

Seeing the Whole Picture

Note: this Homily is based on Revelation 5:11–14. Please read that passage before reading the Homily.

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Seeing the whole picture

There's an old story about the sailor diligently cleaning the decks, training the new crew, making sure his duties are done to the best of his ability. He's the sort of sailor you'd love to have in your crew. Then you step back and take in the whole picture - and you see the ship is flying the Jolly Roger. Suddenly you realise that the sailor you admired is a pirate.

Seeing the whole picture is important to get a true understanding of the situation.

The Apostle John wrote Revelation around the end of the first century. John himself was imprisoned in the island of Patmos, and Christians were living under the constant threat of attack and persecution. But that is only part of the picture. The first verse of Revelation is: *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place."* And Revelation concludes with John hearing:

a loud voice from the Throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:3-5)

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For God's people living under threat, through times of deep struggle, seeming to be a misunderstood minority, the words of the One on the Throne give them the encouragement to see the big picture and to live faithful lives serving their King, Jesus. The picture Revelation gives us shows us what is happening now from Heaven's perspective as we live day by day here. Two truths are happening simultaneously: we live and experience life here and now, and second, God is ruling and drawing history to a climax under Jesus. While John is imprisoned on Patmos, he is given a glimpse into heaven and shown what is happening there. Revelation is written in the present tense, it tells us what is happening now, in our present time, and it shows us what is happening in heaven at the same time. So in Revelation 5:11 John writes:

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.

1. The Throne - is the centre of the action - around the Throne are the living creatures and the elders - representing all of creation and all of God's people. They are encircled by countless angels. In our society, you may feel small and insignificant, but as you gather each Sunday, you are part of a glorious celebration and part of God's people - gathered there around the Throne. The Throne is the symbol of rule and authority. There is only 1 Throne. The One on the Throne rules. All those around the Throne are singing in a loud voice, one song.

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"

As they sing, our attention is drawn to:

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2. The Lamb. The universal song is that he had been slain, but now he lives and is worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise! Back in chapter 4 John saw the Lord God Almighty was seated on the Throne. But the picture is more complex - in 5:6 John tells us:

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.

The Throne - the symbol of power and rule and authority. God is on the Throne. The Lamb standing in the centre of the Throne - the Lamb is on the Throne. And all of heaven is singing to the Lamb, who was slain, declaring that he is worthy *“to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!”* Do you recall Jesus words after his resurrection, as he was speaking to his disciples in Matthew 28:18 *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* Yes, the Lamb is on the Throne. God is on the Throne.

This is so important for us to grasp. When we look at the world from our perspective it does not look as if anyone is in control at all. Our politicians? No. They might make laws, but they hardly look as if they are in control. And we know corruption has contaminated our banking system, our police. And also, so sadly the church shockingly has been stained with child sexual abuse, domestic violence. So, no, the church is not in control, even of itself. And when we step back from that scene of disaster and shame, it feels like no-one is in control. And as he writes Revelation, recall that John himself is in prison - for Christ.

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But Jesus, on the Throne, has given John the full picture - the Lord Almighty is on the Throne, the Lamb is on the Throne. God is in control absolutely - and he is fulfilling his plan. Recall the words of the Risen Jesus in Matthew 28 - *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ...”* Jesus sends us to announce his offer of forgiveness and new life in Christ.

To help us grasp the reality of the vision, in Revelation 5:13-14, John hears every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, burst into song again and we hear:

3. The Worship they give to the Lamb:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

Jesus reveals to John that while John is in prison on Patmos, at the same time Jesus is on heaven's Throne, ruling. An earthly reality and a heavenly reality - both true at the same time. All of creation worships the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. While we sit here today, with our present concerns and hopes, at the same time in heaven all creation worships the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. God is on the Throne today. God has given us this revelation so we can be confidently:

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Living with the Full Picture.

Others in our world are not aware of the full picture. But because Jesus is risen, we can have confidence that Jesus is fulfilling his purposes and that he is with us even through our darkest times, as well as our brightest. And because Jesus is ruling now, we can look forward to sharing in life forever with him who forgives our sin. Because Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, then we can confidently encourage people we meet day by day to turn to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.