are facing persecution, but they need not be afraid because Jesus has overcome the power of death. They have been in dispute with people who claim to be Jews. One of the problems of the early Church was how to understand the Old Testament in the light of Jesus. What was binding on Christians? What was the relationship between Gentile and Jewish Christians or between Christians and Jews? We still have to decide how much of our inherited tradition is the essential foundation of our present day mission and how much is a millstone round our necks.

1st May (S Philip & S James)

Revelation 2¹²⁻¹⁷

Satan's seat at Pergamos is a temple dedicated to the worship of the Roman emperor. The Church there may have been facing persecution for Christians' refusal to worship the emperor. Roman citizens were supposed to offer incense to the emperor's image and acknowledge Caesar as *dominus et deus*, which means, *Lord and God*. There is only one Person Whom Christians can ever acknowledge as Lord and God. It would appear that the Nicolaitanes are the same people who hold the *doctrine of Balaam*. It appears that their sin is to accommodate their faith to the world in which they live to escape censure and persecution and for their own profit. The question, then, is are we ready to compromise with the world in which we live in order to protect our own interests? The message is that those who compromise will be punished, but Christ has a special place for those who stick with Him no matter what.

2nd May

Revelation 2¹⁸⁻²⁹

Eating meat offered to idols is probably the compromise with the world on offer at Thyatira. Sharing common meals with people is a way of saying you belong together. Romantic suppers, family dinners, civic banquets, they are all about sharing food within the group to which you wish to belong. Eating food sacrificed to gods was a kind of table fellowship with the gods. So if you won't (as a Christian) eat food offered in sacrifice when you are invited for a meal or on a civic occasion, you are marking yourself out as not belonging. You are denying the household or civic gods. You are saying that you don't want to be integrated into their families or into the wider community. You are standing out, an outsider and outsiders are resented and seen as a threat. Food isn't the only bonding ritual. Gossip, telling jokes, fashion, the way we speak, taste in music and art, choice of hobbies, lots of things, mark us out as belonging to this or that social grouping. We feel out of it if we don't get the jokes or if we stand aloof from the gossip, try not to swear like everyone else, can't see why everyone likes a particular record. On the one hand, we might think it is wrong to be exclusive, being friends only with people like ourselves. On the other we might ask ourselves whether we compromise our faith in order to keep in with our friends and colleagues?

3rd May

Revelation 3¹⁻⁶

In the days of the British Empire we sent missionaries all over the world. Some of them endured great hardship. Some were rejected and persecuted. But some founded great churches, which are flourishing today, normally now led by indigenous bishops and ministers. Some of these overseas churches are in very poor countries. Some of them face persecution. But many of them are rapidly growing. Their worship services last for hours and so does the preaching. They are not afraid to share their faith. They are active in pastoral and charitable work. They offer education and health care. They exert a transformative effect on the countries where they are located. In the second half of the twentieth century Christians from those churches started to come to England either as visitors or to live. They expected to be warmly welcomed into lively churches. Sadly these “third world” Christians were often disappointed. They found churches wary of welcoming “coloureds” and small, mainly elderly congregations apparently more worried about the roof fund than evangelism. They expected that the Mother Church would be very much bigger and better than their own churches and that she would welcome her grown up children as equals within the family.

4th May

Revelation 3⁷⁻¹³

The Church at Philadelphia has much the same problems as the other Churches of Asia. It has, however, remained faithful, even though it is weak. Does that describe us? The point is that Jesus is both faithful and strong and those who trust in Him will overcome.

5th May

Revelation 3¹⁴⁻¹⁹

Laodicea tends to be the Church which critics compare with the C of E – rich in goods (and we are relative to most of the rest of the world) but perhaps poor in spiritual things. (People who think they can do without Holy Communion because they’d rather go shopping hardly match up to people who risk arrest, imprisonment and death for their faith.) *Neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm.* And yet, even if this is true, Jesus invites the Laodiceans to come to Him for healing. He does chasten us, but He will heal us if we return to Him.

6th May

Revelation 3²⁰⁻²²

I have several pictures of this scene – the Holman Hunt version – including an embroidery my mother made of it. It is deservedly much loved. Jesus the Light of the World stands at the door. The door is surrounded by vegetation. He knocks. He would like to come in and dine. But the handle is on the inside of the door. We have to open it and let Jesus in and, if we do, we shall enjoy table fellowship with Him for ever.

Coming back to what I said about sacrifice a few days ago, in the Holy Communion we dine with our God and with other Christians. We are in table fellowship with Him and with one another. We belong to Him and He belongs to us and we belong to one another. Jesus is the sacrifice and the priest. All this proclaims His Death until He comes and is a foretaste of those good things which God has laid up for those who love Him. This is why I am absolutely adamant that the Sunday Eucharist cannot be replaced by Mattins or a mission service or a children's service, even if they might bring in more people. We can (and possibly should) do all those things as well as celebrating the Eucharist, but we let ourselves down as a Church if we ever do them instead of the service Jesus gave us.

Alleluia, King eternal, thee the Lord of lords we own,
Alleluia, born of Mary, earth thy footstool, heaven thy throne,
Thou within the veil hast entered, robed in flesh our great High
Priest,
Thou on earth both priest and victim in the Eucharistic feast.

7th May

Revelation 4¹⁻¹¹

It isn't always easy to decide which books to look at in these studies. It's probably best not to tackle what people might consider boring or difficult. I don't want to be too repetitive and I do want to cover the breadth of Scripture – Old and New Testaments. I think two things led to the choice of Revelation this quarter. One was an article I read about the end being not a thing, but a person – Jesus. The other was either this chapter or its twin brother in chapter 5. As we have said, even the Bible can only give us an infinitesimally fraction of the truth about the glory of God, but what it can give us is so sublime you have to read it.

8th May

Revelation 4¹⁻⁵

Theophany is the word for when God reveals Himself. There was a theophany at Mt Sinai, when Moses ascended the mountain to receive the Law. Isaiah experienced a theophany when he *saw the LORD, high and lifted up*, an experience which led him to say, *Here am I Lord. Send me*. The prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah were granted theophanies and there are elements of all these Old Testament theophanies in the vision which John is granted here. God builds on what we already know of Him. The 24 elders presumably represent the old and new Israel (12 patriarchs {and the tribes descended from them} and 12 apostles).

