

The Book of the Apocalypse as a model for the Mass

The Book of Book of the Apocalypse is amazing. As well as containing many prophetic statements, it contains a very accurate vision of the Mass as it's taking place in Heaven. The Catholic Mass is an echo on earth, of this beautiful ceremony.

| Mass Stuff | Book of the Apocalypse Passage | Example Text |
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| Sunday Worship | Apoc 1:10 | "The Lord's Day" Celibacy of clergy Apoc 14:4 "They are Virgins" |
| The Altar | Apoc 6:9, 8:3, 5; 9:13, 11:1, 14:18, 16:17 | Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar . He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. |
| Vested priests | Apoc 3:5, 3:18, 4:4, 7:13, 14, 22:14 | "These in white robes —who are they, and where did they come from?"... Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. |
| Candles | Apoc 4:5 | Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. |
| Incense and Prayers of the Saints | Apoc 5:8, 8:3, 8:4 | ...and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. (Apoc 5:8) |
| Blood of the Lamb | Apoc 7:15 | ...they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb . |
| Holy, Holy, Holy | Apoc 4:8 | Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. |
| Penitential Rite (repentance) | Apoc. 2:5, 16, 21; 3:3; 16:11 | Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. |
| Silent prayer after Communion | Apoc 8:1 | ...there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. |
| Invoking angels | Apoc 5:11 | Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels , numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. |
| Gloria | Apoc 1:6, 4:9, 11, 5:12,13, 7:12, 11:13, 14:7, 15:4 | Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!" |

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| Sign of the Cross | Apoc 7:3-4, 11:1, 14:1, 22:4 | Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God. (Apoc 7:3) ... 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.(14:1) |
| Allelujah | Apoc 19:1, 3, 4, 6 | "Allelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God ... The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, allelujah!"... . "allelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. |
| Liturgical readings | Apoc 5:1 | ...in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing ... |
| Lamb of God | Apoc 5:12 | "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" ... |
| Eucharist (Manna) | Apoc 2:17 | He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. |
| Mary | Apoc 12:1-17 | A woman ... crown of twelve stars on her head... pregnant ... gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations ... And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne...Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. |
| Relics of Saints under the Altar | Apoc 6:9 | I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. |

This is the main purpose of Book of the Apocalypse, to describe the most important ceremony of

Christian worship, the Mass.

Who is the central figure of the Apocalypse? The slain and risen Lamb, the Paschal or Passover Lamb that is given to us in the holy Eucharist, instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ at the last ritual and sacrificial meal he celebrated with the disciples before His atoning death. What is the central activity depicted in the book? Worship—either true (directed to God and the Lamb) or idolatrous (directed to Babylon, the beast, the whore, etc.). And what is the central metaphor? Marriage. You are either united as “one flesh” with the Lamb, washed clean in His blood and feasting at His table, or you are fornicating with the devil; the two cities are contrasted as a whore (the old, unfaithful Jerusalem) and a virgin bride (the new Jerusalem, the Church). The very term *apokalypsis* means “unveiling.” At the time the Apocalypse was written, this term was used to describe, among other things, the unveiling of the virgin bride as part of the wedding festivities.

In a nutshell, the Book of the Apocalypse is about true worship of the true God, a mystical marriage with Him; and this is brought about through the Church’s worship, that is, the sacramental life, especially Baptism and the Eucharist. Apart from this life, there is error, folly, despair, horror, and destruction—the history of fallen mankind, which wages war against the Lamb. (It is interesting to note that this book has received a title of honor that was subsequently extended to, or rather, recognized in, the entire body of Scripture, namely, “Book of the Apocalypse”; and it is not incidental that not just *this* book, called “Book of the Apocalypse,” is about true worship of the true God, but *all* of Scripture is about true worship of the true God. Christianity is a religion principally and fundamentally concerned with adoring, loving, and serving the one true God, in which man’s salvation and the very content of love of neighbor consists. It is inherently bound up with sacrifice and sacrament, by which we profess our faith in God and yield ourselves to Him in love.

Now, why does Sacred Scripture *end* with the Book of the Apocalypse? The reason is as simple as it is profound: the Apocalypse is not merely or even primarily the closure of a written book but the beginning of, or aperture to, something else that is greater than Scripture: **the living worship of the living Body of Christ**. This is the subtle but poignant response, far ahead of time, to Luther's invention of *sola scriptura*: the Apocalypse ends the Bible because it depicts and invites us to the Eucharistic banquet of the Lamb, which is where the *things* spoken about in Scripture are *really present*, in their fullest intensity.

