

**STIGMATINE DEVOTIONS:
The ESPOUSALS and the STIGMATA**



in the APOCALYPSE

[Rv 19]

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¹ Cf. Giuseppe Ferraro, *La gioia di Cristo nel 4° Vangelo, nelle Lettere Giovanee e nell'Apocalisse*. Vatican 2000, pp.189-204.

Historical Introduction

[1] In the Stigmatine world, we often thought of our Devotions to the Sacred Stigmata, both Sorrowful and Glorious – and the Espousals of Mary and Joseph as to stem from the fact that St. Gaspar Bertoni was a life-long invalid, very capable Confessor - and that he came from a broken home, his father abandoning the family unfaithfully pursuing his own personal interests.

[2] But there is a deeper reason: In Fr. Raymond Brown's classical treatment of the 4th Gospel, the author has presented Jon's Book of Signs [Jn 1-12] as centered around liturgical festivals: the Sabbath; the Passover [Jn 5-6]; and the Feast of Ingathering, the Harvest, Tents, Tabernacles in the fall of the year. [Jn 7-8] In the spring-time there was the Festival of Blood and the sacrificial Lamb – in the autumn of life, all returned to the Sheep-pen to hunker down during the winter rains.

[3] Jn 19 speaks first of the blood [flowing from the Pierced Side of Christ] in the bloody sacrifice of Calvary [the Liturgical response is AMEN, so be it, FIAT!] – 1 Jn 5:6, speaks of Conversion to the Faith, through the three witnesses: the Spirit [with grace], the water [baptism] and the blood [Eucharist] – the liturgical response is: ALLELUIAH.

[4] There are four scenes that unfold here in Rv 19:

- Canticle of Praise for the Just Victory over the Powers of Darkness;
- Canticle of Praise by the 24 Elders and the 4 Living Beings;
- Canticle of Praise of the Assembly for the Espousals of the Immolated Lamb;
- The Beatitude of the Nuptial Banquet.

Presentation

The Rejoicing in Heaven

19 ¹ After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God,

² for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants."^[a]

³ Once more they said, "Hallelujah! The smoke goes up from her forever and ever."

⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

⁵ And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants,[b] and all who fear him, small and great."

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder peals, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns."

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready;

⁸ to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹ And the angel said[c] to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

¹⁰ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant[d] with you and your comrades[e] who hold the testimony of Jesus.[f] Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus[g] is the spirit of prophecy."

Introduction

[1] In the general structure of Rv, the present passage [16:17-22:5] pertains to the 5th Section, the last of the second part of the book.

[2] At The Fall of Babylon there is contrasted the Celebration of the New Jerusalem, the Spouse of the Lamb. The AMEN responds also to the bloody sacrifice: so be it, FIAT! – and the ALLELUIAH at the outset, sets the tone, but the Liturgical Celebration is rendered possible from the restoration of the Reign of God but this does not imply that the drama is completed. That which the passage presents constitutes the beginning of the drama characterized by the intervention of a variety of actors.

[3] After the vision regarding the great Prostitute, in contrast with the tragic ruin of Babylon, the choir breaks into exultation, already incidentally announced and invoked in Rv. 18:20. Here resounds the first ALLELUIAH, both a simple invitation and a solemn appeal to praise God. He has finally intervened!

[4] This passage serves as the transition between the two opposing scenarios that follow upon one another: the destruction of the great and unfaithful City, as well as the inauguration of the Heavenly Jerusalem. This is what the Canticle of Triumph announces along with the Nuptials of the Lamb. In this passage there are numerous terms that are placed in the register of Salvific Potency, glory, power, the Throne the Divine Reign, Judgment, and vindication.

[5] From the point of view of the theme of Joy this passage corresponds to the Gospel text of Jn 3:32-36:

Jesus and John the Baptist

²² After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized ²⁴ —John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison.

²⁵ Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. ^[a]

²⁶ They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him."

²⁷ John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from

heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but I have been sent ahead of him.' ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."^c

The One Who Comes from Heaven

³¹ The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. ³³ Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified^[d] this, that God is true. ³⁴ He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.

[a] There recurs in this passage Jn's first mention of Joy, and this is from the lips of the Precursor. The 4th Gospel here proclaims the fullness of his own sentiments of exultation, referring to Jesus the title of Spouse. Jesus as the Beloved Son and Spouse, possesses His Spouse, the Church. Just hearing the voice of the Beloved Spouse produces exultation of the spirit of the Spouse, bringing to perfect fulfillment his joy. [cf. Jn 3:29].

[b] This apocalyptic passage contains the final text of the Book in which recurs the theme of joy with the verbs to rejoice/ exult. These have the same object as the earlier gospel text which is the Nuptial Theme. A kind of grand arc connects these two passages which contain the revelation of Jesus as Spouse and the revelation of Joy that emanates from that fact.

[c] There resounds a kind of double image various times delineated in the word of the Prophets:

You shall no more be termed Forsaken,^[a]
 and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;^[b]
 but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,^[c]
and your land Married,^[d]

for the LORD delights in you,

and your land shall be married.

⁵ For as a young man marries a young woman,

so shall your builder^[e] marry you,

and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,

so shall your God rejoice over you. [Is 62: 4, f.]

⁸ I passed by you again and looked on you;

you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of

my cloak over you, and

covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you

and entered into a covenant with you, says the

Lord GOD, and you became mine. [Ezk 16:9].

Israel's Infidelity, Punishment, and Redemption

² Plead with your mother, plead — for she is not

my wife, and

I am not her husband — that she put away her

whoring from her face, and her adultery from

between her breasts, [Ho 2:2]

Ode for a Royal Wedding

To the leader: according to Lilies. Of the Korahites. A Maskil.

A love song.

¹ My heart overflows with a goodly theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

² You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.

³ Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your glory and majesty.

