

Reading 2 2nd Sunday of Easter C
[Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19](#)

I, John, your brother, who share with you
the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus,
found myself on the island called Patmos
because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus.
I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day
and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said,
"Write on a scroll what you see."
Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me,
and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands
and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man,
wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest.

When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead.
He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid.
I am the first and the last, the one who lives.
Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever.
I hold the keys to death and the netherworld.
Write down, therefore, what you have seen,
and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards."

Jerome Biblical Commentary

(I) Introduction (1:1-20).

(A) Superscription (1:1-3). This solemn introduction forms a sort of inclusion with the end of the book (22:6-21), which reproduces the same themes and often the same expressions. Framed between the title of the book, "Revelation of Jesus Christ," and the motive that grounds its importance, "because the moment is near," three parts treat of the origin, content, and the recipients of the Ap.

1. *revelation of Jesus Christ:* Inspired by the prophetic tradition, this title announces the unveiling of the mystery of history, the end of the present era and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is the mediator of this revelation. *which God gave him:* God is the ultimate source of the Ap, which he guarantees with supreme authority. The necessary mediation of Christ, who transmits only that which the Father has communicated to him, is a major doctrine of Jn (7:16; 8:26, 40; 15:15). *to his servants:* These are the prophets (10:7; 11:18; 22:6), who elsewhere are closely associated with all the Christians, also called *douloi* (7:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3). *what must take place:* See 4:1;

22:6; cf. Dn 2:28f. The certainty of the accomplishment without condition and without delay, of the intention of God about history. *sending through his angel*: In order to set off the transcendence of God, apocalyptic style regularly introduces angels, whose role was to transmit God's revelations and execute the divine decrees. In the Ap angels intervene unceasingly. The intermediary by which John receives the revelation is sometimes Christ, sometimes an angel: Christ appears in the guise of an angel (1:19f.), and the angel appears as Christ (10:1ff.), whom he represents.**2. who testified**: Epistolary aorist. The object of this witness is the content of the Ap, indicated in three ways: by reference to God, to Jesus Christ, and to John. Already well emphasized in Jn and Acts, the duty of witnessing suits the historical context of the persecution that surrounds the Ap. Jesus, the faithful and true witness (1:5; 3:14; cf. Jn 18:37), is the model; he shows that persecution is the consequence of witnessing. All Christians, and especially the messengers of the Gospel (6:9; 17:6; 18:24; 20:4), ought to guard firmly the witness of Jesus (12:17), as, for example Antipas (2:13) and the two witnesses (11:7-10). *all that he saw*: This expression, repeated 54 times, and common to all apocalypses, specifies that the content of the book was revealed in ecstatic visions.**3. blessed**: This beatitude, the first of seven, ought to be juxtaposed to that of 22:7. Both suggest the authority of the book (see W. Bieder, *TZ* 10 [1954] 13-30). *who reads aloud*: That is, in a Christian assembly. *the hour is near*: The motive for heeding the exhortations of the Ap is the proximity of the manifestation of Christ (22:6f., 10, 12, 20).

19 (B) Epistolary Salutation (1:4-8). The author begins and ends (22:21) with the Christian epistolary formulas; between chs. 4 and 22, however, there is no further indication that the Ap is a letter. In agreement with the current formula, the author names himself, then those to whom he writes, wishing them "grace and peace." The thanksgiving follows, of a liturgical type, addressed this time not to God, but to Christ (vv. 5b-6). Finally a prophetic announcement, solemnly sanctioned by God (v. 8), proclaims the central theme of the Ap (v. 7). **4. the seven churches in Asia**: Besides these seven churches (1:11), there existed at that time, in the proconsular province of Asia, other churches: among them, Colossae, Troas, Hierapolis, Magnesia. Through the seven churches, John wanted to reach all the churches of Asia and perhaps the universal Church (→ Johannine Theology, 80:48-54). *who is and who was and who is coming*: See 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5. The name of God, as his person, is unchangeable; instead of being in the genitive after apo, the expression remains in the nominative. This description of God proceeds from a long tradition that goes back to Ex 3:14. Familiar to Jews and Greeks, it tries to express the eternity of God by means of the human category of time. John has adapted this title to his message by replacing the usual "he who will be" by "he who is coming" in history. Such a title suits perfectly the beginning of a book revealing the meaning of the present in the light of the past and the future. *the seven spirits before his throne*: Either the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Is 11:2) communicated by Christ to the seven churches, or more likely angels, who, strengthened by divine power, act in the name of God (→ Johannine Theology, 80:56). "Before his throne" is a Hebraism signifying that they are the servants of God. These angels (3:1; 4:5; 5:6) are probably the angels of the presence (8:2ff.; 15:1ff.), well