Good Friday last year I tried to represent the Holy Spirit with 7 candles around the font. The Holy Spirit was present at Creation, bringing order out of chaos, light out of darkness and land out of the primeval oceans. We are born again by the Spirit in Baptism. In Zechariah 4, seven lamps are supplied by two olive trees, representing the kingly messiah and the high priestly messiah. So Jesus anoints His Church with the Holy Spirit to enable us to fulfil our vocation as lights of the world.

9th May

Revelation 4⁶⁻¹¹

Traditionally, the four creatures have been interpreted as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the four evangelists. This interpretation is, however, by no means universal! Whatever they represent, the point is their worship of God. Likewise the 24 elders. The point is worship. This is the worship of heaven, in which we participate.

Therefore, with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying, Holy, holy, holy.

To participate in the worship of heaven is our *duty and our joy*. It is a foretaste and guarantor, an earnest, of our inheritance in heaven. This is true of all worshipped offered *in spirit and in truth*, but it is especially the case when we do what Jesus told us to do and break bread together in remembrance of Him.

10th May

Revelation 5¹⁻⁷

Chapter 4 finished with glorifying God for Creation. Thanksgiving is worshipping God for what He has done. Praise is worshipping God because He is. There is, however, a huge overlap between thanksgiving, praise and worship. God's work is also all of a piece. It helps us to think of Creation (God making and sustaining the physical universe including us), Salvation (God reconciling this errant world – especially us – to Himself) and Sanctification (God purifying His redeemed Creation). Creation, Salvation and Sanctification are all, however, simply aspects of the single purpose of God, which is love. Chapter 4 culminated in praise for Creation. Chapter 5 turns to Salvation.

The lion shall lie down with the lamb. But this lamb is a lion. He is also a root. He is standing as though slain, but slain lambs don't stand. He has seven horns, signs of power, which again you don't associate with lambs. He also has seven eyes, which have the same significance as the seven lamps in the last chapter – the seven fold Spirit of God. The point is that no image is adequate to say all that there is to say about Jesus. So John multiplies images, all of which tell us something about Him. He is the fulfilment of the promises to David. He is the eternal King. He is the sacrifice for the sins of the world and the Passover Lamb, Whose Blood protects His people from the angel of death, when they are set free from slavery to set off for the Promised Land. He is powerful, but His power is the power of self-sacrificial love. His mission is accomplished in His Death, but God raises Him from the dead. Through Him, and specifically through His Death, the Holy Spirit is active in the Church and in the world and in the individual believer. He is alpha and omega, the beginning and the end.

Some people find meditation on the rolls of Jesus inspires them to worship.

Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest and King,
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.

11th May

Revelation 5⁸

Vials full of odours which are the prayers of the saints.

The Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches have developed an elaborate and magnificent ritual in an attempt both to glorify God with the best of our architecture, art and music on earth, and to inspire the worshippers with a vision of heaven.

Protestants (and some RCs and Orthodox) might object to this on three grounds: the money spent on art and architecture could have been given to the poor; it is possible to concentrate so much on getting the ritual (and the building right) that actual worship *in spirit and in truth* gets shoved to one side; God is so great that any attempt to represent His glory must fall so far short that it would be better to maintain silence in the presence of the *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

Very few congregations in practice are able to worship without words or music in entirely unadorned premises. So the question becomes how much music and what kind; what words; what would be an appropriate environment for worship? I've heard it jokingly suggested that at the Reformation some Protestants (like Lutherans and Anglicans) were prepared to use anything in worship which is mentioned in the Bible, whereas others were happy to use anything mentioned in the Bible so long as the RCs didn't use it!

Which makes peoples' reaction to incense interesting. It is mentioned in the Bible even in descriptions of the worship of heaven like this. Many churches use incense as a valued part of their worship, whereas in other churches incense is anathema. There doesn't seem to be any middle ground. Incense is the ecclesiastical equivalent of Marmite!

I once read in a bit of Anglo-Catholic propaganda that there are only two smells in the next life - incense or sulphur – and we had better get used to one or the other. You may or may not find incense conducive to worship (I'm not all that keen myself) but I do think that it vital, in this as in other differences of opinion in the Church, that love takes precedence in all our relationships with our fellow Christians.

12th May

Revelation 5^{9&10}

*For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God, out of every,
kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*

This is basic Christianity. It's what we all know if we are Christians. But let the meaning sink in. What was yours and my purchase price? The Blood of Jesus. What does that mean for the love that we ought to offer back to Him? And who is eligible for this blessing? Absolutely everyone who comes to Him in faith. All Christians stand before God on the same terms. So there should be no divisions, no hierarchy of worth. We are all forgiven sinners, united in the love of God. What does that mean for our commitment to God and our relationships with all our fellow Christians?

*And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign
on the earth.*

Esau sold his birthright to his twin brother Jacob for a mess of pottage. He didn't value his privileged status as the first born son. Things went from bad to worse for Esau and indeed for his descendants. Esau despising his birthright was still remembered nearly 1,000 years later in the New Testament (Hebrews 12¹⁶) as an example of the terrible consequences of not valuing what God has given you. The Israelites were all to be kings and priests under the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant, we Christians are kings and priests. I am not sure exactly what this means, but it is something very special to be a Christian. We are privileged to be Christians. It is something to live up to. We mustn't despise our birthright as the children of God by treating our faith casually, Jesus as just one thing in our lives, Who has to be fitted round all the other things we want to do.

13th May

Revelation 5¹¹⁻¹⁴

The Lamb of God receives the same worship as God, because the Lamb is God. In a way, He is entitled to double honour. He is to be worshipped simply because He is God in all eternity. But also He is to be worshipped because He entered time and space and was obedient even to death on the Cross. He is worshipped for Who He is and for what He has done.

14th May

Revelation 6¹

It is all written in the Book. God has a plan which is unfolded in Creation, Salvation and Sanctification. Things do not happen merely by chance. Neither is the devil in charge. Neither can humanity ultimately thwart the Will of God. There is a plan. Our part is to keep the faith and trust God to bring His loving purposes to pass.