The written signs lead us to the reality signified; the bread of the word leads to the bread of life, the book to the altar. As Hahn writes:

For most of the early Christians it was a given: the Apocalypse was incomprehensible apart from the liturgy. ... It was only when I began attending Mass that the many parts of this puzzling book suddenly began to fall into place. Before long, I could see the sense in the Apocalypse's altar (8:3), its robed clergymen (4:4), candles (1:12), incense (5:8), manna (2:17), chalices (ch. 16), Sunday worship (1:10), the prominence it gives to the Blessed Virgin Mary (12:1-6), the "Holy, Holy, Holy" (4:8), the Gloria (15:3-4), the Sign of the Cross (14:1), the Alleluia (19:1, 3, 6), the readings from Scripture (chs. 2-3), and the "Lamb of God" (many, many times). These are not interruptions in the narrative or incidental details; they are the very stuff of the Apocalypse. (*The Lamb's Supper*, 66-67)

In these final pages, when we behold the new Jerusalem descending from heaven, where does it descend to? Mount Zion, that is, the place where Jesus had eaten His last Passover and instituted the Eucharist, where the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, where the Christians in AD 70 were spared Roman destruction. "In other words, the new Jerusalem came to earth, then as now, in the place where Christians celebrated the supper of the Lamb" (Hahn, 102). Liturgy is anticipated Parousia, the 'already' entering our 'not yet.'

The early Christians did not call it "the Mass." Mass is a medieval English coinage derived from the Latin rite's words of dismissal: *Ite, missa est* ("Go, it is ended"). The first generations of believers called their worship by many other names, each evocative and some even poetic. In the beginning, it was most commonly referred to as "the breaking of the bread." This, however, was immediately supplemented by "the sacrifice," and related terms such as "the offering" and "the oblation"; for the Mass was understood to be the Church's participation in the once-for-all sacrifice of the new covenant. Some called the new rite "the liturgy," from the Greek *leitourgia*, meaning "public service." The Latins, from an early date, used the term "sacrament", while Greeks favored "the mysteries." Some terms were merely descriptive, such as "the table of the Lord", "the Lord's supper", "the chalice" and "the altar".

The Mass of the Early Christians, by Mike Aquilina

What about the ceremony, golden chalices, incense and stuff Catholics use?

Here is a written inventory of articles used by Christians in Certina from 303 AD, before the "legalization" of Christianity by Constantine. Apart from the Scriptures that were always used, the inventory is as follows:

- 2 golden chalices
- 6 silver chalices
- 6 silver dishes
- a silver bowl
- 7 silver lamps
- 2 torches
- 7 short bronze candlesticks with their lamps
- 11 bronze lamps with their chains (i.e., used for incense)
- 82 women's tunics
- 38 veils
- 16 men's tunics
- 13 pairs of men's slippers
- 47 pairs of women's slippers
- 18 pairs of men's wooden shoes

(Gregory Dix, *the Shape of the Liturgy*, Pg. 24.)

Quite a ceremony! Noah made a burnt offering and the "odour pleased the Lord." (Gen 8:21) The Lord did not come to abolish the law of Moses but rather to fulfill it. (Mat 5:17). The Law had a ton of ceremony and vestments in it. Jesus taught in temples all the time. He didn't go in there just to pull out the faithful. He loved the temple and He called it "my Father's house" (Lk 2:49, Jn 2:16). He's into ceremony. Even in Heaven there is ceremony. "The twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense." (Apoc 5:8). "Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the Prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne" (Apoc 8:3). These are some of the reasons why Catholics are into ceremony.

In fact, large parts of the Book of the Apocalypse give us a description of the Mass.

Incense: We find incense at the temple in Lk 1:10 and the Magi brought frankincense to Jesus' birth. There is lots of incense at the Mass in Heaven. (Apoc 5:8, 8:3, 8:4)

Visual art is art for the eyes
Music is art for the ears
Perfume and incense are art for the nose
All art forms can be used in service to God!

We love a good high mass with beautiful music and incense.

Bells: Bells on the top of steeples are cool; they are simply a reminder that it is time for Mass. Some fundamentalists claim they are of pagan origin. But pagans also sang hymns and we wouldn't rule those out. Zachariah spoke of "bells" on horses being inscribed with the words: Holiness unto the Lord: (Zach 14:20) Even the Lord directed that bells be attached to the hem of the high priest's garment! (Exod. 28:33)

Mostly, the opposition to bells is that they are "Catholic" bells ringing in the neighbourhood. But many protestant churches have bells too. In recent years bells have fallen out of fashion because they "bother" neighbours who would rather sleep on Sunday mornings than go to church

Priestly Vestments: We see priestly vestments in Scripture (Ex 40:13-14, Lev 8:7-9, Apoc 3:5, 3:18, 4:4, 7:13, 14, 22:14) We also see priestly vestments in history, as shown above from the pre-Constantine Mass documented in 303 AD. The account below shows the attire worn by priests just a couple of centuries after Christ;

"Cyprian was brought to the plain of Sextus. There he removed his **cloak** and kneeling down he humbled himself in prayer to God. He disrobed and gave his **dalmatic** to the deacons. Clad only in his **linen tunic** he awaited his executioner..."

