

Revelation Chapter 4

Today, we are beginning the period of the Triodion, starting with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. Let us all strive to be like the Publican, humble, recognizing our own sins, recognizing our need for God's forgiveness, and looking toward our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ, the Great Physician, our Redeemer, to tend to our spiritual wounds and injuries, always having Him in our hearts and on our lips, praying like the Publican, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. We will need this prayer in our hearts and minds as well as we continue our study of the Book of Revelation as we are confronted with the deceit, temptation, tribulation, and martyrdom shown in this book, awaiting the Second Coming of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation presented its readers with the condition of the 7 churches in Asia Minor at the end of the 1st century AD. Thus, these chapters represented the revelation of the then present condition, i.e., *the things that are*, the things that were confronting the 7 churches at the time that St. John was told by the Lord to write those letters to them. These letters were not meant for those churches alone, but for all the churches for all time as most of them end with: *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

Now we will begin to look at *the things which will take place after this* -- from AD 96 to the present, i.e., over the past 2000 years to the end of the present age. These struggles and tribulations are presented in the next 15 chapters of Revelation. Some of these indeed pertain to us today as we approach closer and closer to the Second Coming of Christ.

So, what is the purpose of presenting the future struggles of the Church? It is to prepare the faithful for their own personal struggles, persecutions, martyrdoms; to console them, to strengthen them, to protect them, to instruct them -- In other words to prepare us to meet Christ at the Great Judgment, just as Great Lent prepares us to meet our newly Risen Christ at Pascha!

Archimandrite Athanasios writes, "When I was quite young, I was greatly puzzled by comments about the appearance of the Antichrist, the god of the world and the Second Coming; that the Antichrist would mark his people, that all those who are marked would not enter the kingdom of God, and so on. These comments used to bring a question to my mind, I will say it simply, the way I understood it then: What Christians would be so dumb as to surrender to the Antichrist? Needless to say, as I grew up, I understood that this was not such a simple matter. In reality we surrender from the moment that our life loses its true Christian foundation, and our lifestyle becomes anything but Christian. When we do not love and believe in Jesus Christ to the point of death, when we succumb to lukewarm, marginal, rosy-hued Christianity [like we saw in the Church of Laodicia], we will certainly trip and fall when something adverse comes our way ..." [Such a lack of vigilance may lead anyone, including us, to a preliminary acceptance of the Antichrist and fall under his delusion.]

"The Church offers us the God-inspired book of the Revelation to protect us from the danger of secularization because the secular lifestyle provides fertile ground for scandals. As we watch others fall away from the Church, we must keep reminding ourselves that we may also turn cold, impoverished of love and faith. We may desert the Church. We can cease having our hope in Her. We need to realize that the initial cause of this is our own secularization. We need to be extremely careful. Let's not forget that in our days, whether we realized it or not, secularization infects us all to varying degrees. We carry a great deal of worldly thinking within

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us. The world influences our life and our existence.”

With that as introduction let us now look at Revelation Chapter 4.

Revelation 4:1 *After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. 2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. 3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. 4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats [I saw] four and twenty elders [πρεσβυτερους, presbyters] sitting, clothed in white raiment; and [they had] on their heads crowns of gold. 5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6 And before the throne as it were a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. 7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. 9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

4:1 *After this I looked, and, behold, a door [lit. having been] opened in heaven:*

Archimandrite Athanasios; “What is the meaning of this opening? St. Andrew of Caesarea interprets, “This open door means the disclosure of the hidden mysteries of the Holy Spirit.” St. John will be able to see the things that he could not see before because they were not revealed. Therefore, this open door is the revelation of God’s hidden mysteries since heaven is the traditional place of the throne of God. God is everywhere, but we typically say that God is in heaven in the same way we say that hades is below the earth. This was a common belief in the Old Testament and for this reason we have the expression that Christ descended into the heart of the earth. This is traditional or figurative language because God is everywhere.

“In reality, our knowledge of God is extremely limited. We are almost lost in this vast universe. Frankly, without the opening of some of these heavenly doors and the revelation of some of these mysteries, we would not know anything. We could struggle to gain some knowledge, but our efforts would be in vain. The traditional place of the throne of God was inaccessible. It closed because the first created couple, Adam and Eve, transgressed against God. Genesis gives us a great image of this. Adam and Eve were removed from Paradise, the door of the garden was closed, and the Cherubim were ordered to guard the door with a revolving flaming sword. This illustrates everything that I have just told you, that man lost his contact with heaven. The door was shut. Now the door, that was closed for Adam and Eve, reopens.