⁴ In your majesty ride on victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend[a] the right; let your right hand teach you dread deeds.

⁵ Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you.

⁶ Your throne, O God,[b] endures forever and ever. Your royal scepter is a

scepter of equity;

⁷ you love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;

⁸ your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;

⁹ daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor; at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

¹⁰ Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house,

¹¹ and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him;

¹² the people[c] of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts, the richest of the people

¹³ with all kinds of wealth.

The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes; [d]

¹⁴ in many-colored robes she is led to the king; behind her the virgins, her companions, follow.

¹⁵ With joy and gladness they are led along as they enter the palace of the king.

¹⁶ In the place of ancestors you, O king,[e] shall have sons; you will make them princes in all the earth.

¹⁷ I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever.

[d] This Psalm 45 has long been understood as a Canticle celebrating a Royal Messianic Wedding. This was long understood in relationship to that Covenant of loving Mercy the future Messiah would inspire, extending it also to non-believing peoples. In the Christian tradition, however, it was considered as pre-announcing and presenting the Espousals between Christ and the Church.

[6] The Gospel and the Apocalypse re-echo this line of thinking seeing it fulfilled in Jesus Himself – He is the Heavenly Spouse in Whom the God renews the New and Definitive Covenant. The Precursor, the Friend of the Bride, has prepared the Marriage Festival and has received the culmination of his own joy. The Apocalypse now announces this marvelous Heavenly Liturgy in which there is being celebrated the Marriage between Christ and the Church, the ultimate realization of the Covenant of Mercy, as the Sponsal Love of God for the Community of the new People Elect – of Jesus for His Church.

[7] This passage is then articulated in the various liturgical hymns that follow upon this one. The Grand Doxology [19:1-8] is the final such composition in Rv.

[a] It is one of the most refined of them all in the entire NT: its recurring literary theme is *ALLELUIAH*, which is found in Rv 19: 1, 3, 4, 6. These are the only cases in the entire NT where this word is found. In the OT, in all probability it is taken directly from actual liturgical usage from the Early Church. Its emphasis is to bring to the maximum the celebration of God.

[b] This Doxology is composed of 5 brief Canticles of vv. 1-8: 1-2; 3; 4. These are all characterized by the Hebrew *ALLELUIAH* which is translated as Praise God. The 4th Canticle here [v. 5] is the only non-Choral Canticle, and so is seen to be as an Antiphon.

[c] The word goes back to its frequent use in the Hebrew Psalms: Praise the Lord! This recurring invitation manifests an evidently liturgical tone. It is often found 4 times at the beginning of some Psalms, 3 times at the end. These examples are found in the Psalms [cf Ps. 107] a composition known to be used in the Liturgical celebration of the principal feasts. There is the impression that the term loses its sense of a fervent invitation to praise in order to assume the character of a response that expresses this praise. This Liturgical usage has naturally passed over from Judaism to early Christianity. All this shows that a liturgical use is found powerfully attested to in later Christianity. It is more probable that in the 1st & 2nd centuries the Christian liturgies already indicated this element, central to her prayer Praise!

[d] Often times the term was prayed by an assembly, choral group, within the assembly – as the text notes, one was sung by the 24 elders, and by 4 living beings. The Antiphon issues from the Throne, the celebrant. The whole passage comes to a close with a narrative conclusion. These Canticles express exultation which is explicitly affirmed in the 5th Canticle above, regarding the joyful Nuptials of the Lamb. The narrative conclusion [19:9-10] proclaims the Beatitude of those invited to the Nuptial Meal of the Lamb and His Spouse, prolonging the theme of joy and comes to an end, specifically naming the three divine authors of salvation: the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

A. The Chant of Praise the Assembly to God
for the Punishment of the Sinful Prostitute [vv. 1-3]

1. Then I heard a powerful voice as though of a huge crowd in heaven, singing ALLELUIAH! Salvation, Glory and Power are of our God. Truly right and just are His judgments, He has condemned the sinful Prostitute who corrupted the whole earth with her prostitution vindicating the Blood of her servants, shed by her hand. And for the second time, they chanted: ALLELUIAH! - for all the centuries.

2. Once the Judgment of Punishment was handed down to the great and wayward City, horribly stained by the blood of many martyrs, the multitude of the Heavenly Blessed pours forth the celebration of the Divine Glory. This was manifested in the destruction of earthly power hostile to God. After the ALLELUIAH there were proclaimed three divine attributes recurring throughout the Book: Salvation procured for believers; Glory and Power deriving from the Salvation; then there were proclaimed Truth and Justice with which the great corrupted City was punished. This City had spread her corruption through idolatry and had shed the blood of the martyrs. The corruption accomplished by the wayward City indicates the evil activities of those who dragged the People far from the way laid out for them, i.e., the Pathway of Obedience and of dedication to God.

3. The powerful voice expresses, as an echo, the common congratulations, the exultation of all the citizens of Heaven. These praise God repeating the Cantic of the ALLELUIAH, in thanksgiving for the eternity of the punishment indicated by the smoke which rises up forever, and manifests the punishment for evil that will last eternally with the destruction of the City of the Evil, Wicked. There is recalled before the Assembly the text from the Prophet Isaiah regarding the burning of Edom: there will not be extinguished either by day or by night, for there will forever rise up its smoke [cf. Is 34:10]. God Himself has been revealed as a flaming Fire [Dt 9:3; Is 30:27] and His wrath proves to be an irresistible flame.

**B. The Canticle of the Elders and the living Beings offering
Praise to God and the Voice from the Throne [19:4-5].**

1. Then the 24 Elders and the 4 Living Beings prostrated themselves as they adore God eternally. He was seated on the Throne [of the King], the President's Chair [for the Priest]. There came forth from the Throne a voice which prayed: Praise our God, all you His servants all those of you who fear Him, little and great!