15th May

Revelation 6²⁻⁸

These are the famous four horseman of the Apocalypse. (Apocalypse is Greek for Revelation). John's vision foresees conquering armies, wars, famine and disease. The world has rejected its God and the kingdoms of this world are falling apart. This is the consequence of human sin, of the free choices made by human beings to reject God's perfect Law of love. And yet God has it all in hand. Everything that happens (even humanity's rejection of God) ultimately conspires to bring about God's purposes of justice and mercy. Our part is to keep the faith and trust God to bring His loving purposes to pass.

For 2,000 years people have speculated on how this vision relates to historical events. Is it about the trials facing the Roman Empire in John's own day? Or Rome's dissolution 500 years after John was on Patmos? Or the Crusades and the Black Death? Or the first World War? Or the threat of nuclear conflagration during the Cold War? Or the consequences of global warming? Or are they about horrors yet to come at the very end of the world? Jesus tells us that even He whilst on earth did not know the date of the End. So we have to keep our speculation in check. However I think it is legitimate to apply the message of these visions to the wars and famines and plagues and all the troubles of every generation and, at the same time, to see them as prophecy of the end of all things. Jesus said that all these things would come to pass, but, as they do, we must look up, because our redemption draweth nigh. Our part is to keep the faith and trust God to bring His loving purposes to pass.

16th May

Revelation 6^{9&10}

How long, O Lord?

One of my favourite hymns is *The Church's One Foundation*. I haven't got space here to enthuse as much as I would like to about the wonderful teaching contained within its words about the Church as the Body of Christ, constituted by His love. But there is a bit of an odd story about how it came to be written. There was a certain C19 Bishop Colenso of Natal in South Africa. He caused a great deal of controversy by his liberal views on some theological matters and the author of this hymn (Samuel Stone) felt that people like Colenso were a threat to the Church and wrote the hymn as an expression of faith in orthodoxy. I believe the hymn used to include a verse specifically condemning Colenso! When the Church is under threat we need to cleave to the faith once delivered to the saints, to trust Jesus.

There is, however, something of a twist to the story. Colenso is now mainly remembered as a good man. Many of his so-called "liberal" views are now regarded as unremarkable. He did a great deal for the poor and for racial harmony in South Africa. So probably Colenso didn't pose the threat that many Victorian Christians in England thought he did. When Christians are fearful for the Church, it very often turns out that their fears are exaggerated. It is, after all, God's Church.

17th May Ascension Day

Revelation 6¹¹

If you were faced with the choice between a martyr's death and renouncing your faith, you would want to be confident of your inheritance in Heaven. Stephen, the first martyr, when he was about to be stoned, saw Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God. He commended himself to Jesus and prayed for the forgiveness of his persecutors. So Stephen, the protomartyr, set an example to all the Christian martyrs. Jesus ascended into Heaven and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. We surely have a home in Heaven waiting for us and, in the mean time, our calling is to live our loves on earth in the light of eternity. In other words we are called to live on earth as though we were already in heaven. Our calling is to live lives of love.

18th May

Revelation 6¹²⁻¹⁷

Sun and moon shall darkened be, stars shall fall, the heavens shall flee;

Christ will then like lightning shine, all will see his glorious sign;

All will then the trumpet hear, all will see the Judge appear:

Thou by all wilt be confest, God in Man made manifest.

To be honest, I'm not always confident that we either think about what we are singing or understand what it means. This great Epiphany hymn celebrates a variety of theophanies, manifestations of God in Jesus Christ. The verse above is obviously based on today's Revelation reading. I see these verses both as a metaphor for the terrible things that have happened, are happening and will happen in human history, and as a slightly more literal description of the End of all things when time and space will be no more and heaven and earth shall pass away. What we have to cling onto is that whatever happens in history and whatever happens at the end, there is Jesus, our friend and brother.

Grant us grace to see thee, Lord, mirrored in thy holy word;

May we imitate thee now, and be pure as pure art thou;

That we like to thee may be at thy great Epiphany;

And may praise thee, ever blest, God in Man made manifest.

19th May

Revelation 7¹⁻³

The visions in Revelation come in sequences. There are seven seals. Before the seventh, which is the most terrifying, God's people are sealed. God loves and protects His people. We ought not to be afraid. Even if our earthly bodies are destroyed, we have a guaranteed inheritance in heaven.

20th May

Revelation 7⁴

This is where the Jehovah's witnesses get the idea that there are only 144,000 who will be saved, a belief they had to modify when the number of JWs exceeded 144,000. It's a good principle that you interpret Scripture in the light of Scripture (and of the teaching of the Church). You don't take things out of context. You do interpret the difficult bits in the light of what is perfectly plain. Whatever is meant by the 144,000, it is not a limit on the number who will be saved. See v9.

21st May

Revelation 7⁴⁻¹⁷

There is a story about a young man who started going to an evangelical church. After a few weeks, someone came up to him and asked him if he had been washed in the Blood of the Lamb. Rather horror-stricken, the young man asked when that particular ritual was carried out. This story is meant to illustrate how we can put off people who are new to the Church if we use strange language and concepts which they don't understand.

That is a good point and one to keep in mind. We also have to be alert to the opposite danger, however, that we abandon these traditional images of sacred truth and find ourselves without any language at all to convey what they illustrate. Given that we live in a world in which religion isn't much talked about, the words we use every day might not be adequate to convey religious truth. *Because I am worth it* is the very opposite of *We offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice*. We want the *Because I am worth it* generation to understand what we mean by *We offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice*, but can we do that without the concept of sacrifice? The images in the Bible and our hymns and prayers may be alien to C21 secular people. We don't want the images to put people off encountering the reality of God. But if we discard these traditional images, can we do without them? I think not. We have to be careful how we introduce the concepts of the Christian religion, but, once the seeker become a disciple, I think he or she probably needs to learn the language of faith.

22nd May

Revelation 7⁴⁻⁸

The Church inherited the Old Testament. All the first Christians were Jews. Jesus was a Jew and so were the apostles. So in what relation did the Christian Church stand to Judaism? Both Jews and Christians claimed to be the people of God and to inherit the promises. Did Christians have to obey the Jewish Law? Did Jews have to become Christians in order to be saved? Did the Church replace the Jews as the people of God? The New Testament answer is that the Jews are not excluded, but the expectation is that they will ultimately accept Christ. Christ is the Way for both Jews and Gentiles. Those who reject Him condemn themselves. Those who come to Him are saved.