known in Jewish angelology.⁵ This kerygmatic formula expresses the essential content of the faith: The three titles evoke the passion, the resurrection, and the exaltation of Christ. *the trustworthy witness*: See 1:2; 3:14. Jesus was witness during his ministry because he revealed the Father perfectly (Jn 3:11, 32) and crowned this testimony by the sacrifice of his life (Jn 18:37; 1 Tm 6:13). *first-born of the dead*: Cf. 1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:18. Jesus, the first resurrected, guarantees that the era of the resurrection of the dead is inaugurated and summarized in his person. *ruler of the kings of the earth*: Cf. Ps 89:28. The glorification of Christ, consequence of his resurrection, confers on him all power over all creation (Mt 28:19; Rom 14:9; Phil 2:11; Eph 1:20-23). His domination over the kings who threaten the Church (19:12, 16) ought to strengthen the confidence of the Christians.

20 5b-6. This doxology contains three parts: Christ's love for us, the negative and positive effect of his love, and finally praise. *to him who loves us*: Cf. Jn 13:1; 15:9; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2, 25. The pres. tense indicates that Christ's love is perpetual and goes beyond the historical event of the redemption (lysanti and epoiēsen, in the aorist; → Johannine Theology, 80:25-26). *who freed us from our sins by his blood*: Affirmed as an essential fact by the Christian creed (1 Cor 15:3; Gal 1:4), this liberation is often expressed through the metaphor of purchase (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Gal 4:5) by the blood of Christ (Rom 3:25; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20; 1 Pt 1:18f.). *a kingdom, priests*: See 5:10; 20:6; 1 Pt 2:9. This messianic promise had been developed, beginning with Ex 19:6. The persecuted Christians participate now in the abasement of Christ, but they are assured that they will reign with him soon (2:26-28; 20:4; 22:5; cf. Dn 7:18, 22, 27). By reason of their union with Christ the priest, through baptism, they can fulfill the priestly service (Heb 10:19-22; 1 Pt 2:5). *to God his Father*: The Ap affirms the sonship of Jesus (2:28; 3:5, 21; 14:1); but in order to respect the divine transcendence it reserves a similar intimacy between Christians and God for the hereafter (21:7).**7.** *coming with the cloud*: Primitive Christianity saw in Dn 7:13, the prophecy par excellence, the announcement of the glorious coming of Christ in judgment (14:14; Mt 24:30; 26:64; see R. B. Y. Scott, *NTS* 5 [1958-59] 127-32). *those who pierced him*: The Jews who put Jesus to death. *all the tribes of the earth*: All unbelieving nations are equally guilty, for in persecuting the Church, they show their hostility toward Christ. Suffering true sorrow, all will wail. *even so. Amen*: The repetition, in Greek and Hebrew (22:20), underlines the solemnity of the prophecy, in which the Christian assembly believes.**8.** *Alpha and Omega*: Equivalent expressions, "the first and the last," "the beginning and the end," reappear concerning God (21:6) and concerning Christ (1:17; 2:8; 22:13). Isaiah (41:4; 44:6; 48:12) had already affirmed that God was "the first and the last," the creator and the end of everything. Under Hellenistic influence the symbolic value of the alphabet was gradually assimilated by Judaism; the first letter associated with the last, signified totality. *the Almighty*: Proper to the Ap in the NT, except 2 Cor 6:18. The complete expression, "the Lord God Almighty," is borrowed from the LXX and corresponds to

NTS *New Testament Studies*

NT *New Testament*

LXX *Septuagint* (Greek translation of the OT)

Yahwēh 'ēlôhê 'ēbā'ôt (Hos 12:5; Am 4:13; 9:5). The third title summarizes the two preceding: God's enemies can stir themselves and persecute his people, but all power resides permanently with him; he began history and he will terminate it.

21 (C) Inaugural Vision (1:9-20). John in ecstasy is commissioned to write what he sees (vv. 9-11); the glorious Christ appears to him, presenting himself as the source and the master of the life of the Church (vv. 12-16); he renews the commission (vv. 17-20).