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“Heaven, which closed with the fall of Adam and Eve, remained mysterious. The true God was forgotten. People began to worship created beings and objects because that was all they were able to see. Human existence and its true purpose became vague, a true mystery. Soon enough the question arose: what is man? Man’s existence is a mystery. Look to the Greek philosophers who excelled in these matters of universal philosophy and philology, to see how they viewed the human being. One person said one thing and the other said something altogether different precisely because heaven was not open to reveal to us what God is, what man is, and what the relationship between man and God is. Man began to develop a very strong desire to break through and to see something beyond this tightly locked heaven, something -- anything. This something is that which man could perceive, like a tiny spark, a tiny hairline crack. This is what we call an illumination of the human intellect, and we stand in amazement before it.

“Plato amazes us, Aristotle astounds us. We admire some great philosophers, especially the Greek philosophers, because they manage to strike a tiny spark, to penetrate and see behind the heavily sealed curtain of heaven, but their experience resembles that of looking through a convex lens. They saw some things clearly and directly as we would any object, but they were distorted ... “ [However, much was purely speculation of their own making.]

“People spoke about the soul, but they could not know its real essence. As human history has revealed, people spoke about reincarnation, the death of the soul as well as the rational and the spiritual soul, attempting to separate the two. Or they spoke about the biological soul and the spiritual soul along with many other notions and falsehoods. Heaven needed to be reopened by God to reveal His mysteries to men, so men would have direct knowledge of these mysteries. Let us see how Scripture describes this. *No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man* (St. John 3:13). This verse seals [and reveals] everything that I have been referring to about the tightly closed heaven. Since no one ascended to heaven, how could anyone know what really transpired there? This is similar to the statement that many of our simple and doubting people often say, “Oh, who [ever] went to hades to see it and tell us about these things? Who really knows? Who went to hell? Who went to paradise to get us proof? How do we know?”

“We can respond to the people who say these things, those overdosed with unbelief and rationalization: I did not go, but Christ did. I did not ascend to heaven, but Christ descended from heaven. Do you not believe in Christ, by brother? [If not] The door to heaven will be locked for you because the door is the Incarnate Son of God Himself. The Lord said, *I am the door* (St. John 10:7). [And *no man cometh unto the Father, but by me* (St John 14:6).] This is the very door that Saint John now sees wide open in heaven. Without the door, Christ, it is impossible to know Who or What God is, what man is, or what the relationship between man and God is. Without Christ, we are left in the deepest and thickest darkness. The great existential problems that have always troubled mankind will continue to do so inexplicably and endlessly.

“I look at endless new publications of philosophers, book after book: European philosophers, Eastern philosophers, but primarily European and American philosophers. They perpetually create new theories and write new books. Poor pitiful philosophers! The door opened two thousand years ago, but since you [philosophers, dreamers, creators of your own realities] do not accept Jesus Christ, Who *is* the door, for you the heavens are tightly shut and you cannot see anything. You do not know anything. You live and exist in your delusions. I say

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this because in our audience we have many young intellectual people who may want to satisfy their thirst by reading the works of these philosophers. Do not read them at all. They are senseless and absurd. Criticize me if you will, but after Christ, philosophy is useless.

“Before Christ, of course, philosophy offered an attempt to penetrate, to pierce, and to learn something about this unsurpassable and opaque wall surrounding heaven. But there can be no philosophy after Christ when heaven is wide open ...

“Christ is the Door. In his description of heaven during the baptism of Jesus, [the Theophany we have just experienced this past week], Saint Mark the Evangelist employs a powerful participle, schizomenous (σχίζομενους). (Schizo / σχίζω in Greek means *I tear apart; I rip*). To understand it better, Let us say that I have a sealed envelope that I must open. I generally try to unglue the glued side or I use a letter opener. Ripping it open shows that I am impatient. I grab the letter. I rip off the top, and I pull the letter out of the envelope. Saint Mark says that John the Baptist saw the heavens being ripped which shows a forceful action in heaven. So, he saw the heavens being ripped and the Spirit descending as a dove upon Jesus. The implication of all this is that heaven is now open. So, through the ripped heaven, I can now see not only the mysteries of heaven but the mysteries of earth as well. If someone does not teach me about the mysteries of earth, I would not be able to know them either. Now please pay attention to this point; the heavens were opened only for Jesus, through Jesus, and by Jesus. No one else ever, while being baptized, experienced this opening of the heavens. Therefore, the heavens opened for Jesus but also *through* Jesus because God the Word became man. The Spirit would not have come if the Word had not incarnated.

“Look at how the Lord states this, *Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor [παρακλητος, (the Holy Spirit)] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you* (St. John 16:7). It is as if He is saying, Therefore, I must ascend; I must go with the deified human nature which I assumed, which for you is the corrupt nature, but I deified it. And now this deified nature must ascend to heaven, and in this way I will open the path, through which the Holy Spirit will descend (*cf.* St. John 16:5-16). The descent of the Holy Spirit is what took place during Pentecost. The arrival of the Holy Spirit is the reason the Lord informed His disciples before Pentecost that it was in their best interest that He depart from them. It means that the heavens are open now, and the important matter here, is that from the moment of the Lord’s incarnation, heaven remains open for anyone willing to access it.