May 23rd

Revelation 7^{9&10}

The 144,000 represent the people of Israel (far more than 144,000 of whom may be saved!) and then there is this multitude which no man can number from every nation. This is one of the readings for All Saints Day and it is sometimes used at funerals. What a marvellous thought it is that all these diverse people are numbered among the redeemed of the Lord.

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Alleluia! Alleluia!

May 24th

Revelation 7^{11&12}

We can't know much about angels and archangels. They are aspects of a spiritual realm which we can only dim grasp. They are spirits in heaven. We are souls and bodies. But, like us, angels are the creation of God. Like us, heavenly beings are redeemed by the Blood of Christ. We are one with the angels and all the company of heaven in proclaiming God and what a marvellous thought that is.

May 25th

Revelation 7^{14&15}

You may wonder what tribulation these saints have come through. In the immediate context it is persecution and martyrdom, but I don't think it's unreasonable to think of other tribulations Christians might go through – sickness, unemployment, family worries. The point is that whatever we have to face on earth, we attain our heavenly home through the Blood of Jesus. His death is sufficient for us. His death availed for all.

Some through the waters, some through the flood,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood;
Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,
In the night season and all the day long.

May 26th

Revelation 7¹⁵⁻¹⁷

We can't imagine what it will be like in heaven, but this beautiful picture language gives us some idea of what our loved ones are enjoying now and what we shall enjoy when we join them.

May 27th Pentecost

Revelation 8¹

I set this as a quiz question once. In which book of the Bible does it say there was silence in Heaven for the space of half an hour? It seems so surprising, given all the singing and the trumpets and all the other sounds. And the space of half an hour seems strange in a place where there is no time. The seventh seal is now to be opened – the most terrifying of them all. Is this silence heaven drawing breath? The tenth plague of Egypt was of course the death of the first born. There had already been plagues of frogs and flies and locusts, cattle disease, crop disease, boils and the water turning to blood, but do you remember what the ninth plague was? The ninth plague was thick darkness over the whole land of Egypt. Was that less terrible or more terrible than the eight preceding plagues? The tenth plague like the seventh seal was the worst. Are the silence and the darkness an indrawing of breath before the final onslaught. Is it that they inspire awe? Do they allow space for contemplation?

Pentecost reverses Babel. The Gospel is preached so that it can be understood by everyone, whereas at Babel, human language was confounded to make it harder for human beings to conspire together to rebel against God. Order is brought out of chaos by the Holy Spirit, as in the Creation. The ½ hr silence is the opposite of Babel, too. Is it a pause for contemplation, an opportunity to repent and to be filled with the Spirit or is it the calm before storm. Maybe it is both, depending on whether or not you are open to the love of God.

May 28th

Revelation 8²⁻⁶

The seven seals are followed by seven angels, but before we hear about them, an angel offers the prayers of the saints at the Throne of God. There are dramatic manifestations of God's power in answer to prayer. Our prayers do reach God through Jesus Christ. Our prayers are powerful because they are part of the purposes of God. We pray *Thy will be done*, and God's Will is done in fellowship with our will. And often we may pray for the wrong things or we may not know what to pray for, but, if we pray in faith, we know that our prayers come before God through Jesus and the Spirit Who makes of our prayers what they ought to be.

May 29th

Revelation 8⁷⁻¹³

The Universe is sustained by God. Things happen in accordance with the laws Science discovers, such as gravity and thermodynamics. The Universe coheres. What happens is predictable. The apple always falls to the ground. We know how to make an aeroplane fly. The laws Science discovers are the laws of God. God has created and He sustains this universe of time and space, of energy and matter, in accordance with his natural laws.

The moral law is just as much the law of God: Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Thou shalt have none other gods but me.

John's vision is a vision of anarchy. Creation has rejected the law of love. We have failed to love God with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves. We have brought chaos out of order. We are anarchists. In John's vision, then, the universe no longer obeys the natural laws of science. The cosmos disintegrates. This is self-inflicted judgment, punishment. And yet it is all within the providence of the all-loving God.

May 30th

Revelation 9¹⁻¹²

If you remember the story of Noah's Flood, it says not only that it rained for 40 days and nights; it also says, *the same day were all the fountains of the great deep opened up*. Creation is bringing order out of chaos, light out of darkness, dry land in the midst of the ocean. It is taming the forces of anarchy. It is binding the power of evil, death and dissolution. In both the story of the Flood and in Revelation, God unravels Creation or creation unravels itself as a consequence of (human) creation's rebellion against God. It is a terrifying prospect, but don't forget what Jesus said, *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away*.

May 31st

Revelation 9¹³⁻²¹

It's the last couple of verses we need to concentrate on. All these terrible things have upon the cosmos because human beings would rather worship the creation than worship the Creator.

June 1st

Revelation 10¹⁻⁶

There is another pause before the seventh, this time the seventh angel. John hears seven thunders and what they proclaim is apparently intelligible to him but is not to be communicated to the rest of us. We can't know all the details of God's plan for the end of all things.

It is difficult to read the horrors foretold in Revelation. John lived in a cruel world. We know about the violence in the Roman arenas, the sexual immorality at the court and in public life, the betrayals and the poisonings. We know about the obscene luxury enjoyed by some, contrasted with the extreme poverty of others. We know about the ruthlessness of the Roman war machine. We know about the institution of slavery. And we know that these people persecuted the Church. We might then think that these people deserved all the evil which John foresees coming upon them. Or at least we might be able to understand why John should think they deserved it.

And we might remember that the Romans are not the only ones. We can think of genocides and slave trading, bloody battles, pogroms, persecutions, massacres, much closer to our own time. Maybe the perpetrators do deserve these terrible punishments. At least we can see that their victims might think that they should be so punished. I knew someone once whose Jewish family had died in Hitler's concentration camps. He had no desire to see the Nazis let off.

Yet we know that God does not desire the death of a sinner – however vile. We find it hard to think of God unleashing all these horrors on people however much they may have deserved them. We can't say that all these terrible crimes don't matter and that the perpetrators ought to be let off. We can say that these crimes matter tremendously and that the perpetrators ought to be forgiven, but we'd have to consider the price of forgiveness for these atrocities. Only God could pay that price.