9. who share with you: John is closely related to the Christians, reborn in Christ like himself. He shares completely their destiny of suffering and glory. *the tribulation, the kingdom, and the endurance in Jesus:* Access to the kingdom is only obtained by means of trial (Acts 14:22). In waiting for the glorious event, patient endurance remains the specific virtue of the persecuted (2:19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). Incorporated into Jesus by baptism, Christians share his passion, in order to participate in his glory (14:13; Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10f. 2 Tm 2:11f.; 1 Pt 4:13). *Patmos:* A rocky island of 16 sq. mi., of the Dodecanese group, situated some 50 mi. to the SW of Ephesus (see G. Camps, *VDBS* 7 [1961] 73-81). **10. a loud voice:** Cf. Ez 3:12. That of the angel of Christ (1:1; 4:1; 21:9, 15; 22:1, 6). *like a trumpet:* Descriptions of apocalyptic visions are regularly introduced by "like," "similar to," to emphasize that every comparison of the terrestrial order is inadequate; the expressions fail to describe what has been seen and heard in the celestial sphere. Taking inspiration from the theophany of Sinai (Ex 19:16, 19; Heb 12:19), apocalyptic style inserted the trumpet into eschatological settings that described the passage from the present to the future era (Is 27:13; Jl 2:1; Mt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thes 4:16). **11. the seven churches:** The churches have not been chosen for their importance, since Troas and Miletus numbered communities more populous than Thyatira and Philadelphia. They are named according to an order, which, on the map, roughly describes a circle, with Ephesus as the point of departure. These cities, connected by excellent roads, probably had courts of justice, where those who refused worship to the emperor could be judged. **13. in the midst of the lampstands:** Christ is present in the midst of the seven churches (v. 20; 2:5), ready to exhort them (2:1-3:22) and to help them. *like a Son of Man:* Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Dn 7:13: He appears like the eschatological judge who intervenes with the power of God (→ Johannine Theology, 80:17-20,60). *a long robe...a golden girdle:* Cf. Dn 10:5. These vestments manifest his dignity as high priest (Ex 28:4; Wis 18:24). **14.** The shining light that emanates from Christ reveals that he belongs to the divine world. *his head and hair were white:* Christ is clothed with the dignity that belonged originally to the "Ancient of Days" (Dn 7:9). The glorified Christ possesses the attributes that in the OT belonged to God alone (1:18; 2:8; 5:12; 22:13): the Ap thus affirms the divinity of Christ. *like a flame of fire:* See 2:18; 19:12; Dn 10:6. The eyes of Christ, judge of the Church and of the world, penetrate all things. **16. seven stars:** The only known parallel instances of this symbol come from the pagan world: Mithras and the Caesars were represented with

VDBS F. Vigouroux, *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément* (7 Vols.; Paris, 1928-)

OT Old Testament

seven stars in their right hand in order to affirm their universal domination.

Consequently, there might perhaps be a polemic accent here: Not Caesar, but Christ is the Lord of all things. *a sharp two-edged sword*: Cf. Is 11:4; 49:2; Wis 18:15; Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12. This bold image represents the word of Christ who judges Christianity (2:12, 16) and the universe (19:15, 21). *like the sun shining*: See 10:1; Jgs 5:31. The narration of epiphany frequently applies this comparison (Mt 17:2 par.).

22 **17.** *I fell at his feet*: This reaction of fear and prostration before the apparition of God or of a messenger of God is nearly of obligation (Gn 32:31; Ex 33:20; Jgs 6:22f.; 13:22; Is 6:5; Ez 1:28): Man ought to disappear before the glory of God. **17b-20.** The sublime titles that Christ demands are destined to encourage Christians who place all their confidence in their Lord. These titles synthesize the three stages in the career of Christ: his pre-existence, his death on earth, his exaltation to eternal life as conqueror of the infernal powers. **18.** *the living one*: As God alone is the truly living one (4:9f.; 10:6; Ps 42:3), Christ lives by the communication of the life of the Father (Jn 5:26). *I died, and behold I am alive*: This contrast between the past and the present, between death and the life of the resurrection possessed forever, constitutes the core of the Christian creed. *the keys of Death and Hades*: "To have the keys" signifies "to be the master of" (3:7; 9:1; 20:1; Is 22:22; Mt 16:19). The possession of these keys is the consequence of Christ's victory over the hostile forces, when he descended into hell. Death, then, can no longer frighten Christians. **19.** *what you have seen, what is and what shall be*: This apocalyptic formula describes the office and privilege of a prophet; it relates the Ap to ancient prophecy (see W. C. van Unnik, *NTS* 9 [1962-63] 86-94). **20.** *the angels of the seven churches*: See 1:16; 2:1. The identity of these angels has been much discussed since patristic times. The letters of chs. 2-3 containing praise and reproaches are addressed to them—they cannot belong exclusively to the celestial world. On the other hand, the word *aggelos* regularly designates in the Ap a superhuman being in the service of God or of Satan. Here, then, it probably refers to guardian angels, celestial counterparts of the churches. They participate in the responsibility and in the destiny of the churches they represent and guard. Christ holds them in his right hand to signify that he is the Lord of these churches and that they are under his protection.

