

Handout: Revelation Lesson 4

You must follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would the Apostles. [...]. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church (Ignatius, Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 8.1; ca 110 AD, Jurgens, Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. I, page 25).

Covenant Treaty Format in the Letter to Smyrna:

1. **Preamble:** *Here is the message of the First and the Last, who was dead and has come to life again (Rev 2:8).*
2. **Historical Prologue:** *I know your hardships and your poverty (Rev 2:9).*
3. **Ethical Stipulations:** *Do not be afraid of the sufferings that are coming to you (Rev 2:10).*
4. **Sanctions:** *Even if you have to die, keep faithful, and I will give you the crown of life (Rev 2:10).*
5. **Succession Arrangements:** *and I will give you the crown of life for your prize... for those who prove victorious will come to no harm (Rev 2:10-11).*

At no point does the New Testament or the writings of the Fathers of the Church ever promise freedom from suffering in this life. But the Church of Jesus Christ does guarantee that our suffering is not in vain when we unite it to Christ's Passion (CCC 1508, 1521). We must be faithful like Smyrna's beloved Bishop St. Polycarp and his Smyrnaean Christians, remembering Jesus' command to bravely take up our crosses and follow Him (Mt 10:38; 16:24; Mk 8:34; 10:21; Lk 9:23; 14:27), because **without the cross there will be no crown of victory.** As St. Rose of Lima wrote: "The Cross is the only ladder to Heaven!"

Rev 2:10-11 ~ From crosses to crowns is a promise we can all rely on:

- In 2 Timothy 2:11-13, St Paul writes a saying that we can rely on: *If we have died with Him, then we shall live with Him. If we persevere, then we shall reign with Him. If we disown Him, then He will disown us. If we are faithless, He is faithful still, for He cannot disown His own self.*
- In Matthew 10:22, Jesus said: *You will be hated by all on account of My name ... but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.*

who was dead and has come to life again (2:8). The early Christians had a saying that wisely expressed the concept of a double death and double resurrection: *Born twice, die once; born once, die twice.* Catechism # 1002-1003:

- *Christ will raise us up "up the last day"; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. For, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ (CCC 1002).*
- *United with Christ by Baptism, believers already truly participate in the heavenly life of the risen Christ (CCC 1003).*

Old Testament references:

1. the dead returned to life:

- Isaac, the precious son of promised by God to Abraham and Sarah, was offered as a sacrifice by his father but was saved by an angel (Gen 22:1-14). Also see Hebrews 11:17-19 (underlining added for emphasis): *It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the*

test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though he had yet to receive what had been promised, and he had been told: Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power to even raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

- Joseph son of Jacob/Israel was cast into a well by his brothers and then sold into slavery (Gen. 37:18-36; 39:20-41:45; 45:4-8; 50:20). His brothers told his father that he was dead, but later it was discovered that he was still alive.

2. persecution and imprisonment:

- Joseph son of Jacob was falsely imprisoned (Gen. 41:40-44) like the faithful of Smyrna.
- There is also a connection to the “false Jews” who were persecuting the true “heirs of the promise” (Smyrnaian Christians), just as Abraham’s illegitimate son Ishmael persecuted Isaac, the “son of the promise” (Gen 21:9; Gal 4:22-41).

3. *the hardships [tribulations] for ten days* followed by victory:

- The reference to *the hardships for ten days* followed by victory recalls Israel’s endurance through the ten plagues before deliverance.
- The ten days may also refer to the hardships of the four faithful young Jews in the Book of Daniel who asked for a ten-day trial in not eating ritually unclean pagan food, and, after that period, were declared healthier than the other captives (See Daniel 1:12, 14, 15, 20).

The Covenant Treaty Format in the Letter to Pergamum:

1. **Preamble:** ...*the One who has the sharp sword, double-edged* (Rev 2:12).
2. **Historical Prologue:** *I know where you live* (Rev 2:13).
3. **Ethical Stipulations:** *Nevertheless, I have one or two charges* (Rev 2:14-15).
4. **Sanctions:** *So repent, or I shall soon come to you and attack these* (Rev 2:16).
5. **Succession Arrangements:** *to those who prove victorious I will give some hidden manna and a white stone, with a new name written on it* (Rev 2:17).

2:15 (also see 2:6) ~ The false Nicolaitan apostles advocated what is called “antinomianism,” the teaching that Christians were “freed from the law.”

Satan’s throne:

1. The allusion could be to Zeus’ throne-like altar located in the Temple of Zeus high above the city. 2. It may be a reference to the prominence of Pergamum as the official cult center of emperor worship in Asia. 3. It may even refer to a community of false Jews, another “synagogue of Satan.” The unbelieving Jewish communities who rejected their Redeemer-Messiah became the foremost enemy of the Church and were constantly denouncing Christians to the Roman magistrates (Acts 4:24-28; 12:1-3; 13:8; 14:5; 17:5-8; 18:12-13; 21:11; 24:1-9; 25:2-3,9, 24). John will reveal in Revelation Chapters 12-13 that Satan is the moving force behind the Jewish and Roman attempt to destroy the Church!

The 3 gifts in 2:17 ~ 1) manna, 2) a white stone, and 3) a new name.

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