This would be the Lamb standing as He had been slain.

June 2nd

Revelation 10⁷⁻¹¹

All these verses in Revelation echo earlier Scriptures and ought to ring bells as we read them. In a vision Ezekiel was given a scroll to eat, a scroll which was written all over with prophecy, the Word of God. The Word was to be engrafted in him and proclaimed by him. It tasted sweet. They say you are what you eat and Ezekiel completely absorbed the Word of God and it became part of him. In Holy Communion, the Bread and Wine are the Body and Blood of the Word of God. We are nourished by Him. We become what we eat.

But, although like Ezekiel, John finds the scroll sweet in his mouth, it gives him a stomach ache! Why should that be so? Some people think it is because it is a word of doom. God's faithful servants don't enjoy proclaiming death and devastation on people. They may have to do so, to warn people, that they are on the road that leads to destruction, but they don't delight in the death of a sinner anymore than God does. G B Caird has an interesting suggestion. The bitterness is that the only authentic witness to the truth of the Gospel is a readiness to face martyrdom.

(Many years ago a young man asked me for an explanation of Revelation. I lent him Dr Caird's commentary and I think he found it very helpful. Sadly the young man has since died, but maybe he is now experiencing these great truths for himself. I can lend anyone Caird's commentary if you would find it helpful.)

June 3rd Trinity

Revelation 11^{1&2}

This is difficult. The Temple is of course the dwelling place of God. Is John referring to the Temple in Jerusalem or to the Church, the Body of believers, the Bride of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit? In OT visions of a measuring line, the focus is on measuring up to see whether in fact we do measure up, or in the vision of a measuring rod, measuring up to rebuild after destruction. Here the sense seems to be of protection despite coming persecution. We dwell in the Persons of the Trinity and the Persons of the Trinity abide in us. We may walk through the valley of the shadow of death but He is with us.

June 4th

Revelation 11³⁻¹³

The imagery of the two olive trees comes from the Book of Zechariah. Zechariah foresees the restoration of Jerusalem when the Jews return from exile in Babylon. High priests and kings were anointed with olive oil. So the olive trees signify Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the prince. Jesus fulfils both rolls. He is the anointed King and High Priest, the Messiah. We have already seen how the seven branched lamp fed by the two olive trees stands for the sevenfold Spirit of God.

So what is described in Revelation could be the ministry of Jesus. He is the prophet Who proclaims the Word of God. Apparently He is defeated by the devil at the crucifixion. But God raises Him from the dead and exalts Him to Heaven. And the prophecies come true whether people like it or not. He is the faithful witness (martyr).

But all this is also true of individuals Christians and of the Church as a body. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. We are called to be witnesses. We are called to proclaim the Word of God (to prophesy). We are buried with Christ in Baptism. Some of us are called to lay down our lives for the Gospel. And God raises us from the dead and exalts us to heaven. Our lives and our words are vindicated.

June 5th

Revelation 11¹⁴⁻¹⁹

The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.

I like these words and I quite often use them in public prayer. Quite rightly we often list in our general intercession many of the things which are wrong in our world today – war and oppression, anarchy and chaos, crime, infidelity and dishonesty, family breakdown, corruption, greed, materialism, poverty, disease, ignorance. We list these evils not to tell God something He doesn't know, but to align our wills with His. Most, if not all of them, are caused by humanity's disobedience to God, because the kingdoms of this world are not governed by the Law of God. How we long for the time when they will be, when Christ shall take His power and reign.

June 6th

Revelation 12¹⁻⁶

As the Church of St Michael and All Angels we are very familiar with this reading at Cuxton. Incidentally, we're often told we haven't got anything for teenagers, especially for young men. Actually this is just the sort of thing they play with on their games consuls. We have the resources to communicate the Gospel to people, but we're too coy to utilise them!

The woman in this passage might be Eve and her child the human race. Then again she might be Mary and the child Jesus. Then again she might be Mother Church and the child represent Christian people or the people of Israel. The dragon is of course the devil. The devil tempted Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge and brought doom upon the human race. Herod tried to kill the infant Jesus. Pharaoh killed the Hebrew baby boys. The adult Jesus died on the Cross. Christian people are persecuted. Adam was the son of God. Jesus is the Son of God. Christian people are God's adopted children. Israel was God's son called out of Egypt. In each case, the devil attempts to destroy, but, through much tribulation, God protects.

June 7th Corpus Christi, Thanksgiving for Holy Communion Revelation 12⁷⁻¹¹

God overcomes the power of the devil through the Cross of Jesus. Jesus is the willing sacrifice, Who offers Himself for the sins of the world in love both for God and for the human race. In the parallel universe of heaven this victory is betokened by the Archangel Michael casting Satan out of heaven. The accuser of the brethren is cast out. We are forgiven. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus gives us the Holy Communion to remember His Death, to participate in His Death and to proclaim it until He comes again. We share His Risen Life. Christians have the victory over sin, the world and the devil, the victory over death, through the Blood of the Lamb. Crucified with Him in Baptism, we have eternal life. We take up our cross and follow Him in order that we may find our lives. We are called to be faithful even unto death.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Blessed are those who are called to his supper.

Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.

June 8th

Revelation 12¹²

Jesus died saying, It is finished. His perfect offering Himself on the Cross in love is the Victory. Sin, the world and the devil are defeated. Death has been overcome. But the war isn't over. The success of the Normandy Landings in 1944 doomed Nazi Germany. Hitler couldn't come back from that defeat, but there was still a year of bloody fighting before peace could be declared. In fact as things became more desperate for the Nazis, they used ever more terrible tactics, hurrying up the extermination of the Jews and unleashing the V1 and V2 rockets on Britain. This is where we are now. Jesus won the decisive victory over Satan on the Cross, but we shall only know perfect peace when time shall be no more. Meanwhile Satan is unleashing ever greater horrors in his desperation.

