

Notes for Next Sunday

Last Sunday of the Church Year

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14). The Ancient of Days presides over a court of judgment and condemns the fourth beast to be burned. Daniel sees “one like a son of man,” coming with the clouds of heaven, who is given eternal rule over the whole earth. We recognize that this King is Jesus, fully divine and fully human, Son of Mary and Son of the Most High, whose kingdom will never end.

Epistle (Revelations 1:4b-8). John praises the one true God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—while simultaneously clarifying the identity of God’s people: they are the “kingdom” and “priests” for whom He will soon come. Given our continual failure to live up to such a high calling, we need to hear again and again the truth of our identity in Christ. When the Gospel of God’s grace is preached, the Church may speak a hearty “Amen” in its conviction that Jesus will return and then perfect our redemption.

Gospel (John 18:33-37). Pilate tries to dismiss the case before him by accommodating a Jewish custom calling for the release of a prisoner at Passover—in this instance, an insurrectionist called Barabbas. The story of Jesus’ Passion is filled with people refusing to accept responsibility for their own sins, a failure that afflicts us all. But God willed that the guilt of sin be laid on His innocent Son so we might receive God’s forgiveness.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

⁹“As I looked, “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. ¹⁰A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. ¹³“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

7:9 thrones were set in place. Here is the climax of Daniel’s nighttime vision. The succession of earthly kings stopped, and God stepped in, to have the last word. The thrones were set in place because God was about to pronounce judgment. Since the judgment pictured here is the last judgment, it is clear that Daniel’s vision of the fourth beast involves a long time span – beginning with the rise of the Roman Empire and extending to the second coming of Christ. (PBC)

7:9 Ancient of Days. This unusual title, used only here in the Scripture, refers to the mystery that God is eternal. This title contrasts God’s unchanging permanence with the changeableness and instability of all human power structures. The eternal, majestic God was active long before nations and empires appeared on the world scene. Here the Ancient of Days is pictured pronouncing sentence on His enemies and granting a new and splendid kingdom to the Messiah. (PBC)

7:9 clothing...white as snow...hair while like wool. Whiteness is symbolic of purity, holiness and righteousness, all of which would fit Christ on the last day. The white hair also suggests wisdom and dignity.

7:9 throne was flaming with fire. Throne, wheels, and stream (v 10) were all fiery, as was God's appearance on Mount Sinai. (TLSB)

7:10 river of fire. This symbolizes Jesus' burning zeal which would destroy his enemies but rescue his people.

7:10 stood before him. Stand in Scripture is an expression of readiness to serve, the common posture for prayer, and also of worship, the people stand to show their respect for the public reading of God's Word. (PBC)

7:10 books were opened. This is like a court of law where books are opened and verdicts read. One book contains those who are saved. Other books are also mentioned in Revelation 20:12 and have to do and contain the deeds of people like that of Matthew 25. This is not to suggest that the deeds save anyone, they merely the proof of the faith that lives in people and saves them. (PBC)

7:13 like a son of man. † See Rev 1:13. A title that Jesus applied to himself. He will be enthroned as ruler over the whole earth (previously misruled by the four kingdoms of men), and his kingdom "will never be destroyed" (v. 14), whether on earth or in heaven. (CSB)

7:14 all peoples...men of every language worshiped Him. Daniel's vision pictured the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Apostle Paul that "...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..." (Philippians 2:10f) (PBC)

EPISTLE – Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits^a before his throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.⁷ Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

1:4 who is ... was ... is to come. This is "I am" language from Exodus 3:14 where God calls Moses to lead God's people out of Egypt. (CSB)

1:4 seven spirits. † The sevenfold description of the Holy Spirit in Isa 11:2: (1) of the Lord, (2) of wisdom, (3) of understanding, (4) of counsel, (5) of power, (6) of knowledge, (7) of the fear of the Lord. (CSB)

1:6 a kingdom and priests. † This OT designation of Israel is applied in the NT to the church (1Pe 2:5, 9). Cf. also 5:10; 20:6. (CSB)

1:7 every eye will see him. This refers to Christ's second coming on the Last Day. Note that Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, sitting at God's right hand, and returning to judge are all mentioned in vv 5-7. (TLSB)

1:8 the Alpha and the Omega. First and last letters of Greek alphabet. As such, this title underlines God's eternal nature. It should be noted that both here and at 21:6, this title is applied to God the Father, while at 22:13 it is applied to Jesus. This demonstrates Jesus' eternal divinity. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – John 18:33-37

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” ³⁴ “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” ³⁵ “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?” ³⁶ Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” ³⁷ “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

18:33 Are you the king of the Jews? Pilate’s question revealed that he was aware of the Jewish leader’s real complaint - Jesus’ messianic claims. Politically speaking, Pilate saw no threat posed to Rome by the pitiable, but not criminal, man before him. (TLSB)

18:36 My kingdom. Jesus agrees that he has a kingdom, but asserts that it is not the kind of kingdom that has soldiers to fight for it. It was not built, nor is it maintained, by military might. (CSB)

18:37 to testify to the truth. This is a challenge to Pilate to assess the truth of the claim that Jesus presented. The person of Jesus and His revelation of divine truth are inseparable (14:6). (TLSB)