Haydock's Catholic Commentary

Notes & Commentary:

Ver. 1-3. *The Apocalypse, or Revelation.* I rather prefer the word Apocalypse, which the Latin interpreter did not think fit to change. --- *Of Jesus Christ...by his Angel, sent to his servant John.* So that these things were immediately revealed to St. John by an Angel,

par. Parallel pasage(s) in the Synoptic Gospels

who represented and spoke in the person of Christ.--- *Which must shortly come*; and as it is again said, (ver. 3.) *the time is at hand*. This cannot be meant of all things in the Apocalypse, where mention is also made of the day of judgment, and of the glory of heaven at the end of the world. It can only mean, that some things were to happen shortly, i.e. what is said of the seven churches. (Chap. ii. and iii.) Or the persecutions foretold should begin shortly. Or else these expressions are only to signify, that all time is short, and that from the coming of the Messiah, we are not in the last age, or the *last hour*. See 1 John ii. 18. (Witham) --- St. John excites their attention by the most pressing motives, the approach of the events. Whatever explanation be given of this book, it is equally true in all, that the time is at hand, when it will begin to be accomplished. To find our consolation and happiness in this sacred book, according to the promise of the Holy Spirit, we must peruse it with faith and humility, receive the interpretation of the Church with submission and docility, and practise the truths contained with fidelity and promptitude. What is the life of man, since ages are but moments that escape us? Eternity is but a moment, but a moment that will never end.

Ver. 4-6. *John to the seven churches*,^[1] afterwards named; and by them, to be understood of all churches, bishops, and people in the like dispositions. --- *From him, who is, who was, and who is to come*. As these words are only applied, and applicable to him, who is truly God and eternal, Alcazar (p. 176) applies them to God the Father. Others think them to be spoken of God, as the word God agrees to all the three divine persons, who are one and the same God. See Ribera. --- *And from the seven spirits*. Alcazar understands them of seven of God's attributes, or perfections, but, by the common exposition, are meant seven of the chief created spirits, who in a special manner assist at the throne of God, employed to execute God's commands, as Raphael saith, (Tobit. xii. 15.) *I am one of the seven who stand before God*. (Witham) --- *Spirits, &c.* Some understand this of the Holy Ghost, on account of his seven gifts; but the most literal interpretation is of the principal Angels, who always surround the throne of God, and are his ministering spirits. (Calmet) --- *And from Jesus Christ*,^[2] made man, and the Redeemer of mankind, whom St. John here names after the seven spirits, because he continues his discourse about Christ, *who is the faithful witness*; testified and approved of God by so many miracles, prophecies, &c. He is the chief of the martyrs or witnesses, as the Greek word signifies. --- *The first begotten of the dead*, both first in dignity, and first that rose to an immortal life. --- *The prince of the kings of the earth*, whose power is infinitely greater than all theirs; and this to put the suffering Christians in mind, that they needed not to fear the persecuting emperors, who have no power after this life. --- *And Christ hath made us a kingdom*, inasmuch as by his grace he has made us members of his true Church, called the kingdom of God, and promised us to reign with him in his glorious kingdom in heaven. --- *And hath made us priests to God, and his Father*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices. See 1 Peter ii. 9. --- *To him be, or is due, glory and empire, for ever and ever. Amen.* That is, to Jesus Christ. (Witham)

Ver. 7. *Behold he cometh*, or is to come at the day of judgment. (Witham)

Ver. 8. *I am Alpha, and Omega*. These, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, signify the same as what follows, *the beginning, and the end*, the first cause and last

end of all intelligent beings, *who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty*. These words agree only to him, who is the true God, and here are applied to our blessed Redeemer, who is to come and judge all. (Witham)

