

From the First Reading of the Day: Then one of the elders addressed me, saying “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” I said to him, “Sir, you know!” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple.” [Revelation 7.13-15a]

I.

Today, the First lesson of the Day, comes from the last book of the New Testament, The Revelation of Jesus Christ to Saint John, as the first verse of the text puts it. In the Lesson read to you, St. John is given a vision of worship in heaven.

There is great discord in our church body and elsewhere in Christianity – discord over worship. What should it be? What should it do? What should Christians be expecting from a time of worship?

When many of us who are showing the graying of hair and the growing of wrinkles were little tikes there was in our church body a great unity over the question of worship. One could go from one church to another, from one region to another, and in each of our churches, the liturgy would be the same. It might have done simply or it might have been done lavishly; it might have been conducted poorly or well. It was the same Divine Service.

Why was this so? Some younger members today might say – “It was all the same because they were just old-fashioned by then, in the 1950s, just after Noah came over in the flood.” But, the tikes and teens of the mid-20th Century, when they went to church, opened up the hymnal to page 15. They confessed their sins and received absolution, and they joined in the same liturgy as did their parents before them. So, “old-fashioned” doesn’t explain why

there is such contentiousness over the Divine Liturgy today.

Consider how it is done in heaven, among all the saints of all history who are collected there, who are awaiting us, and even moreso, who are awaiting the return of Christ to earth, awaiting the judgment and the completion of the ranks of those whom God has elected for eternal life, awaiting the new heavens and new earth as their permanent and eternal home. Consider how and why the Divine Liturgy of heaven is conducted.

II.

Our text gives us a snap shot of the Liturgy of Heaven, when you hear – *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all the tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!*

It is the myriads of people standing in vast array, involved in this Liturgy of Heaven, surrounding the connection between earth and heaven – the Lamb on the throne! Christ on the throne! That will be something to behold! That will be something to join!

There’s more that St. John shows us of the Liturgy of Heaven. He begins back in chapter 3: *Behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.... Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on these thrones were*

twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.... And around the thrones, on each side of the throne, are the four living creatures... and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, Holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who is seated on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created!"

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain ... and He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who seated on the throne. And when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls of incense – which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying "Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth!"

Then, the Lamb who was slain – your Lord Jesus Christ – reads the Holy Gospel, as He opens the seven seals.

III.

That is a glimpse of the Liturgy of Heaven. Who are the participants? Well, they are the angels. They are the Old Testament prophets and New Testament Apostles (the 24 Elders). They are the redeemed in heaven. And the participants

in the Liturgy of heaven are also those Christians still alive on earth. All of them, except the angels, have washed themselves in the blood of the Lamb. They are the baptized! They are the ones who daily confess their sins and cling in faith to Christ and His Holy Gospel. Yes, you are there, already in the Liturgy of Heaven, because Heaven is outside of human time and embraces both what has been and what is and what is yet to come about the saints on earth and the saints in heaven.

So, while you are here, you also are there. While you pray for yourself and those in need of God's mercy, you are also in heaven among those who are praying for you! It is the same mystery of life that you encounter when you confess the truth of justification: The repentant sinner is, simultaneously, 100% sinner and 100% saint. Likewise, you are in this world, awaiting the next – you are in the prelude, awaiting the fullness of living. And so, you are both a beneficiary of the prayers offered by the saints in heaven and, simultaneously, you are a contributor to those prayers, which is why we use the timeless liturgy of the Church. It is all a part of the truth that your Savior calls "the great mystery" of salvation. It is your inheritance and your possession as a saint of God: called, enlightened, forgiven, united to Christ, kept indwelt by the Holy Spirit, beloved of the Father, and gathered --- here and in heaven – for the corporate praises, prayers, and proclamation of the Lamb. This the Liturgy of Heaven, and so also, this is the Liturgy on Earth!