2. The 24 Elders having come on the scene for the first time in the book in Rv 4 and then mentioned repeatedly [Rv 4:4, 10; 5:e5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4] appear here for the last time.

a. These 24 Elders play a decidedly liturgical role between God and the Church herself. After their Amen!/ alleluiah! in 19:4, they are no longer found: they seem to be lacking in the New Jerusalem. This fact accentuates their functionality which is unfolded only in the development of Salvation History even unto its conclusion, and indicates that these are personalities who are well defined, and seem well substantiated in the literary plan of the Book. With respect to their multiple mediation in both an ascending and descending sense, this is indicated by this background Jesus Christ occupies the central role – these 24 Elders will be of assistance to those Christians still on earth in order to comprehend the meaning of the presence and the action of Jesus Christ. They will lead all to God those of goodwill – through the prayers of these personalities they will contribute mightily to the coming of the Reign of Jesus Christ in this world.

b. Their number corresponds to that of the 24 priestly orders established by David as noted in 1 Ch 14:1-9:

Divisions of the Priests

14 ¹ The divisions of the descendants of Aaron were these. The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ² But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no sons; so Eleazar and Ithamar became the priests. ³ Along with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, David organized them according to the appointed duties in their service. ⁴ Since more chief men were found among the sons of Eleazar than among the sons of Ithamar, they organized them under sixteen heads of ancestral houses of the sons of Eleazar, and eight of the sons of Ithamar. ⁵ They organized them by lot, all alike, for there were officers of the sanctuary and officers of God among both the sons

of Eleazar and the sons of Ithamar. ⁶The scribe Shemaiah son of Nethanel, a Levite, recorded them in the presence of the king, and the officers, and Zadok the priest, and Ahimelech son of Abiathar, and the heads of ancestral houses of the priests and of the Levites; one ancestral house being chosen for Eleazar and one chosen for Ithamar.

⁷ The first lot fell to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, ⁸ the third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, ⁹ the fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin,

c. The 24 clearly exercise a priestly service: they praise and adore God, and offer prayers to Him Prayers for the Faithful. They also enjoyed a Royal Role: they assist God in His government of the world and they share in His power.

d. The living beings which are frequently associated with these Elders, as described as having many eyes, which symbolize the universal knowledge of God and His Providence. They render continuously glory to God for His Creative work. In their first apparition they are described as a Lion, Bull, Man and Eagle – images all of which represent that which is the most noble, the most strong, the most wise and the most agile in all of creation. Like the Elders they also are mentioned here in our text for the last time. ²

e. Their importance refers to the action of God throughout history and they refer to the absolute centrality of Jesus Himself. Since the time of the Church Fathers, these 4 Living Beings were thought of as the 4 Evangelists. With respect to the on-going exchange between heaven and earth – between immanence and transcendence this is symbolized by the word living. This is its central point of reference that is determining and qualifying of them and their main activity –all centered around Jesus the eternal Lamb. Since the relationship between the 4th Gospel and the Apocalypse seems to be that of a greater explicitation and further application in the history of these theological themes. There can be seen in the centrality of Jesus Christ with that movement of exchange between heaven and earth, as the liturgical impact on eternity. There is a re-presentation of his in Jn 1:51: in truth you will see the heavens opened, and the angels of God who ascend and descend on the Son of Man . These 4 beings are under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit.

² Rv 4:46, 7, 8, 9; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 6:1,3, 5, 6, 75; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4]

3. In the scene as described here these two categories [Elders and Living Beings] of persons adore God and pronounce two special words: AMEN & ALLELUIAH!

a. The AMEN sounds like one's commitment, adherence, ratification, confirmation, solemn caution and ultimate approbation of the relationship between the Church on earth and the community involved in the Eternal Liturgy, honoring the Imolated Lamb – the Merciful High Priest offering thanksgiving forever in the celestial Sanctuary [cf. Hebrews]. All of this is proclaimed triumphantly, joyously by those Beings closest to God in eternity, persevering, faithful believers - from the Doxology of the Canticle of the immense Crowd, Assembly. This solemnly professes that it is seeing the salvation and judgment of God eternally fully realized. This AMEN re-echoes the Benediction of the Psalms: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel forever and ever. And the whole Assembly responds: AMEN! [cf. 106:48 – this is the doxology which ends the 4th Book of the Psalter.

b. The ALLELUIAH associates the Elders and the 4 Living Beings to the common and eternal Chant of Praise of the Imolated Lamb. God is represented as being seated on a Throne – this is the habitual figuration in the Apocalypse and the expression of divine majesty³.

4. Near the end of an English translation of his classic, The Lord⁴, Romano Guardini states:

a. Among the wealth of details in his vision [of the Apocalypse], one detail stays the attention: on the Throne sits Someone. The modern no longer knows what a Throne is, nor how one sits on a Throne, who one *thrones*.

b. Looking back, we encounter the mighty throning depicted in Egyptian sculpture. What quiet power emanates from these statues of gods and rulers! We find it again in the early Greek art, and [Christianized] in the mosaics of the first Christian centuries and in the stone figures of the opening Middle Ages. Then it vanishes.

c. Personages no longer throne –they merely 'sit'. And even the sitting becomes more and more restless. The ancient throning was not stiff - its movement lay in the potential power of the figure, in its stillness, intensity. Now movement

³ cf. Rv 4:9-10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5.