“Here in Revelation we are impressed by this open door. *And behold I saw an open door in heaven.* He does not say that he saw a door opening and closing, or open for a moment, but a door open in heaven, *an open door.* Standing open means that someone opened it. Let us state this one more time. No human being can enter heaven except by the gate called Christ. Only if I pass using the door called Christ, only then can I enter the Kingdom of God. As you remember, when Christ died on the cross, the veil the curtain of the temple, which was a symbol of the separation of heaven and earth, was ripped in two (Matthew 27:51).

“Prior to this event [With the only exception, of course, being the Most Holy Mother of God the Theotokos.] only the priests and the archpriests [High Priests] were allowed to enter into the outer section of the temple [the Holy Place]. Access was denied to the inner part behind the [second inner] veil, called the Holy of Holies, except for the archpriest and then only once a year

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to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice. The inner part was the symbol of heaven and the outer part was the symbol of the earth. So, heaven was kept separate from earth with this veil, or heavy curtain. When Christ was crucified and breathed His last upon the cross, the veil was ripped in two from top to bottom. This indicates that heaven is now open. Thus, Christ united these two separate entities of heaven and earth. They were united by the human nature of Jesus Christ.”

[Note: As written about in THE GOOD WORD Vol 4, Issue 1, Sep-Oct 2016,¹ the stone lintel, the support beam of the of the temple, from which hung the veil, broke in the middle and came crashing down. This ensured the ripping of the veil from top to bottom: “Regarding earthquake damage to the Temple complex, Blessed Jerome (AD c. 340-420) in his *Letter to Hedibia*² wrote that the huge lintel over the Temple’s outer doors broke in two and fell. He associated this with the tearing of the Veil: ‘How should we account for these words of Saint Matthew [27:50-52]: *Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit, and at the same time the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, the rocks were split, the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who were in the sleep of death revived...The Gospel that Saint Matthew wrote in Hebrew does not say that the veil was torn, but that the top of the portal, which was of prodigious size, was completely reversed. The earth shook*, because it could not support the weight attached to its God on the cross.’ Naturally there are those who believe that Jerome was reading a non-Canonical Gospel of Matthew. But St. Epiphanius (AD 310 - 408) in his *Panarion 29.9.4.* and St. Sophronius of Jerusalem (AD 560-638) wrote in his *Life of St. Matthew* both testify that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew.”]

During this time let us again struggle to purify our hearts, humble our egos, and strive to ascend on that narrow path that leads to life, to enter that door that is open for all to enter, to love our Lord Jesus Christ with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves. Let us not worry about the splinter in our neighbors eye, but remove the log in our own first. The Church, in its wisdom, has provided this period of the Triodion to assist us in this struggle through denying ourselves, picking up our crosses and following Christ. Let us make the most of this time.

1. The Good Word, Vol. 4, Issue 1, Sep-Oct 2016, p. 4, column (a) online @ <https://storage.googleapis.com/production-jpage-v1-0-6/576/1238576/hWNOgodx/ad6217a291ea41c5aad4319666affba2?fileName=4-1%20THE%20GOOD%20NEWS%20Sep-Oct%202016.pdf>

2. Jerome, “Answer to] Question #8,” in *Letter to Hedibia*, https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_hedibia_2_trans.htm.

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Revelation 4:1 *After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. 2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. 3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. 4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats [I saw] four and twenty elders [πρεσβυτερους, presbyters] sitting, clothed in white raiment; and [they had] on their heads crowns of gold.*



So far we have only considered the first phrase: **4:1** *After this I looked, and, behold, a door* [lit. having been] *opened in heaven*. We discussed how Christ is the door and that access to Heaven is only through Him. That door opened when Christ was baptized, and the Heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove. For St. John the Theologian, that Door was opened to him on this Sunday, when in the spirit, he received this vision.

Œcumenius, the late 5th to early 6th century AD Christian writer states: “Obviously, there is not in heaven a real door that is closed and opened from time to time. But it appeared that way to the Evangelist, so that he might see realities that are truly transcendent. For whenever there is a door open, of necessity one is able to see what is inside.” It is open to us as

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well if we remain faithful to the end. Conversely, when someone doesn't believe in Christ Jesus, or falls away from the faith, then that open door is closed to him, and access to the mysteries of Heaven is cut off.