June 9th

Revelation 12¹³⁻¹⁷

This is about Satan's attempts to destroy the Christian Church which will continue until heaven and earth pass away. Aesop tells the fable of the Wind, the Rain and the Sun trying to get a traveller to take off his overcoat. The more the Wind blows and the Rain rains, the tighter he does up his belt. But when the Sun shines, the traveller takes off his coat and throws it away. The devil has often tried to destroy the Church by persecution, but very often, the blood of the martyrs has proved to be the seed of the Church. The harsher the persecution, the greater the growth of the Church as people have been forced to experience for themselves the resources God offers us in the face of adversity. On the radio this morning Richard Dawkins was talking about a survey he had had conducted into the true beliefs of the 50% or so of English people who call themselves Christians. Most of them hardly ever go to Church. They don't read the Bible. They don't know, it seems, the most basic teachings of the Church. Bathing in the sunshine of material prosperity, protected by the Welfare State, living in a country blessed by 60 years of peace, they have loosened and cast off the overcoat of religion. Well, only God knows the number of his elect and neither Richard Dawkins nor I can say whether or not people who call themselves Christians really are Christians. As a reader of the Bible, I should not be surprised to discover that only few find the strait gate and the narrow way which leads to life. There is a warning in these figures.

June 10th

Revelation 13¹⁻⁶

Those of you who know your Bibles will be reminded by the vision of Daniel, where beasts coming up out of the sea represent the world's great empires throwing their weight about on the stage of human history until that great day when God comes in judgment and the violent, greedy, dishonest oppressors are punished and their innocent victims, the people of God, are vindicated, set free and presented before the Throne of Heaven. This is the thought here, but there is the added thought that the peoples of the earth worship what gives power to the oppressors – wealth, military might, status. We might add things like celebrity and cosmetic beauty because these seem to have the power to make people waste their lives on trivia – clothes, fashion, even cosmetic surgery – instead of turning to God in Whom alone they can find their peace. You become what you worship. So to worship anything less than God devalues you because you were made in the image of God. His image is defiled in us when we build our lives (or indeed our communities and nations) on money, violence, lust, self-importance, greed, selfishness, and trivia.

June 11th St Barnabas

Revelation 13⁷⁻⁹

Barnabas was one of the first disciples. He was a rich man but put all his wealth into the common purse held by the Church. He is one of only three people called apostles in the Bible apart from the original twelve. He recognised Paul's potential when other Christians were still suspicious of the converted persecutor. He travelled with Paul at first and shared the hardships endured by those early missionaries, but later they parted when they had a disagreement about John Mark, whom Paul was unwilling to trust after he had let them down once, but to whom Barnabas was willing to give a second chance. Barnabas and all those other early Christians stood alone against the might of human power and authority. The enemies of the Church had soldiers, law courts, torturers and prisons at their disposal. They had great wealth. They were looked up to, feared and respected by the general population. Most people went along with them, because they hoped to be rich and powerful too, or because they were afraid, or just because "everybody else did". Christians were the exceptions because their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We still are.

June 12th

Revelation 13⁸⁻¹⁰

I recently saw the film *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels*. It was a bit hard to follow, but it struck me that its basic message was what Jesus said to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, *All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword*. Or, *what goes around, comes around* (which Jesus didn't say, so far as we know). It's a dreary cycle, isn't it? Wars between or within nations. Criminal gangs on the streets. Fortunes made and lost on the stockmarket or at the casino. Produce and consume. No matter how much money you make, it's never enough. No matter how much time you spend at the gym or in front of the mirror, your body will die and decay. Because people seek the wrong things, they live futile lives, bringing harm to themselves and to other people. The only way out of this vicious circle is for those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. The only way to have your name inscribed in that book is to repent and to be baptised. That's all you can do, all you need to do, but, once you've done that, you are set free, you are free to follow the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, losing the world to gain your life.

June 13th

Revelation 13¹¹⁻¹⁸

Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit. In order to prosper in worldly terms, you need to be marked with the mark of the beast. But you can't have both, the Holy Spirit and the mark of the beast. Insofar as getting on in this world means compromising our Christian principles – cheating, lying, using violence, putting self before others, exploiting relationships, putting business before God – Christians cannot get on in this world. This is the price that we pay, but what we gain is eternal life. The mark of the beast might earn you a big bonus, but what you get ultimately get out of worshipping nothings such as wealth, power, beauty, celebrity status and material goods is nothing.

There has been a great deal of speculation about what is meant by the number 666. The honest answer is that no-one knows. It is just short of 777 and 7 is often thought of as the perfect number. So 666 is a failure to attain what God has laid up for those who love Him. It is the working week without the Sabbath, Palm Sunday to Good Friday and Holy Saturday, but no Easter.

June 14th

Revelation 14¹

What is necessary in Baptism is water applied in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. What is required of the person coming to be baptised is repentance and faith, at the moment of Baptism and of course throughout their lives. Repentance and faith can only be at a level of which the person is capable. None of us has more than an inkling either of the greatness of God's Love or of the seriousness of our human sin. So none of us is ever really ready for Baptism. We come with what we have to offer back to God. Baptism is open to the mentally handicapped and the insane. God doesn't exclude anyone from His Church and Baptism is the Sacrament of Initiation, God's welcome, our welcome, to all who come. A child can be baptised on the basis of the knowledge of God to which he or she has come. And I think we can defend the Baptism of babies on the same basis. They come just as they are. Their godparents speak for them (which is why godparents must be baptised themselves. How could they say on behalf of the baby what they couldn't say on their own behalf?) and the parents and the rest of the family undertake to bring the child up to know Jesus for himself so that the growing Christian lives a life of faith.

It has for centuries been the custom to make the sign of the Cross on the forehead of those being baptised. This is the mark of being a Christian, a sign of Christ's and our victory over the devil. Recently we have revived the custom of using olive oil blessed for this purpose and also of giving the newly baptised a lighted candle because Jesus is the Light of the world and we are called both to walk in His Light and to shine with His Light. In some places they also give the newly baptised a new white robe. But none of these extra symbols is necessary to the rite and we must be careful not to confuse them with what is necessary.

June 15th

Revelation 14^{2&3}

How did we make Jesus boring? someone once asked. Whatever is going on here in the heavenly worship, it is special. The worshippers are privileged to take part. At what point did worship become a bore something you do because you have to do it and which you stop doing when you no longer feel obliged?