⁴ Romano GUardini, The Lord. With an Introduction by Pope Benedict XVI. Washington DC: Regnery 1982 [re-print], pp.572, f.

flings itself to the surface. Sitting has become careless, a flighty interim between coming and going. Something at the very root of our lives has changed.

d. When we ask a man today what he considers life, the answer will always be more or less the same: Life is tension, flinging oneself towards a goal; it is creation and destruction and new creation. It is that which rushes and foment, streams and storms – a City that never sleeps!. Thus the modern finds it difficult to realize that also the omnipotent present is life; intensity of gathered forces; quiet power that vibrates in stillness. For him, life is linked to the flow of time. It is change, crossing over, the constantly new.

e. Life resting in permanency and bordering on the eternal is beyond his comprehension. When he considers God He thinks of the restlessly creative One. Indeed, he is inclined to see the Maker Himself in an unending process of becoming that arches from an infinitely distant past into an infinitely distant future.

f. The God of the pure present, immutable, realizing Himself in the reality of His existence, does not appeal to him. And when he hears of an eternal life in which all meaning is to fulfill itself he is likely to grow uncomfortable: what does one do with an existence in which nothing happens?

g. The Throne stands for the majesty [QUADOSH] of the God of the immaculate present. It stands for him who lives in eternal stillness, one who in the timeless simplicity of his will created, sustains and reigns over all things. Before his countenance, earthly toil and struggle is but passageway and their claim to be genuine life superlative nonsense.

h. This, then, that image of God that dominates in revelation. God does not speak; he silently contains the meaning of all things. God doesn't act, but all power to act comes from him. Not even his face or form is visible, only a blaze of costliness that the eye is unable to penetrate...

5. From the Throne of God, which symbolizes God Himself, there emanates a voice which exhorts continual uninterrupted praise of God. The heavenly exhortation is to proclaim warmly, enthusiastically, the ALLELUIAH, by repeating it, by diffusing it. This divine exhortation prepares and introduces the Chant which follows. This is the same beginning as so many of the Psalms:

- Praise, o servants of the Lord, praise the Name of the Lord ...! [Ps 113:1].
- Raise the Lord, all you nations...! [Ps 117:1].
- Praise the Name of the Lord, Praise Him servants of the Lord...! [cf. Ps 135:1].

- Praise the lord because He is good..! [cf. Ps 136:1].
- Praise the Lord ...! [cf. Ps 147:1; 148:1; 150:1].

6. Those who are invited to proclaim the glorification of God, are all His specially chosen servants who fear Him in worship – in this manner to the Canticle of the Glory of God of the Blessed in heaven there is to be united here on earth the praise and glory of God offered by Faithful Believers, part of the Church Militant, still on earth – thus uniting earthly liturgy to heavenly praise.

**C. THE CANTICLE OF THE IMMENSE ASSEMBLY:
ETERNAL JOY FOR THENUPETIALS OF THE IMMOLATED LAMB [19:6-8].**

1. I heard like the choir of an immense gathering as the voice of the crashing waters and as the voice of a raging thunder that loudly proclaimed; ALLELUIAH. The Lord has reigned, our Lord and God, the Omnipotent. Let us all rejoice and exult, let us give unto Him something of the glory He deserves – because the Wedding Festival, the Espousals, of the Lamb has arrived: the Spouse prepares herself. Her wedding garment is unique in its splendor! The wedding garments for her are made up of the good deeds of the Just, of all the saints!

2. this Chant is the eternal Refrain for the immense multitude of the Elect who make up, and are contributing members of the Church of all through the Ages, and of every land and condition of life, a true Communion of Saints – their numbers seem to come across for those who are there as the roar of the mighty waters, cascading through time and space to our present liturgies. The roar of this exultant praise is both contagious and admirable, potent and inviting. It invites the Church on earth to live a life-long procession perseveringly, to share one day also in this eternal choir in the celestial sanctuary already celebrating eternal thanks, praise and wonder.

3. These are some of the images - perhaps with the Voice being the central allegory – as in the Transfiguration. In this scene from the Apocalypse the Heavenly Choir made up of the immense assembly of the Saints, and they provide a sound, convincing melody, symphony of truth and goodness across the centuries, ever acquiring newer members as the faithful depart through time for eternity. They are like the sound of a roaring sea, or mighty flow of water cascading across time. The leap precipitously across the ages, making an immense roar. Without faith, this might be thought of as inducing awesome fear - while for the believing Faithful this eternal harmony extends an almost irresistible invitation. As the clouds separate at the fearsome flashes of violent lightning, so the minds and hearts of the People of

God through courageous, faith are pierced though by His Word, Message of Mercy. This enables us to dare to pray! – Our ABBA! The Canticle of this great Divine Voice gets underway with the eternal ALLELUIAH. Its central message is the glory of God, through a variety of themes: the fulfillment of the Reign of God in the human hearts of those available to it, and the celebration of the Espousals of the Immolated Lamb with His beloved Spouse, the Church.

4. There might be noted in all this a gradual crescendo, a noticeable intensification of the Voice from on high: it begins with the comparison of an immense assembly engaged in hymn-singing - gradually the comparison is like the roar of Niagara Falls, the Falls of Iguaçu [Brazil], the roar of mighty waters, much like a loud thunder echoing across the skies and the ages. In all this, the theme of the Chant of Praise does on: at the beginning this was simply the Canticle, praising God for His eternal Justice, in castigating those who would destroy His beloved Spouse – *as long as you do this to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do it to Me!* - but gradually this becomes the exultant Gratitude for the establishment of the Merciful Reign of God among human beings. The culmination of all this is the grateful recognition of the blessed celebration of the Espousals of the Lamb with the ecclesial Assembly. The central core of this message of exultation is the most solemn and positive announcement that the Reign of God has indeed been established inchoatively – and like the tree planted beside the running streams, this will blossom into the Eternal Thanksgiving and praise of the heavenly choir.