... and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me;

Archimandrite Athanasios: "Now, this first voice is the voice of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ ... Who dictated to Saint John, in the first sequence, the seven epistles to the seven churches in Asia Minor. It sounded like the voice of a trumpet during the first and second time. Saint Andrew [of Caesarea] says the trumpet symbolizes the very great [*alt.* sonorous] voice of the one revealing." [The great voice of the Word of God, the Son of Man, attracts and commands attention.]

which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.

Archimandrite Athanasios: "Now, Saint John is on earth; where is he supposed to go". He is on Patmos in the cave of the Revelation. It is Sunday, the Lord's Day. Where would he go?" St. Andrew of Caesarea answers that, he is to "turn away completely from the things of the earth and be turned toward heaven." [St. John is lifted up to the Divine Liturgy in the Heavens, after which, according to the pattern given to the Saints, our own Divine Liturgies are modeled.]

4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

Ecumenius: "And I ascended *in the Spirit* -- for the ascent was neither bodily nor sensible -- and I saw, he says, a throne, and there was on it God, who is spirit, having the appearance of jasper and carnelian. God is not like these things -- of course not! -- nor is He Who is invisible, incorporeal and without form like in any way to the body of any perceptible being. Even the seraphim hide their faces with their wings when they are shown his invisible nature, Similarly when God was speaking with Moses, He said, *No one will look on my face and live* (Ex. 33:20). And even the evangelist himself, as though contradicting what he says here, says, *No one has ever seen God* (John 1:18). Therefore since God is similar to nothing in appearance, the vision of him in the revelation is depicted on the basis of His activities."

Archimandrite Athanasios: "*And immediately I was in the Spirit* (4.2). This indicates spiritual ascent. The $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ is captivated, the mind elevated. This is the meaning of *come up here and behold*. It is like going to a place full of strange and exciting things, breathtaking things. And as a small child calls out, 'Mom, Mom, look, look!' Adults do this as well. 'Look here, look here. This is what this *behold* suggests. Saint John is in a state of constant ecstasy from what he sees, and so he repeats continuously: Look, look, behold! I saw this, and then I saw that, and then this other thing and *behold, a throne set in heaven*. Now, really, does God sit on a real throne? It is a symbol. Let us pay attention here so we can develop some insight to discover the reality behind these symbols. The throne is a symbol of glory, but it is also a place of rest.

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“*And Micaiah said, [This Micaiah, son of Imiah, was a prophet in Israel, who only spoke once, to King Ahab.] I saw the Lord sitting on his throne and all the host of heaven, standing beside him on his right hand and on His left ... (1Kings/3 Kingdoms Lxx 22:19). In his amazing vision the prophet Isaiah writes, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple (Isaiah 6:1). This is because he [Isaiah] sees his vision in the Temple of Solomon. After this, the Cherubim chant, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke (Isaiah 6:3-4). Imagine the roof moving up and down and shaking from the voices of the angels. All this represents the glory of the Lord. Therefore, the throne symbolizes the Lord’s glory and rest, because in the final analysis, a throne is simply a chair, a luxurious, extravagant, and highly ornamental chair.*

“... According to the Prophet Isaiah, God rests on His saints. *The most high Lord, resting on his holy ones, on his saints (Isaiah 57:15).*³ Of course God, does not have feet or a body to sit on a chair. Nor does He become tired. These are all anthropomorphic expressions. Yet, He rests on His saints. Saint Andrew says: By the word *throne*, what is shown is the rest of God on His saints, for He is enthroned with these.⁴ In the Divine Liturgy we hear [in the prayer of the Presbyter, after the Small Entrance: O Holy God, Who restest among the Saints, and art hymned by the Seraphim with thrice- holy voice and glorified by the Cherubim, and worshipped by all the heavenly Host] ”You are the One who finds rest on the saints.” These are the same words that Christ spoke in the Gospel. *We will come unto him and make our abode with him (John 14:23).* We, the three Persons of the Holy Trinity will come and We will live within the faithful person. Therefore, the throne of God is the faithful people, the people of faith. If I am faithful I become the throne of God.”

Rev. 4:3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “When, in this vision, he presents a vision of the Father, he does not present him in any bodily form as was the case in the previous vision of the Son, but he likens him to precious jewels. ”

Archimandrite Athanasios: “Saint John, similar to the prophets of the Old Testament, avoids description of the Father, as He is the invisible and ineffable⁵ God. It is also significant that he avoids naming Him. He does not say *God*. He does not say *the Lord*, but the *One sitting*. In attempting to symbolically describe Him, he uses the brightest objects known at that time. These brilliant and most colorful precious stones are suggestive of the different characteristics of God, of *the One sitting*... The prophet Ezekiel and other prophets talk about the likeness of God’s glory, but not necessarily about the likeness of God” ... [I.e., the essence of God is unknowable, beyond knowledge. We know Him through His energies, not His essence.] ...