June 16th

Revelation 14^{4&5}

When I was in the Holy Land a young Jewish man asked me how the Christian Church came to place such a high value on celibacy when the first commandment in the Bible is *Go forth and multiply*. Caird thinks that the focus is not so much on virginity for virginity's sake here. Caird believes that 12 tribes of 12,000 martyrs represent the army of God, conquering not by force of arms, but, following Jesus, overcoming evil with good, laying down their lives for their enemies. In the OT soldiers consecrated in God's service had to *keep themselves from women*.

This may be symbolic, but St Paul seems to say that it is better not to be entangled with a wife in marriage if you are a missionary or in a church facing persecution, but he certainly does not forbid marriage. Lust may of course lead people into all kinds of sin. One's family may stand between one and God. These legitimate concerns may make Christians wary altogether of sex, especially when it came to be believed (wrongly I'm sure) that Adam's original sin was transmitted to all of us by the manner of our conception. I believe, however, that marriage is blessed by God and that it is His plan for the procreation of children, the proper expression of our sexual feelings, and the mutual support and tenderness that husband and wife offer one another. There is an alternative to marriage – celibacy. Which is right for you depends on God's calling.

June 17th

Revelation 14^{6&7}

Jesus said that the Good News must be preached throughout the world before the coming of the End. This is a more picturesque way of stating that same truth. The Good News is for everyone. Angels are God's messengers. Christians are God's messengers. Even the inanimate Creation bears witness to the glory of God.

You might think that all the wickedness of the Roman Empire and of human societies in general deserves to be punished, perhaps in these horrifying scenarios described in Revelation. But the point is that God sent Jesus because He so loved the world. He doesn't will the death of the sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.

June 18th

Revelation 14⁸

Babylon is Rome or conceivably Jerusalem or possibly even Babylon. What I am saying is that “Babylon” in Revelation, while primarily representing Rome, actually stands for all the wicked cities founded on violent conquest, exploitative trade arrangements, slavery, sexual immorality, idolatry (the worship of gold and silver, power and similar vanities) and the persecution of the people of God.

There is a tension in human history about whether cities are a good thing. The words *civilisation* and *citizen* are related to the word *city*. When people come together and live in one place in large numbers, they can create fine buildings and works of art. They can organise themselves politically. They can put on concerts and theatrical performances. They can organise education and health care. So cities are where civilised people live and people who live outside cities are country bumpkins. That’s one way of looking at it. The opposite way of looking at things is to say that cities are places of corruption – high crime rates, epidemic diseases (in the days before modern sanitation), dishonest politicians, bankers and merchants, extreme poverty on the streets, indifference to religion, capitals from which armies go forth to lay waste to other lands, whereas in the country health people live close to nature and to God and work hard minding their own business and caring for one another in family groups and small communities.

There is truth in both views of town and country. What is clear is that God must come first, whether we choose to be urban or rural, if human beings are to flourish.

June 19th

Revelation 14⁹⁻¹¹

They say that some people in the Middle Ages thought that part of the enjoyment of Heaven would be watching the torments of the damned in Hell. That cannot be true. If and when we get to Heaven, we shall be made like Him and He delighteth not in the death of a sinner. It would be terrible to be in Heaven and to see other people in Hell, especially if they were people you knew or even people you loved. I’d like to conclude from this that everyone will be saved (I Timothy 2^{3&4?}) but I daren’t. There has to be justice if there is to be mercy.

June 20th

Revelation 14¹²

Here is the patience of saints.

We're always under pressure to conform to the world. To some extent we have to. We have to go to school, work for a living, live in the community. A minority of Christians may be called to be hermits, monks or nuns, but, if most of us withdrew from the world, the Church wouldn't be able to do God's work in the world, proclaiming the Gospel, caring for people in need and transforming society for good. If we have families who are less keen on Church than we are or non-Christian friends, we may have to ask ourselves to what extent can we miss Church in order to spend time with them, go out drinking, share gossip, turn a blind eye to fiddled expenses or tax evasion, laugh at questionable humour, shop or eat out or buy petrol on Sundays, etc.? Most of us can't withdraw from the world altogether and ought not to try to do so, but at what point does compromise become the equivalent of receiving the mark of the beast?

June 21st Midsummer Day

Revelation 14¹³

Revelation is such a difficult book that it might seem strange that it is so often quoted. This verse is used in the funeral service after the body is committed to the ground or to be cremated and what a wonderful verse it is with its comfort for those who are left and for those who may be afraid of dying.

June 22nd

Revelation 14¹⁴⁻²⁰

It was 22nd June 1980 that I was ordained deacon. Deacon means servant. We are ordained deacon to serve Christ, Who is the Servant of the LORD. Moreover the ordained ministry epitomises the ministry of the Church, the ministry of all baptised people. Every Christian is called to serve God in imitation of Christ, to serve the Church and to serve the world which God so loves. The Church is the Body of Christ, commissioned to complete His apostolic servant ministry. (In fact minister also means servant and ministry is service. So *going into the ministry* and *going into service* are the same thing!) This image of the blood of the enemies of God coming up to the horses' bridles is appalling, but what if it is the Blood of the Servant of God Who dies in the place of God's enemies and of those who take up their cross to follow Him? *The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.* (Mark 10⁴⁵).

June 23rd

Revelation 15¹⁻⁴

The service Jesus gave His Church was of course Holy Communion. He Himself replaced the ritual in the Jerusalem Temple, because He Himself fulfilled the Law and the Law's demands. In His own person Jesus is Temple (the dwelling place of God), Sacrifice (effecting the forgiveness of sins and the atonement between Creation and Creator, humanity and God) and High Priest (Intercessor, Mediator and Bestower of Blessings). The synagogue service consisted of Bible readings, psalms, prayers and a sermon. The Church began to feel the need for something similar, daily services of prayers and readings in the context of worship, to supplement the Sunday Eucharist. So began the daily offices or monastic hours, which eventually distilled out into our Mattins and Evensong. At these two services, we read the Bible regularly each day in the context of worship and prayer. We say or sing psalms and canticles taken from or based on the Bible such as Te Deum and Magnificat. Common Worship provides a greater selection of canticles than the old Prayer Book, including some such as this from Revelation (CW p800).