Ver. 10. *On the Lord's day.*[3] Not on the Jewish sabbath, which is our Saturday, but on the Christian sabbath, our Sunday, called the *Lord's day*. The Church, in the apostle's time, changed the day of rest, on which the Jews were commanded to rest and sanctify that day, from Saturday to Sunday, from the last day of the week to the first. They judged this only to be an indispensable precept, that some day or some time should be appointed, in a special manner, for God's service and worship, on which Christians should also abstain from servile works, that were not of necessity: as to the determination of such a day of the week, they judged that the Church had power to change the day. The late pretended reformers have all agreed with us in this change. And if they would have all that is expressed in this commandment, to be of an indispensable and unchangeable obligation, according to the letter of the law, they ought certainly to observe, to sanctify, and to abstain from all servile works on Saturdays, or on the Jewish sabbath. --- *A great voice, as of a trumpet*. To signify the importance of things to be revealed. (Witham) --- *Voice, &c.* This was most likely St. John the Baptist, who calls himself the voice of one crying in the desert, and who in Malachias is called the Angel of the Lord, as he is also styled in the first verse of this chapter. (Pastorini)

Ver. 12. *I saw seven golden candlesticks*, which, by the last verse of this chapter, represented the seven Churches of Asia. We may suppose these candlesticks to have been shewn to St. John, like what is described, Exodus xxv. 31. For in these visions of St. John are frequent allusions to the former tabernacle, and to things relating to the service and worship of God, which Moses was ordered to make. (Witham)

Ver. 13. *And in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks*, i.e. *walking among the candlesticks*, like unto Christ, as he many times called himself the Son of man, and at other times told the Jews he was the Son, the only begotten Son of God. By this walking among the candlesticks is signified his providential care over all the particular Churches, which make up one Catholic Church. --- *With a long garment*,[4] and a *golden girdle*, with a resemblance of the habit of the priests. (Witham) --- Jesus Christ is in the midst of his Church to enlighten it, to defend and sanctify it, the true model of pastors, who should reside in the midst of their flock, be clothed with sanctity and justice, and girt with the golden girdle, i.e. with singular purity, always ready for combat and labour, by their charity and zeal.

Ver. 15. *His feet like unto fine brass*, to signify the purity and steadfastness of his steps and actions. --- *His voice as the sound of many waters*, the sound of his preaching by himself, and by his apostles, has been heard throughout all nations of the world. (Witham)

Ver. 16. *In his right hand seven stars*, which, as it is said, (ver. 20.) were the *Angels*, i.e. the bishops of the seven churches, by this comparison is expressed their dignity. --- *And*

from his mouth came out a sharp two-edged sword. The word of God preached is compared to a two-edged sword. (Ephesians vi. 17. and Hebrews iv. 12.) It also signifies God's severity in punishing sinners. (Witham)

Ver. 17. *I am the first and the last.* These are the words of the Son of man, or of him that represented our Saviour, Christ, to St. John. To be the first and the last, is another expression agreeing only to him who is the true God, as it is divers times applied by the prophet Isaias. (Witham) --- From the 12th verse to this place we have a description of the Son of man, i.e. Christ. The different emblematical descriptions of his countenance, his dress, &c. are similar to what are used by other prophets, and easily explained of his attributes, his eternity, vengeance, &c. &c. (Omnes passim.)

Ver. 18. *And alive, and was dead;* always living as God, and as man was dead, died on the cross for the salvation of all men, rose again, triumphed over hell, death, and sin, and am living for ever and ever, and have the keys of death and of hell, power over all, all things being made subject to me, even as man, or as God and man. (Witham)

Ver. 20. *Angels.* These are the seven bishops of the churches. Christ's having them in his right hand, shews the care he takes of his Church. (Calmet)

[1] Ver. 4. Ab eo qui erat, & qui est, & qui venturus est, apo tou o on, kai o en, kai o erchomenos, as if it was said, apo tou os legetai o on, &c.

[2] Ver. 5. Qui est testis fidelis, o martus o pistos. Martyr ille fidelis.

[3] Ver. 10. In Dominicâ die, en te kuriake emera.

[4] Ver. 13. Vestitum podere, endedumenon podere. See Exodus xxviii. 51.; Daniel x. 5.