3. *I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. (KJV)*

4. St. Andrew of Caesarea: “... the sovereign throne that symbolizes the repose of God among the saints, for God is enthroned among them.”

5. *INDESCRIBABLE, inexpressible, beyond words, beyond description, begging description; indefinable, unutterable, untold, unimaginable; overwhelming, breathtaking, awesome, marvelous, wonderful, staggering, amazing.*

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Saint John is precise in using these images in his description *like jasper, like sardine stone*, and a rainbow appearing *like an emerald*. He does not say it *was* that, but that it somehow appeared to be *like* that. He does this to show the human inability to describe the divine.”

Rev. 4:4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats [I saw] four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and [they had] on their heads crowns of gold.

There have been a variety of opinions on who these 24 elders are:

Archbishop Averky, following St. Andrew of Caesarea and Victorinus considers the 24 elders to be “representatives of humanity who have pleased the Lord. Many suppose, basing themselves on the promise given to the holy Apostles, *Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (Matt. 19:28), that by these twenty-four elders one must understand twelve representatives of the Old Testament humanity -- the holy patriarch and prophets -- and twelve representatives of the New Testament humanity -- namely, the 12 Apostles of Christ. The white garments are a symbol of purity and eternal feasting, and the golden crowns are a sign of victory over demons.”

David Chilton, contemporary Orthodox Presbyterian and highly patristic minister writes: “...there are cogent reasons for understanding these elders are representatives of the Church in heaven (or, as St. John progressively unfolds throughout his prophecy, the earthly Church that worship in heaven). First, the mere name *elders* [presbyters] would indicate that these being represent the Church rather than a class of angels. Nowhere else in the Bible is the term *elder* given to anyone but men, and from earliest times it has stood for those who have rule and representation within the church [both Old and New Testaments] ...Thus, the elders in Revelation would appear at face value to be representatives of God’s people, the senate [presbytery?] sitting in council around their bishop ...

“But the picture of the 24 elders is based on something much more specific than the mere notion of multiplying [of] twelve. In the worship of the Old Covenant there were twenty-four divisions of priests (1 *Paraleipoemenon/Chronicles* 24) and 24 divisions of singers in the Temple (1 *Paraleipoemenon/Chronicles* 25). Thus the picture of 24 leaders of worship was not a new idea to those who first read the Revelation: It had been a feature of the worship of God’s people for over a thousand years. In fact, St. John has brought together two images that support our general conclusions: (1) The elders sit on thrones -- they are *kings*; (2) The elders are 24 in number -- they are *priests*. What St. John sees is simply the Presbytery of Heaven: the representative assembly of the Royal Priesthood, the Church.

“That these elders are both priests and kings shows that the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Covenant has been superseded and transcended; the New Covenant priesthood, with Jesus Christ as High Priest, is a Melchizedekal priesthood. Thus St. John tells us that these priest-elders are wearing **crowns**, for the crown of the high priest has been given to all. The two independent testimonies from the second century, that St. James in Jerusalem and St. John at Ephesus wore the golden crown of the high priest, have generally been discounted by modern scholars; but

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these traditions may reflect the actual practice of the early church.⁶

“This brings us to another point that should be mentioned before we move on. We have already noted several problems caused by the rationalistic tendencies of those groups that grew out of the Reformation. Unfortunately, it became common in those same groups to dispense with the elder’s robe of office. Though the concern was for ‘spirituality,’ the actual effects were to platonize doctrine and worship, and to democratize government and ministry -- further steps on the long dusty road toward Reformed barrenness. As Richard Paquier reminds us, ‘Color is a teacher through sight, and it creates moods. We misunderstand human nature and the place of perception in our inner life when we down grade this psychological factor in the worship of the Church.’ God created us this way, and the continuing validity of official robes [vestments], in the same way that the judges in our culture still wear robes -- a practice, incidentally, that grew out of the practice of the Church.

“Paquier continues: ‘It is natural, therefore, that the man who officiates in the worship of the Church be clothed in a manner corresponding to the task assigned to him and expressing visibly what he does ... ’” [In the Orthodox Church our liturgical colors are those specific colors which are used for vestments, altar covers, and analogia covers within the context of services of the Church. The symbolism of colors may serve to underline moods appropriate to a season of the liturgical year or may highlight a special occasion.]