5. Our God, the All-Powerful, has reigned, He is reigning right now, and ever will! The fact of God already reigning had already been proclaimed: across the heavens and the ages there echo the powerful voices of the Heavenly Choir. They proclaim that the Reign of God pertains to our Lord Himself and His Christ: and He will reign forever and ever! Thus, the 24 Elders seated on their Thrones in the sight of God, prostrate themselves with their faces on the ground in a pose of what their hearts proclaim: they adore the Lord God, the King, Prophet and Priest forever. Their Canticle of Thanksgiving resounds: we render you thanks, O Lord, omnipotent God, Who is and Who ever will be because You have applied your power hand and arm and with divine power, You have instituted Your Reign of Mercy [cf. Rv 11:15-17]. A great sound emanated from the heavens singing: Now salvation has been accomplished, the power and the reign of our God, and the Power of His Christ [cf. 12:10] have acted!

6. In this present text which comes after the Canticle praising God's Justice against the corrupting Powers of Darkness, the Lord God exercises His omnipotence, He takes possession of His reign, He brings Peace, stability, land remain inviolable. Our God reigns with His Christ! The Psalms puts words into the mouth of this Heavenly Choir: He is resplendent in His splendor... Solid is His Throne, from all eternity You are! [cf. Ps 93:1,f.] – The Lord reigns, let the whole earth exult! [cf. Ps 97:1] – The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble in worship as God reigns, He is the omnipotent King Who loves Justice as well [cf. Ps 99: 1, 4]. This Canticle which exults over the fact that God indeed is reigning in infinite Mercy and justice, is a Hymn, a Canticle of great Joy and blessed satisfaction. This joy explodes, Literally overflows in the eternal celebration of the Sacred Nuptials of the Immolated Lamb with His wounded Spouse: Let us rejoice and exult, let us give to Him along the Glory, because the Nuptials of the Lamb have arrived - His cherished Spouse prepares herself [cf. Rv 19:7] by the life-style of her Faithful Believers.

7. This formula echoes across the centuries proclaimed earlier in the Psalms, this whispered eternal conversation, exchange between Eternal Goodness and Truth:

- Acclaim the Lord all the earth, cry out, exult with canticles of joy! [cf. Ps 98:4].
- This is the day that the Lord has made let us rejoice and exult in it! [cf. Ps 118:24].

8. All this is summarized in the last of the Beatitudes: Rejoice and exult! [cf. Mt 5: 12]. In our text under contemplation, joy and exultation which accompany the proclamation of the reign of God is further nourished and strengthened in its crescendo knowing of the security that the Nuptials of the Immolated Lamb with His beloved Wounded Spouse – its name has come: this text seems to admit of a most sublime interpretation – it treats and presents the eschatological union of the messiah and of His Church, the People of His Faithful Witnesses. The essential melody that recurs throughout this Eternal Chant that the time of the Nuptials has arrived! This Espousals of the Immolated Lamb and His afflicted Spouse is the culminating moment, point, in the entire development of salvation History: This Espousals in fact, provides the ultimate motivation for this Canticle of Joy in its eternal parallelism with the Reign of God.

9. These Espousals are forever the sublime source of genuine happiness and joy – the theme here is of the Marriage, the eternal Wedding Day – An Espousals - this most solemn and majestic festival of which any believer could ever imagine. This pressing invitation to share in the Joy is expressed by three verbs: rejoice, exult, glorify! The ultimate source of this profound Joy, exultation and glorification, is the Nuptial Event of the Immolated Lamb with the Wounded and beloved Spouse, the Church. This results from the contemplation of the Spouse who shows herself in readiness among her members through the ages. The Matrimony of Jesus Christ and His much loved Church is the image that expresses the communication of Grace and the Reign of the heavenly joy, shared in some way also in this life, also in the Liturgy. The nature of this eternal happiness is described in the final chapters of the Apocalypse under the image of the Espousals. The protagonists of this Heavenly Nuptials have already begun:

The New Heaven and the New Earth

21 ¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home[a] of God is among mortals. He will dwell[b] with them; they will be his peoples, [c] and God himself will be with them; [d]

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

10. The Apocalypse is indeed the Book of the Lamb – the image is so central, appearing some 29 times! The representative animal shares the stage with other representatives: I saw standing around the Throne the 4 Living Beings [the Evangelists?] and the 24 Elders [the 12 Minor OT Prophets & the 12 NT Apostles?] – a Lamb that seems to have been immolated - It had 7 horns and 7 eyes, symbol of the seven Spirits of God sent into this world.

a. And the Lamb arrived, took up the Book at the right hand of the One seated on the Throne. And when he had taken it the 4 Living Beings and the 24 Elders prostrated themselves before the Lamb. They chanted a New Canticle: you are worthy to take the Book and open its seals because You have been immolated and have redeemed, ransomed for God with Your blood, men and women of every Tribe, Blood, People and Nation and You have constituted them for our God a

Reign of Priests ... Then I heard the voice of many Angels around the Throne - and they sang with great power: The Lamb Who was immolated has been found worthy to receive Power, wealth, wisdom and Fortitude, honor glory and benediction.

b. All creatures responded: to the One Who sits on the Throne and to the Lamb they sang: honor, glory, power forever and ever. The 4 Living Beings responded: AMEN! And the 224 Elders prostrated themselves in adoration [cf. Rv 5:6-14]. The Immolated Lamb then loosed the seals of the Book [cf. Rv 6:1].

c. The multitude of those who were standing before the Throne and before the Lamb cried out in a very loud voice: Those dressed in white robes are those who have washed their garments, rendering them white with the Blood of the Lamb. This Lamb that stood in the center at the Throne will be their Shepherd and will guide them to the sources, fonts, springs, streams of living water [cf. Is 12:1, ff.; cf. Rv 7:9-10, 13-14, 17].

d. Those allied to the Beast battled against the Lamb, but the Immolated Lamb will conquer because He is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, and those with Him are called the Elect, the Chosen, the Faithful! [cf. Rv 17:14]. In the New Jerusalem the author does not see any temple because the Lord God, the omnipotent and the Lamb are the New Temple. The City does not need the light of the sun, nor that of the moon because the glory of God illumine the universe and His Lamp is the Lamb. Nothing that is impure can enter there, nor can anyone who commits abomination of falsehood – but only those whose names are written in the Book of Life of the Lamb [Rv 21:22-23, 27]. The ancient Canticles of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah [42:1-4 (5-9); 49:1-6; 50:4-9 (10-11); 52:13-53:12] are echoed here.

