

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



Sanctuary Windows (Upper South side)

St John the Divine

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent



The Angel comes to St John

Reading: Revelation 22:1-9

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

And he said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.’

‘See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.’

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!’

Commentary

St John the Divine, or St John of Patmos, has long been acknowledged to be the Apostle John, son of Zebedee and author of the Fourth Gospel, though there is dispute over this in favour of someone called

‘John the Elder.’ In the Book of Revelation, he simply identifies himself as ‘John.’ He is considered to have been exiled to the island of Patmos (a Greek island off the coast of Ephesus in modern day Turkey) during the anti- Christian persecutions under the Emperor Domitian (c 89-96AD), as he was probably regarded as a threat to Roman political power and order.

It was on the island of Patmos that John had a vision of Heaven. The word ‘Revelation’ in Greek is ‘Apokalypsis’ (apocalypse) which means the ‘unveiling’ or ‘revelation’ of Divine mysteries, privileged access to the workings of Heaven. John is told to write down what is being revealed and send it to the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, Ephesus being the main city. The entire book of Revelation is the letter, but the first part, a kind of introduction, constitutes seven individual epistles to the churches.

After these, John describes a series of ‘heavenly visions’ and towards the end of the Book, he describes the Day of Judgement followed by the renewal of all of creation: ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ and ‘a new Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God.’ The description of this heavenly city is one where the presence of God to humanity has been fully restored; it is not just a city and a sanctuary but also a garden. Our windows reflect this, for both John and his angel are set within a garden. The river containing the water of life and the tree of life reflect Paradise Regained, where ‘They (the faithful) will see His (God’s) face.’

The Book of Revelation ends with the urgent cry for this vision to be fulfilled: ‘Amen Come Lord Jesus!’

Meditation

The Book of Revelation was written to Christians undergoing or in danger of experiencing, persecution. The book is full of visions revealing the rewards for those who remain faithful despite hostility and even death. Yet, St John is concerned not just to inspire and comfort those in need but to challenge with a prophetic message those who are complacent and too ready to compromise with the ethics of the surrounding culture, particularly through business.

One of the criticisms levelled at one of the seven churches, the one at Laodicea, is that it is 'neither hot nor cold', 'a spiritual lukewarmness.' Laodicea was equidistance between the Hierapolis (modern Pamukkale) with its thermal hot springs with all their healing properties, and Colossae, with its refreshingly cold-water springs. The tepid water of Laodicea is used as a sign that the church there has lost its fervour, lost its effectiveness as a Christian witness.

Meditate on the verse: 'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life.'

Imagine that this river flows through all the parched and dry places of your life and experience, bringing healing and renewal.

In what way are you lukewarm about your faith and worship?

Prayer

Risen and exalted Christ, our Lord and King – Come into our hearts today, renew us and remake us in Your image so that we are pleasing to You. Forgive us our complacency and self-satisfaction and create in us a holy unrest with our affluence and with all that takes us from you. Amen