Archimandrite Athanasios, with the most detailed and well-thought out opinion, writes, “What an awesome vision. *Around the throne of the One sitting, I saw twenty-four thrones.* Naturally, these were not as bright as the central throne. *And on these twenty-four thrones, I saw the twenty-four presbyters.* *The Twenty-four elders* [as the translation says] were also sitting, *clothed in white robes; on their heads, they were wearing golden wreaths, or crowns.* This is truly a great spectacle, an awesome vision. Based on the image described to us by the Evangelist here we could say, indirectly, that God does not alienate Himself from his creation. He does not stay isolated from the work of His hands. He does not limit Himself to the internal communion of His Hypostases (Persons). God communes with His creation. When He is on His throne human beings, the twenty-four elders surround Him. This indicates that God is in constant communion with creation. This fact alone would be sufficient to demonstrate the infinite glory of God Whose essence is outside and above His creation. God’s energies commune with His creation because He loves the work of his hands.

“Who are the twenty-four elders? Who are these twenty-four presbyters? They are the Church Triumphant [from both the Old and New Testament Church], the righteous and the saints upon whom God rests. Their number as I mentioned earlier, is expressed with the definite article “the,” *the elders* (4:10). *I saw the twenty-four elders sitting.* He does not say, I saw twenty-four elders. But I saw the elders. The article is used for the purpose of specificity. First, it emphasizes that God knows these twenty-four elders. God knows all those who belong to Him. When people want to make you invisible and totally insignificant by disregarding you and discarding you, know that God watches you. He knows you. He singles you out. You are His. Don’t worry. What a great consolation this can be! God knows me. I am His. He knows me.

6. Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Seabury Press, 1982, p. 313; WHC Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1967, p. 143.

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“Second, Saint John knows these presbyters. Saint John was on earth, but this did not matter in the least. The saints know each other. I refer to the Lord’s Transfiguration when Saints John, Peter, and James saw Moses and Elijah. The Apostle Peter said, *Lord, it is good for us to be here. It is good here. Let us prepare three tents, one for you, one for Elijah, and one for Moses* (Matthew 17:3, Mark 9:4-2, Luke 9:33). Where had he seen them? Moses lived fifteen hundred years before Peter and Elijah nine hundred before him [Peter]. Where had he seen them? The saints know each other. This is the reason Saint John did not say I saw some elders, but I saw *the* elders. I saw *the* saints, *the* Church Triumphant, from Abel until the moment of the vision. The martyrs, the prophets, the choir of the saints, who are represented by these twenty-four elders all know each other.

”... These are presbyters, and in Greek this can mean older people or spiritually mature people. There are twenty-four elders or twelve times two, a symbolic or schematic number ...

“To the Pythagorean school of thought, this two times twelve, or the number twenty-four, always meant the totality of heaven, or all the stars of the heavens. Therefore, the twenty-four elders reflected all the saints of heaven. The white robes are the symbol of purity and holiness. The gold crowns symbolize their victory against evil and their membership in the royal priesthood. Saint John tells us, *And he made us a Kingdom, priests unto God and His Father* (Rev. 1:6). He made us kings and priests. As both the Old and new Testament say, we are the royal priesthood. This parallels the promise of Christ to His disciples that they will sit on twelve thrones of glory. This holds true for every faithful, for every true believer. Remember what He said in the previous epistle to the bishop of Laodicea, *Anyone who becomes victorious [i.e., overcomes], I will grant him to sit with me on my throne* (Revelation 3:21).

“The twenty-four elders were sitting. At a certain point they will stand up. We will see this during our journey through this topic. They were sitting, which suggests rest, the rest that awaits the saints in the Kingdom of God. A little later Revelation relates, *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth ... that they may rest from their labors, for their [good] deeds follow them* (14:13). And as the Evangelist says, the elders are *sitting around the throne*. What does *around the throne* mean? Saint John is watching the entire scene unfold before his eyes, so for him to be able to see the central throne of the Lord, he would have needed to have the front of the circle open and unoccupied so as to have the full view of the central throne; so this is most likely half a circle. The elders are on the left and on the right of the central throne, allowing an opening in the fort for him to see the entire scene.

“This is a most beautiful image of divine worship in the Divine Liturgy. This reminds us of the *synthronon*⁷ found in ancient churches. The *synthronon* (*συνθρονον*) was the bishop’s throne, which was located behind the holy altar [or at earlier times, where there was no altar, the bishop’s throne was the center]. In the center was the bishop. This can be seen in the Church of the One Hundred Gates, on the island of Paros, Greece. The *synthronon* was behind the holy altar, with steps like the bleachers of a stadium. The bishop was in the center, and the presbyters were around the altar. The bishop was the typology of Christ and the presbyters represented God’s people. This is quite profound.

“While we are on the subject we might ask, what *is* the Church? It is the faithful around the holy altar, which is a symbol of the throne of the Slain Lamb. The faithful, the twenty-four

7. *syn-thronon*: to be enthroned together, to share a throne

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elders, and the saints are around the throne of the Lord. This also includes us when we gather around the holy altar, although today the altar is not in the center but at the far end of the church. We are present mystically and noetically even though we may not surround it physically. Essentially, however, we encircle the holy altar since we are active participants of the King's mystical supper, wishing to be partakers of the plenteous fatted calf, the Body and Blood of Christ, atop the holy table. This entire image of *the One sitting* on the throne and the twenty-four elders sitting on thrones, shows the most profound mystery of God's communion of love with His creation."

