

## 'I am making everything new'

Zacharia 2:11-15 Rev 21:1-7

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Life on planet earth can be so beautiful; Most of us, I think, thoroughly enjoy living, and we like to do this as long as possible.

But even though we love life, all beauty on earth has a dark cloud hanging over it. We all know that our life will one day end, and even the beautiful days of our life are often tainted by the paintbrush of imperfection.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day, commemorating all saints who have passed away, including our own family members and friends. It reminds us of the great sadness of this life.

It is easy to become depressed about the state of humankind. This hopelessness is, I believe, caused by our separation from God our Creator. There is distance because He is God and we are human, but especially because He is holy, and we are not. We want to make life better and we want to be better people, but we seem to be able to mess up badly each time when we try.

But we have been created with a desire for God, and we cannot stop dreaming of better days, filled with Him and his perfection.

### 1. The dream

Few saints have been blessed with such a clear vision of God in heaven as St John the Apostle. In his book Revelation he shares with us what God made him see. As the *grand finale* of his vision he describes a new heaven and a new earth, after the first heaven and earth had passed away. St John offers us hope! There *will* be something new!

St John describes the end of history. His book completes the great story that we as a Church have been speaking about since the time of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in fact, almost from the beginning of creation.

A new heaven and a new earth – those words remind us of the first verse of the Bible. In Genesis we read that God created the heavens and the earth, and he made it *well*. 'It was *good*.'

Genesis speaks of a perfect garden where humankind lived in the most beautiful environment; a man and woman were able to live in perfect harmony with each other; that alone makes clear how different that world was from where we are now.

And they lived in full communion with God. God was in their midst, and that made all the difference. The world of God and man was *one world*.

The vague and almost subconscious memories of a paradise lost, of a broken link with the world of God, is felt by many people – Christians and others alike – and it creates a yearning for something new. A desire, I think, that many of us also experience.

The idea that our world has no hope but to just muddle on forever, generation after generation, as it does now, is not a very attractive idea at all. We desire, yes we need a quality change for the better.

Israel's prophets often reminded the nation of this early history of the world, and they promised that one day God would restore perfection again in a garden with God in their midst;

"You shall be my people and I will dwell in your midst", is what God promised Israel through the prophet Zachariah.

These words the same words are spoken by God in the vision of St John. Almost every word in the vision of John mirrors concepts, images, promises that Israel already knew from it's own Holy Scriptures.

Israel has always maintained its hope that God would one day restore the earth to its original design, with God truly with us, and even in the midst of the most godforsaken horrors, Israel has continued to show us the power of this hope.

St John describes this new earth as a place with 'no more death or mourning or crying or pain'. It is exactly our experience of present sadness and imperfection that makes us hope for new things to come.

We are in such bad shape that even if we do all we can to make our lives better, and to make ourselves better human beings, we fail miserably. We are able to lengthen our lives a bit with better medicine - but still all people die, and many of our friends and family members pass away too young. Disease and death are so ugly, so horrendous.

We would love to love, but we fight and we quarrel. We want to have happy marriages, but see how many end in divorce. We try to be decent people, but see how we detect venomous hatred and other ugliness in the corners of our hearts.

Something is intrinsically wrong with us, very wrong. If you find that hard to accept, you have not studied history enough, and you do not look often enough in your own moral mirror. We do not love our neighbor as ourselves, and we do not love God with our whole heart, do we?

The core of our problem is that we, as human beings, are by our own nature so corrupt, that *God cannot be with us*. We have turned the wrong corners; we have made the wrong immoral choices. That is why the promise that God will one day be in our midst again, is so very amazing.

'The dwellingplace of God is with men, and he will live with them', is what St John predicts. The Creator of heaven and earth will be in our midst again. He himself will 'will wipe every tear' from our eyes.

Unbelievable words! Maybe this is why John, after he saw and heard these extraordinary promises, was told specifically by the one who sits on the throne of the universe: "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Rev 21:5b) You better believe it, is what God says.

## 2. Jesus in the throne

The one in the throne then says, '*It is done*'. A statement that reminds me very much of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, when his last words were: '*it is finished*.' I believe this is no coincidence.