11. These many and varied representations of the Immolated Lamb might be synthesized in this manner: this is the sacrificial Lamb, the Holocaust – in fact, in all these scenes, the animal does appear to have been immolated.

a. Often the text speaks of His precious Blood and at the same time He is still standing, has come back to life, and is risen up again. There is thus noted the expression of the Priestly Dignity and activity of Jesus Christ and of His resurrection. The Lamb is thought of as the Conquering Warrior, the Leader of His People, their sure Guide, their Shepherd, and all this of all the Chosen, the Elect. He guides them to victory and the sources of fresh water, the living streams.

b. The Lamb is presented through out in a variety of separate contexts, levels –all which characterize the Lamb Himself:

- the sacrificial level: this is suggested by the term derived from the OT. However the sacrifice is not directly, specifically presented as an immolation – it is simply crudely presented as a violent murder, that happened some time in the past. Yet its effect have some mysterious continuity in the present, co-existing explicitly with the resurrection. There may be noted here a theological arc, that is complete and suggestive. The Lamb, though, does also assume the sacrificial power for expiation as noted in the OT but is realized in the New Era, beyond the environment of purification and merely ritual expressions. This is applied to the Lamb also in His quality as the Risen Lamb of God. Jesus Christ by means of His Precious Blood realizes those effects of purification and of protection as attributed to the Blood on the tents, but goes infinitely beyond these old ceremonies. The Blood becomes the Font of Life a full life applied in the context of the integral Paschal Mystery, as the redemptive action of the Risen Lord.

- a Communion sacrifice;
- the Lamb who becomes the Lion of Judah.

12. These images are still further enriched by the Liturgy associated with God and His Principal Celebrants' Throne: a stream, flood of living water, limpid and clear as crystal, flows form the Throne of God and of the Lamb [cf. Ezk 47]. The Throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the midst of the City and His servants will adore Him. They will see His face and they will bear His Name on their foreheads [cf. Rv 22:1, 3].

a. This Vision is Trinitarian since 'God' is the Father; the Lamb is the Son and the stream of fresh water is the Holy Spirit. In fact as the Fresh water emanates from the Throne of God AND the Lamb [Filioque?!] so the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father AND from the Son.

b. The Spirit is compared to the Stream of fresh water in the mind of Christ: Whoever is thirsty, let him/her come to me and drink, whoever believes in Me – 'as Scripture says, streams of Living Water will pour forth from His breast. [cf. Jn 7:37-39]. The Holy Spirit is figured by the stream of fresh water, which is the abundant source of grace and glory, of rejoicing and happiness. This stream which has its source in the throne upon which are majestically seated God and the Lamb, implies God as communicated, the Third Divine Person represented by His action. Thus, at the summit of the New Jerusalem we see the Most Blessed Trinity, full and

entire: the Father penetrates the whole City with His Glory; the Lamb illumines the City with His Wisdom; The Holy Spirit pours forth and brings to birth ever new life, especially through the sacrament of Baptism.

13. To all this development of imagery, the Apocalypse also adds the important symbol of the SPOUSE, the Espousals Festival. This rich variety of representations and symbols of the Lamb, culminate in this Trinitarian vision in which He, with the Father, the unified Source of the Holy Spirit, concur in presenting the figure of the Lamb as Beloved Spouse. This includes within itself the various component ideas: priesthood and sacrifice in the figure of the Immolated Lamb; the Victorious Guide and Good Shepherd of the wandering flock as the Son of God a divine Person united with the Father in the sending out of the Holy Spirit.

a. We have met the Nuptial Theme in the 4th Gospel in the first text that speaks of Joy, the Baptist as the Friend of the Groom – He must increase and I must decrease! [cf. Jn 3: 29]. The Nuptial Theme though is most abundant in the wedding in Cana of Galilee [Jn 2] – where Jesus' body is compared to the New Temple. Nuptials in the Synoptics is always the source of sublime Joy and Happiness [cf. Mt 22:2-10; 25:10; Mk 2:19; Lk 12:36] as well as in Paul [cf. 2 Co 11:2; Ep 5:25-32].

b. Cana in Galilee has always received special emphasis: the Covenant Spouse of that day is Jesus Himself – His presence is the cause of sublime joy for the good wine [of the Gospel] to have been saved for the last, for that day of the Nuptials, and it is poured out lavishly. The text of the Apocalypse represents the culmination of abundant Nuptial Revelation. The time of the Espousals has come, and the Immolated and Living Lamb Who has purchased back, ransomed, redeemed the Spouse for God, with His precious sacrificial blood, and made of her a Reign of people from all nations, language, and has constituted them all for God Himself a reign of Priests. [cf. Rv 6:9-10]. The Lamb seated on the throne with the Father has poured out the abundant fresh waters, representing the Holy Spirit.

c. The wounded and wayward Spouse has been converted, readied for the Nuptial Ceremony – this is the Church now in glory, whose Marriage with Christ is celebrated for all eternity in the Heavenly Liturgy where she will forever be united to her Immolated Spouse in eternal happiness. She is prepared for the Nuptial Ceremony – a preparation that has been worked out over the arc of the long centuries, through all the ages already lived and those yet to come - and the millennia now gone and the years that lie ahead, still to unfold.

14. The Wedding Garment: part of the preparation was to put on Christ which the 'Saints' do by their persevering good deeds. The wedding Dress is a symbol of their life-long good works – while being won by good deeds, this garment is also the gift of a merciful God.

a. The Wedding Dress of beautiful spectacular white linen is both pure and resplendent, kind of an eternal Transfiguration, made up of 'just deeds' 'Justice' here would imply a rectitude of actions lived through the ages, and such deeds perfect the persons practicing them.

b. With the specific word used here, there may be a more precise meaning. This presents not only admiration for those who have already 'made' it to heaven, but also to those of the militant church, struggling their life long in a spiritual combat. There is some question among the experts of precisely what is the life-long rectitude lived by the saints, and presented as the ideal for the wayfarers still alive.

c. These are the many in the Communion of Saints still potential saints who have contributed to Salvation History. These are the many who mightily confront evil and energetically promote good. The value of 'just deeds' in a pre-eschatological situation do have an eternal bearing as the reward. As these cannot be properly 'merited', they are an eschatological gift of God.

d. Thus the unknown Seer of the Apocalypse is presented in glowing terms: I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, from God and all ready as a beautiful Spouse all splendidly adorned for her immolated Spouse, the Lamb that had been killed. [Rv 21:2]. The promise is that we will be shown the Chosen Woman, Beloved Spouse of the Lamb [cf. Rv 21:9]. The invitations are sent out: the Spirit and the Spouse, say: COME! This will all take place very soon! – AMEN, so be it! [cf. Rv 22:17, 20].

e. The Joy and exultation to which this Canticle invites all the Faithful Believers has its content the Espousals between the Immolated Christ and His Spouse, the Church - between the Son and the Eternal Word of God with the new Community, in the New Covenant of Merciful, unfailing Covenant love. The rejoicing and the festive sharing is centered on the loving relationship between the Merciful Spouse and His beloved, forgiven Spouse. Every Liturgical Assembly participates to some extent in this, to the extent of its participation in Grace. The Spouse has been prepared, and is still being prepared and all are invited to share in putting on Christ Jesus, as a Nuptial Garment. All the Just sharing in the Liturgical Assembly now

proclaim the Joyful Hymn of Thanksgiving in each Eucharist. They are the protagonists also in making up the wedding Garment of the Spouse – and they join with the Saints of heaven in singing joyfully, happily – while they experience their eschatological joy in Holy Communion.

f. The worshippers here who also share in preparing the Wedding Garment directed their just deeds through the help constantly offered received from on high. This is the ‘new order’, the prayer of the New People of God. The emphasis here is on the sole reality that truly matters here on earth - that is to live out the beginnings of the constantly offered eternal life, until it is a possession – now it is anticipation, living the Vigil Period.

g. The just punishments of the Powers of Evil provide a sign of the actuality of the gift of salvation. This canticle is the Prelude of the eternal Canticle of Thanks for the establishment of the Reign of God, as the Nuptial Festival of the Immolated Lamb. This is being celebrated right now in the heavenly sanctuary – and we are all in procession leading toward it. Those who have given up the ways of sin and share in the Eucharist may indeed use the purified language of heaven in their response to the Gift of the Espousals: AMEN/ ALLELUIAH!

D. THE BEATITUDE OF THE NUPTIAL BANQUET [Rv 19:9-10]

1. Then the Angel said to me: Write! Blessed are they invited to the Nuptial Banquet of the Lamb! Then he added: These are the true words of God. Then I prostrated at His feet in order to adore Him, and He said to me: Don’t do that! I am a Servant just like you and your brothers, who keep the testimony of Jesus Christ. It is God whom you must adore. The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy. There is in these lines the 4th of the Seven Beatitudes of the Apocalypse:

- Blessed is he who reads and blessed are those who listen to the words of this prophecy and put them into practice [Rv 1:3];
- Blessed are those who die in the Lord! [14:13];
- Blessed is he who is vigilant! [16:15];
- Blessed and holy is the one who takes part in the first Resurrection [20:6].
- Blessed is he who keeps the prophetic words of this book [22:7];
- Blessed are they who wash their garments [22:14].

2. The words of the Beatitude proclaimed by the angel and noted down by the Seer communicates the invitation to the Wedding: Blessed are they invited to the Nuptial Banquet of the Immolated Lamb. These words are then described by the one who extended them: These are true words of God! For their importance, they had to be written down.

a. The “Elect” are called ‘Blessed’ – to them is extended the Joy, the Happiness of the Nuptial Banquet, which confirm the words of Jesus: Can those invited to the Wedding fast when they still have the Bride-groom with them? [cf. Mk 2:19; Mt 9: 15; Lk 5:34]. In the instant when Jesus proclaimed these words His presence was only temporary, until Calvary. There would return those long periods when the physical absence of the Spouse would be the time for the necessity of fasting.

b. But now, however, the Spouse is with His Chosen, the Elect, the Invited to the Wedding, eternally. As a result the Nuptial Happiness, Joy is everlasting, without interruption.. The realization of the culminating point of the Synoptic parallels with Jesus as Spouse is perpetual: The Wedding Feast is ready - the Hall is filling up with those who have been invited. [cf. Mt 22:10]. The Spouse has suddenly arrived and the wise virgins who were ready with lamps enkindled enter with the Spouse for the Nuptials [cf. Mt 25:10].

c. This Beatitude of the Invited was enjoyed by those who are to participate forever in the Wedding Festival, can share in the wedding banquet of the Lamb. Faithful believers are called to share in the goods of which the Immolated Angel-Spouse is full and offered totally to His beloved Spouse, the Church. This is the full happiness, the eternal establishment of the Reign of God without end, all presented under the image of a joyous Nuptial Feast. In this indeed the reality of the Espousals and the eternal union of the happy Spouses take place at their marriage banquet. They will enjoy the tender morsels of this eternal festival, and the best wines [cf. Jn 2] that were kept of this eternal celebration. The Good Wine is abundant, filling the 6 large jars of the original creation week in this New Creation after the resurrection. This is the ultimate realization of well-being, Joy, festivity, exultation - none of which has any limits and will be celebrated eternally.