Revelation 4:5 *And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6 And before the throne as it were a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. 7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. 9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

We have now discussed the first 4 verses, noting that it was God the Father sitting on the Throne, and that the 24 elders were representatives of the Old and New Covenants, both Kings and Priests in the Kingdom of Heaven, after which the 24 courses of priests and chanters were aforesaid modeled by King David.

Rev 4:5a *And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices:*

St. John describes the heavenly court in familiar terms of the sights and sounds which accompanied the Lord when He appeared to Moses on Mt. Sinai, i.e., lightnings, thunderings, and voices (Ex. 19:16-19.). (Averky): "This indicates how frightful and terrible God is for unrepentant sinners who are unworthy of His mercy and forgiveness" (Ex. 19:16.) (St. Andrew of Caesarea): "But for those worthy of salvation, the lightnings and thunderings do not cause fear, but sweetness and enlightenment: the one enlightens their spirits, while the other gives pleasure to the hearing."

Rev 4:5b *... and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

In the Holy Place in Israel's Tabernacle in the wilderness the Lord instructed Moses to place a Golden Menorah with 7 lamps. Here in **Revelation** the heavenly imagery of the 7

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Heavenly lamps/torches of fire before the Throne of God is shown to be that which Israel's Menorah was modeled after. Similarly, we Orthodox may have a 7-branched Menorah on our altar table modeled after those 7-heavenly lamps. What do these lamps represent? Earlier those candlesticks were used to represent the 7 Churches of Asia Minor to whom St. John sent the Lord's letters. But here, by these seven lamps one must understand the fullness of the grace/energies of the Holy Spirit, which are enumerated by the holy prophet Isaiah 11:1-2: *And there*

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shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

Rev 4:6a And before the throne as it were a sea of glass like unto crystal:

[Note: as with all the visions in Revelation, things are being described in terms we can understand, but they are symbols and are not to be taken literally.]

Æcumenius: “The vision of the sea indicates the multitude; the glass and crystal indicate the purity and utter cleanliness of the holy spirits who are around God, who are as a sea in multitude. [For the Prophet Daniel says, *A thousand thousands stood before him, and ten thousand times ten thousand served him.*] And although they are so many, they are all pure similar to glass and crystal.” [Note that] this crystal sea is unmoving and still. (St. Andrew of Caesarea). ” Thus, these are the souls of men who have not been disturbed by the storms of the sea of life, but like crystal reflect the seven colors of the rainbow, being penetrated by the seven gifts of the grace of the Holy Spirit.”

Archimandrite Athanasios: “This sea of glass separates heaven and earth. Being clear, transparent like glass, the One who sits on the throne can see everything below. “God knows everything taking place on the face of the earth. Nothing escapes God’s knowledge. He knows absolutely everything, even those things, of course, that remain unknown to people and those things we do not even know about ourselves ... Everything lies before Him, open and clear.”

Rev 4:6b ... and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were [four living creatures] full of eyes before and behind.

Æcumenius: “This passage does not imply that these living creatures are the same ones that the prophet Ezekiel [the Cherubim] was thought worthy to behold. For each of those creatures had four faces and eight wings, and they drew chariots ... (Eze 10:13), even though they did have many eyes, as these also have. However, in this passage, each creature has but one face, although they are different, and six wings. However, Ezekiel was told that those creatures were cherubim, but these, as I believe, are the seraphim that were revealed to holy Isaiah, although Isaiah did not say what faces they had, only that they hid their faces with their wings. Nor did he say whether they had many eyes, only that they had six wings.”

Rev 4:7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “These symbols probably signify also the economy of Christ: the lion as king, the calf as chief priest or rather sacrifice, the man as incarnate for our sake, and

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the eagle as giver of the Life-giving Spirit which descends on us from above.”

These four living creatures have served as emblems of the four Evangelists [“St. Irenaeus of Lyon was the first to make this association: the lion with St. Mark, the calf with St. Luke, the man with St. Matthew, and the eagle with St. John.” --Fr. Seraphim Rose]. The multitude of their eyes indicates the Divine omniscience, the knowing of everything past, present, and future. These are the highest angelic beings and closest to God [the Seraphim] **who ceaselessly glorify God.** (cf. Isaiah 6:2-3). [Note: The 4th century Syrian monastic, Fr. Alexander, after praying and fasting for 3 years that the Lord would reveal to him His will, was then shown by the Lord in a vision how the ceaseless praise of the Angelic powers were to be imitated on earth. All the monks were divided into 24 watches of prayer (like the 24 elders in Revelation and the organization of the 24 courses of priests by King David 1 Paraleipomenon/Chronicles). Changing shifts each hour, day and night they sang in two choirs the Psalms of David, interrupting this only for the times of the divine services. The monastery received the name “ the Unsleping Ones,” because the monks sang praise to God throughout the day and night as an image of the Kingdom of God, in which Angels and men together will forever sing the glory of the Holy Trinity. Their worship was modeled after the Heavenly Worship of ceaselessly praising and glorifying God.]

[St. Athanasius the Great says also that *Holy, Holy, Holy*, here also indicates the Holy Trinity and the equality of the Three Persons: “The Triad, praised, revered and adored, is one and indivisible and without degrees. It is united without confusion, just as the Monad also is distinguished without separation (Isaiah 6, Rev. 4:8 offering their praises three times, saying *Holy, Holy, Holy* proves that the Three Hypostases are perfect just as in saying “*Lord*, they declare the One Essence.].

Archimandrite Athanasios: “We also notice that the hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy*, is repeated 3 times. On the one hand, this accentuates the meaning of the holiness of the One sitting on the throne, and on the other hand, it refers to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.”

Œcumenius: “He says, [the Lord Almighty] *Who was, and is, and is to come.* These words indicate the holy and awesome Trinity, as we noted before ... Moses names the Father *he who is*, for God said to him, *I am he who is* (Ex. 3:14). And the Evangelist himself wrote of the Son as, *he who was*, saying, *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1). And *he who is to come*, speaks of the Holy Spirit, for he always visits those who are worthy to receive him.”

Rev 4:9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

The Heavenly praise does not end with the song of the 4 living creatures, because the 24

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elders join in with antiphonal praise and fall down before him and worship him casting their crowns before the throne.

The 24 elders are participants in the hymns of the heavenly powers and confess that they received from God the power of victory over spiritual enemies. St. Andrew: “They say: “In as much as Thou, O Master, art the Cause and giver of the glorious victory, to Thee should be sent up thanksgiving from all creatures.”

Ecumenius: “The text says that along with the living creatures the elders give glory to God. This is indicated by their throwing their crowns before God. The crown is a symbol of victory and of rule, and so when they cast them before the throne of God, they ascribe to God, who is over all, that the kingdom is real and true as is the victory over all enemies, and they say, ‘To you, O Lord, glory is due from every creature, for you did bring all things from nonexistence into existence, and by your will did you establish what formerly did not exist.’”

Rev 4:11b ... for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Archimandrite Athanasios: “As we realize by now, in actuality this celestial liturgy in ***Revelation*** serves as the *typos* or the prototype of the earthly Orthodox Divine Liturgy. If one studies and develops an understanding of the entire ***Book of the Revelation*** one will realize very quickly that the model or the format of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy is an exact replica of what takes place in heaven [an image of it, or an icon of it, as you will].

“St. Paul makes reference to this in Hebrews where God says to Moses, *See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain. They serve as copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary* (Heb. 8:5-6). According to St. Paul, these things are models or typologies foreshadowing the future or heavenly things. We celebrate Divine Liturgy here, knowing its prototype is in heaven, and with the full understanding that God is the only One worthy of receiving glory, honor, and the power because He is the Creator of all. Thus, if the twenty-four elders wear golden crowns and are enthroned around God, it is the result of the love and the goodness of God.”

In our current era on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, we don't see the Icon, the identity, of Christ, the Theotokos, the Angels, or the Saints so much under attack, as the Icon of the Church itself. It is the identity of the Church itself, One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, that in our age is under broad demonic assault by the ecumenists of our age. They have thrown the image of the True Church underfoot and trampled upon it, even as the Iconoclasts of old trampled upon the Images of the Lord, His Mother, His servants--the Angels and the Saints. You can hardly recognize this vision of the worship of God in ***Revelation*** in most of today's heterodox, so-called “Christian” churches, let alone in most of the formerly Orthodox Churches of the New Calendar, or Ecumenist Old Calendar Churches. The True Image of the Heavenly Worship has been lost or severely tarnished at best among these Ecclesiastical Iconoclasts. Our Bishops of the True Orthodox Churches are working to maintain that image and restore the defiled image of the Church to its ancient state in those who have lost it or are in the process of losing it.

In this pericope/passage from the ***Apocalypse*** we had a glimpse of the Divine Liturgy in

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the Heavens portrayed in visions given to St. John the Theologion. We need to remember what Moses and later St. Paul exhorted us, that we are to *make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain*. That pattern was modeled on the worship in Heaven. And as Christ said to the Church in Philadelphia, *Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast*.