'*It is done*'; even though the actual event is still to happen in the future, the one on the throne already speaks of it as accomplished, because it is so sure. '*It is done*', because it is grounded in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

Because our Lord Jesus Christ died for the sins of humankind, the curse was lifted; St John describes him as 'a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne'. (Rev 5:6)

Jesus is central in the story of God's renewal of our world. If you look at the throne of God, there He is, Jesus, with the signs of his suffering still visible.

The one in the throne says: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. [...] He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son." So the one in the throne is God himself. The Creator of all things.

But in Revelation 22, the very same words, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End", are spoken again, but now by Jesus Christ!

St John does not present us with a detailed theology of the Trinity, but he makes clear that the early Church believed that God the Father and Jesus Christ shared the same divine identity.

It is *Jesus* who tells us that the promise of a new heaven and a new earth are sure. *He* is the one who says: "I am making everything new!"

He is *able* to do this, because He is seated in the management-room of the cosmos. And He is *committed* to do it; he sealed it with his own death and resurrection. '*It is finished*. The curse is

lifted. '*It is done*.' There will be a new heaven and a new earth.

When my father died of cancer, he was only 42 years old. At his own request my mother had this verse engraved on his tombstone. "I am making everything new."

What a hope for the future, and what comfort for today, for people who live in the midst of misery and loneliness, or whatever problem you are facing today. Jesus Christ promises to make things new.

Mind you, Jesus does not say: *One day* I will make all things new. He says: '*I am making everything new*.' This is present continuous tense. He does it *now*, and he does it *always*!

While our Lord gave John this beautiful vision of a distant future, He told him that he is already in the process of renewing all things. These are not words about a distant hope only; this is the description of what our Lord is doing *today*. The future that God has designed for us is already impacting us today.

## 3. Foretaste

St John, present at the throne of God, describes his vision of the future:

### Read Rev 21:3.

When the cosmic clock no longer ticks, 'the dwelling of God is with men' - forever and in perfection. But we hear the echo of this future dream in the Gospel stories, especially around Christmas, when we read, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us". And we hear it in the words of Jesus who told his followers: 'I am always with you, to the close of the age.'

Surely, in the book of Revelation we see the *fulfillment* of God being with man in its *highest* possible intensity, but when God became incarnate, He was called *Immanuel, God with us*, and that is what he is, even today.

We look forward to a new heaven and earth, to the renewal of all creation; but according to St Paul, 'You *are* a new creation'. Already.

We look forward to that day, when we shall be with God *as his people*, but even today, the followers of Jesus Christ are called his people. St Peter writes: "You are a holy nation, his own special people."

Even today, in church, as the people of God, we experience something of the presence of God.

So in our *present* life as Christians, we already experience something of the great things that are to come. It is as if we have already received a down payment. We already experience something tangible, something real, of the much better and bigger things to come.

This is because today, we are already connected with the Lord in his throne. Even today. This foretaste of paradise is also what our Lord invites us to when he says:

To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.

When Jesus speaks about this thirst, he speaks of the thirst *for God*, the desire for a life in which *He* is present. He is today offering us this tremendous foretaste of communion with himself as promised in the new heaven and the new earth.

Now we have tears – but God is with us. One day, he will wipe the off our faces forever and unite us with all the beloved friends and family members who have passed away.

Now there is disease and death – but God is not far.

Now we pray for change in our life – one day God will complete our makeover.

Thirst is an existential experience. Not something vague and undefined. Go for a day into the desert without water, and we know again how real thirst can be.

Someone said to me that she does not go to Church because she does not experience much of faith. It just does not impact her. I asked her whether children, because they do not know

much, should therefore not go to school. Or, do we not eat that fantastic juicy steak because we have never had one so we do not know its taste?

Learning comes before knowing, eating comes before tasting. Living a Christian life comes before experiencing something of God.

### **Concluding words**

The difficulties and miseries in our life are very real, but this vision of how life will one day be, is comforting. And it is even more comforting if even today we are able to taste something of that future life with God.

Jesus Christ promises to quench our thirst for God in our *present* situation. For receiving this life-giving water, we must not just wait and see what happens; we have to be where Jesus Christ is.

Being with him, in prayer, in holy communion, in serving other people, in reading our Bible, in participating in church life, *being with him*, that is what we have to do in order to experience this foretaste of eternal and perfect communion with God.

**+ In the name of the Father and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen**