

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR C

Second Reading **Apocalypse 5: 11–14**

The Apocalypse – a Greek word meaning Revelation, and often named as such – is the last book in the Bible. It was probably written around 85–90 AD by John the Apostle or a group of people very familiar with his writings: scholars are unsure.

Apocalyptic writings are mysterious revelations told by angels. Here the book paints a series of visions, full of symbolism that is often hard to understand. It tells of what will happen in the future and helps us make sense of the past, recounting the fight between good and evil and the ultimate victory of Christ. It was a source of comfort to the early Christians at a time of persecution by Roman authorities.



In this passage, John tells of a vision of an innumerable quantity of angels, elders and animals praising the Lamb – the only one in heaven who can open ‘the scroll’, a record of God’s plan for the end of time (Apocalypse 5: 5). He is the Messiah, who has conquered death and still carries the marks of his martyrdom. Christ has often been equated with a lamb, as in Isaiah 53: 7, read during the Good Friday liturgy:

‘He never opened his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter-house’.

In a scene reminiscent of the honour given to a Roman Emperor, this large number of beings attest to Christ’s worthiness to read God’s plan; he is worthy of seven honours. The first four – power, riches, wisdom and strength – concern his dominion, while the last three – honour, glory and blessing – confirm the adoration of those present that day.

The entire creation is of the same mind: the One, that is the Creator God and the Lamb, are on an equal footing. St Paul refers to the glory and power praised here in his letter to the Romans: *‘I think that what we suffer in this life can never be compared to the glory, yet unrevealed, which is waiting for us. The whole creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal his sons and daughters’* (Romans 8: 18–20). All creatures in heaven and earth agree: *‘Amen’* – It is true! So be it!

Image: Jan Van Eyck, *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (1432) (Wikimedia)

Gospel John 21: 1–19

The Risen Jesus appears by the Sea of Tiberias

It was by the Sea of Tiberias

Also known as the Sea of Galilee, this was also the location of the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6). It is situated 80 miles north of Jerusalem, whereas Luke 24 and John 20 place Jesus’s appearances in or around Jerusalem itself.

They caught nothing that night ... It was light by now

The opposition of night and day is typical of John’s Gospel. The risen Lord, the light of the world, appears at sunrise.

Simon Peter, who had practically nothing on ...

Many scholars have wondered why Peter should put his cloak on to jump into the water. It would hardly make swimming easier. Although we cannot be sure, one explanation might be that Jews were very sensitive about greeting others when wearing unsuitable clothing. The event is typical of Peter’s impetuous character as depicted in the Gospels.

The breakfast on the beach

We can recall other episodes in the gospels where significant events occur around the breaking of bread and the eating of fish, in particular the feeding of the 5,000 and the meal at Emmaus.

The instruction to bring some of their catch is symbolic of the disciples’ apostolic mission to draw people to Jesus. The fish caught that morning were not needed, as Jesus was already cooking some. Jesus apparently does not eat, but gives the food to the disciples. This passage has Eucharistic overtones.

One hundred and fifty-three fish

Much has been written about the significance of this number, but nothing is certain. It may be the number of known species at the time, which would in turn indicate that Jesus calls all people to himself.

Simon Peter ... do you love me?

Jesus asks this question three times. It is generally thought that in doing so he gives Peter the opportunity to make amends for his three-fold denial (John 18: 15–18, 25–27). The scene taking place around a charcoal fire reinforces this link.

When you grow old, you will stretch out your hand

As well as the literal meaning of the words, some commentators also see in this phrase a reference to crucifixion. Peter, according to tradition, was crucified upside-down in the reign of the emperor Nero around 65 AD.