3. Once they had received the invitation from the Angel the joy-filled announcement of the victory over the Great and Corrupted City, the most happy announcement of the Nuptials of the Immolated Lamb and of all those called to participate in the Nuptial Meal – and after they had all heard the happy and pleasing voices of the Elect who chant the solemn ALLELUIAH! This is to attribute honor to

the messenger, as eternal Thanksgiving for all that had been said and done, and to which they were enabled to listen and to respond to it all. . This gesture is repeated at the end of the Book and is also the end of the revealed Scriptures as we presently have them [cf. Rv 22:9-9]. The angel refers to himself with the noble title of 'Servant of the Lord' – he powerfully urges that all adoration be addressed to the Merciful God.

4. The conclusion contains an affirmation in which are named the three divine Authors of God's own salvation: God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit: Your brothers and sisters guard over Jesus' own testimony; there is adoration of God that is extended - and the Witness that Jesus gives is of the Spirit of Prophecy [cf. Rv 19:10]. The Spirit Who inspired the prophets rendered in anticipation testimony to Jesus. To share now this testimony is to proclaim under the same inspiration the fulfillment of the Prophetic Message.

a. There is repeated reference here to Jesus' own testimony, in the subjective sense – and not just testimony about Jesus. This though does not exclude the integral inclusion of the objective testimony concerning, about, Jesus. The sense is that this 'prophecy' finds its support on the revelation rendered by the words and deeds of Jesus, that render His objective and subjective testimony.

b. Through the voice of the Angel [as at the Annunciation of Mary], the Seer states that his Apocalypse is inspired, and provides simply the Spirit's reminder, His testimony, offering in revelations a Summa, Synopsis, Enchiridion of Jesus' entire message. The witness offered by Jesus is that of the Spirit of Prophecy. The complete testimony of the integral Paschal Mystery is here summarized in the Apocalypse. This is proclaimed and communicated to the happy Community thanks to the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Prophets.

c. Thus, the word of God [cf. DV of Vatican II, and Verbum Domini of Pope Benedict] I the testimony to the Liturgical Assembly from Jesus, the Faithful Witness" [1:5] - through the Holy Spirit Who speaks through the Prophets. Thus Jesus gives His own testimony – and this is simply the Holy Spirit of Prophecy. Jesus appears in the Apocalypse as the Supreme and Faithful Witness. The Spirit Who operates in the Church, in reminding us of the witness of Jesus, provides His own testimony regarding Jesus Christ and His message. Therefore, the Apocalypse remains faithful to the Faithful Witness offered by Jesus in the Synoptics [cf. Mk 13:11; Mt 10:18-20; Lk 12:11-21].

CONCLUSION

[1] The first Gospel text on Joy pertains to that Joy that the Precursor had that was caused by the appearance of the Messianic Spouse, and on hearing His voice, on the part of John the Baptist: this was a NUPTIAL JOY on the part of the one who had prepared the coming of the Spouse for the eventual Nuptial Banquet. The text of the apocalypse contemplated here has at its theme the Canticles of Joy for the celebration of the espousals of the immolated Lamb as the beloved Spouse with His much loved [and often forgiven!] Spouse, the Church. Thus, the initial joy of the Gospel and the final joy of the Apocalypse correspond one with the other, contemplating the Messiah as the Spouse.

[2] Brief comparison of Texts:

Jn 3:29-30

Rv 19:6-7,9

**The One who has the Spouse is the Spouse
Himself – the Friend of the Spouse who is
Present and hears Him,
Exults in Joy**

At the Voice of the Spouse.

Now my Joy is complete

**I heard as the voice of an
Immense crowd, as the
Roar of rushing water,
as the sound of crashing
Thunder, which cried:**

**Let us rejoice and exult,
And give to Him the glory
because**

**The Nuptials of the
Lamb have arrived
And the Spouse
Prepares herself.
invited to the
Wedding Feast of
The Lamb!**

[3] Common themes:

- first of all the 'Voice' – this recurs three times – from the crowd, from the crashing of waters and from the thunder – a voice that sings the Nuptial Joys. In the Gospel this is only once, and it is the voice of the Spouse, of Jesus Himself, which brings joy to all.
- In both texts there are present the two protagonists: the Spouse Who in the Gospel, is Jesus – in the Apocalypse it is Jesus under the image of the Immolated Lamb Who has His Beloved Spouse which in both passages means the community of faithful believers in Jesus Christ, responding to His faithful Witness.
- In the Apocalypse there is explicitly mentioned the Espousals which in the Gospel is only implied in the reference to the Spouse Who has His spouse.
- Joy is the common theme.

[4] The two passages, gospel and apocalyptic, are integrated and complement one another mutually in expressing the same revelation: for the Espousals between Jesus Christ, the Immolated Lamb – and the community of the Faithful Believers, which were called into being by the Message and Person of Jesus Christ. His Personal Mission from His Father was prepared for by His precursor, John the Baptist. He comes to be qualified as the Friend of the Spouse: as Jesus notes: *I no longer call you servants, but friends!* In the Apocalypse there is the presentation of the eschatological realization in the Nuptial Banquet in the Celestial Liturgy.

[5] At the end of both passages, there are named the three Authors of Salvation: the One Whom God has sent, professes the Words of God. God bestows His Spirit beyond measure. The Father loves the Son and has handed Him over to all [cf. Jn 3:34-35]. In the Apocalypse here, we found: Your brethren guard Jesus' testimony. It is God Whom you should adore. The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy [Rv 19:10]. The central mystery of Divine revelation and the Christian Faith is at the beginning and at the end presented of the Espousals between Christ and His Church.