June 24th Nativity of S John the Baptist.

Revelation 15⁵⁻⁸

John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. He told people that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. He warned of coming judgment. The One Who was to come after him, Whose shoes he was unworthy to unloose, would come with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He would winnow the people, separating wheat from chaff, the wheat to be stored in God's barns and the chaff to be burnt. We cannot evade judgment if we accept the message of the Bible. Sin is serious because it harms people whom God loves. When we hurt someone else we hurt God. When we fail to help someone else, we neglect God. When we let ourselves down, we let God down. There is judgment before there is mercy. There has to be. The John of Revelation and John the Baptist warn us of the wrath to come.

Almighty God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

June 25th

Revelation 16^{1&2}

The mark of the beast made it possible for men and women to prosper in this world. They accepted this world's standards and so they flourished. They were hard-hearted in the face of the needs of others, as dishonest as they needed to be, violent when it suited their purpose, exploitative both in sexual relationships and friendships. They worshipped the gods of gold and silver. But, in the end, *the wages of sin is death*. You can't actually run a world in defiance of its Creator, treating with contempt His perfect Law of Love. As I said a few days ago, we cannot help but compromise with the world in which we live, but at what point do we compromise to the extent of accepting the mark of the beast? Is it when we drop out of public worship, bible reading and prayer? Is it when we go along with something our place of work or political party is doing which falls short of proper standards of integrity and right-dealing? Is it when we are afraid to go against what everybody else is saying or doing even though we know they are wrong?

June 26th: Read Psalm 1

June 27th

Revelation 16³⁻¹¹

One way or another, the universe will come to an end. Our world might be consumed in a nuclear holocaust or through environmental degradation and global warming. We could be struck by a meteorite. Our sun could explode and destroy the earth. If it doesn't it will eventually cool to the point at which it can no longer sustain life as we know it. The universe itself will apparently either continue to expand until it is so attenuated that nothing like what we now know any longer exists or it will turn in on itself in a Big Crunch, the reverse of the Big Bang which supposedly began everything. Given any of these cataclysmic events, human life would just be overwhelmed, whether by earthquakes and tidal waves, fire and heat, extreme cooling, excessive pressure, unbearable gravitational forces or whatever. It's no use saying that all this just isn't true and that Revelation is a horrible vision which we liberal, modern Christians refuse to take seriously. Things like this do happen in the world today and they will certainly happen at the end of all things. The question is not whether or even when these things will happen, but do we trust God? Jesus said, *When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.* (Luke 21²⁸).

June 28th

Revelation 16¹²⁻²¹

Armageddon. This is a familiar enough word used to discuss a tremendous catastrophe or a terrible battle. It is really two words put together and means Hill of Megiddo. Megiddo was a very important fortified town on significant trade routes. There were several battles at Megiddo in the years BC as the various empires fought to enforce their sovereignty. In Revelation Armageddon comes to be seen as the final battle between good and evil, between God and the devil, between life and death. The victory is decisive. God triumphs as He must do, but the price is unbearably high – the deaths of Jesus and the Christian martyrs, the terrible punishments inflicted on God's enemies. But Jesus has borne in His own Body on the Tree the punishments deserved by the enemies of God. So will the wicked really suffer like this in the end? Or will they be redeemed in Christ? All they have to do is to repent of their sins and to turn to Him and, no matter, what they have done, they will be forgiven and received into Heaven.

June 29th Ss Peter and Paul

Revelation 17¹⁻¹⁸

Whatever else may be implied here about the end of all things, the immediate reference is to Rome. Peter and Paul both finished up in Rome by very different routes. The Emperor Nero launched a terrific persecution against the Christians in Rome. The story is that he blamed the Christians for a devastating fire which it is strongly suspected he started himself so that he could have the city rebuilt the way he wanted it. Among the thousands of Christians who died were the apostles Peter, who was crucified (upside down at his own request because he did not think he was worthy to die as Jesus did), and Paul who (as a Roman citizen) was beheaded. John foresees a terrible judgment coming on Rome for these and all the other terrible sins which she has committed. And yet, it is God's Will that even Rome should be saved and Rome is steadily and eventually converted, not least by the steadfast love of the martyrs.

Almighty God, whose blessed apostles Peter and Paul glorified you in their death as in their life: grant that your Church, inspired by their teaching and example, and made one by your Spirit, may ever stand firm upon the one foundation, Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

June 30th

Revelation (18 if you like &) 19¹⁻⁹

Chapter 18 is definitely about judgment on Rome in its original reference. Other generations and other faith communities have seen the reference to their own circumstances and judgment on their own particular oppressors. Some protestant groups have even seen a reference to the Roman Catholic Church at the height of the Inquisition spilling the blood of the (protestant) martyrs. I think all these interpretations have some legitimacy. All the wicked come under judgment, all wicked individuals, all wicked civilisations and cultures, even all wicked churches. God does keep His saints (i.e. Christian people) safe and there is a home in Heaven for us all. So, when we are feeling oppressed, we can have faith. I also think that, rather than being too quick to judge other cultures and civilisations, other religions and even other churches, we would be better advised to leave judging them to God and to examine ourselves for the sins of which we need to repent, the extent to which we fall short of the love of God. More generally, these chapters are to be interpreted in terms of the end of all things – God’s final victory in the battle between good and evil, the victory won by Christ’s self-sacrificial death on the cross. Love overcomes hatred. Good overcomes evil. Life overcomes death. Love does not become hatred, nor good evil, nor life death, in order to destroy hatred, evil and death. They (love, good & life) overwhelm because they are in themselves infinitely more powerful than hatred, evil and death. You need faith to grasp this insight and wisdom to act on it. There is the Last Judgment, the separation of sheep from goats, and the final vindication.

Finally (and maybe you will have time to read the rest of the Book of Revelation) we are shown something of the End of all things, something of what God has laid up for those who love Him. Here in cap 19, the redeemed of the Lord are described as the bride of Christ. New robes indicate her purity. Marriage is two people giving themselves to each other in love. Marriage is the joy that follows from selfless love. Marriage is about fidelity and dependability. Marriage is about loving and knowing that you are loved. What can be true for this life for two human beings is true in all eternity for all human beings who love the Lord.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Blessed are those who are called to his supper.

Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.