

What a time we live in, Christians! Think of all the things that are happening in the world today. We have Christians who are being told to deny what God says or they'll lose their job. We have a government which is trying to get us to accept all kinds of evil things as normal, as even good for society. We have people who say that Christians are evil simply because they believe what Christians have always believed. It's a very difficult time we live in! One which leads us to ask: why? Why is this happening? What do we have to do to deal with these things? How can we stand firm in the face of such evil?

The book of Revelation gives us the answers to these questions, Christians. The book of Revelation reveals to us through pictures and through symbols what is happening. It shows us that we are in the midst of a great spiritual war, and by showing us what is happening, Revelation prepares us to fight in that war. It shows us how we can hold on even when all the world is against us. It shows us how we can have hope even when everything on earth is taken away. Revelation prepares us for what is to come.

And so in the beginning of our reading, in chapter 12, we hear of a great sign which appears in heaven. Verses 1 and 2 say: "A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth." This woman that we meet is a picture of the Church, of God's bride. And she is clothed with the sun because she looks like God. In Revelation chapter 1, we hear that Jesus had a face that looked like the sun. So she is holy like him. She has been made like him. And she has stars around her head, twelve stars, which are a symbol of the twelve tribes of Israel, a symbol of the twelve apostles, a picture of the entire church. And she has a crown also on her head, which is a crown of victory, a crown which would be given to somebody who won a contest. We might think of an Olympic medal, for example, or a trophy, but in those days it was a crown. That's what she has on her head, because she is victorious through Christ our Lord. She is the Church, the bride of the Lamb. But she's in pain. She's in pain because she lives in a world which is still attacking her, a world which will not leave her alone. And so she's wondering: how long is this going to go on? When will she finally be delivered? Where is her hope in the midst of all of this suffering?

But now we meet another sign, verses 3 and 4: "Another sign appeared in heaven. Behold, a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child, he might devour it." And so the picture we have now is of Satan, the great enemy of God and the great enemy of his Church. And Satan is described as a great dragon, a great serpent, the same snake who deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden, the same snake who drove Adam to sin against God. And this great serpent is colored red, the color of blood, because he wants bloodshed. He wants destruction. He wants to bring us down. He has many heads and horns, which are symbols of kingdoms and of kings, of earthly powers, the means that he uses to carry out his persecution on earth. Seven and ten being the numbers of completion, the numbers of fullness, showing that it seems like he has all the power in the world, like he has everything behind him, like there is nothing that can stop him. And he has on his heads seven diadems, a different kind of crown, the crown of a king, one who has authority. Who has power like this dragon? Who can fight against him? With his tail he drags down a third of the stars from the sky. It seems like there is no hope for us. And now this great

dragon stands before the Church, before the woman, to devour her child, to take away the hope that the church has.

But now the great moment comes. The child is born. Verses 5 and 6: "She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days." This child, Christians, is Jesus, the promised Son of God, the promised son of Mary. And Jesus has been born as a king, one who is to rule over all the nations, one who has a rod of iron in his hand to show his strength and to show his power. None will be able to resist him. None will be able to stand before him. Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the one before whom every nation will bend the knee. Jesus is victorious. He has come conquering and to conquer. And before the devil has anything to do to stop him, Jesus goes up into heaven, where he sits down at the right hand of the Father. His victory is complete. His victory is swift. So fast, in fact, the devil didn't even have a chance to react. The battle is already over. Satan has lost.

And the woman, the Church, flees into the wilderness to a place where she will be protected by God, safe from the attacks of Satan, safe from the attacks of the world. She will be there for 1,260 days, a symbolic number which shows the time between when Christ went up into heaven and the time when he will come back again on the Last Day. That's the time we now live in, Christians, the time where we are waiting for Christ to return. The Church is safe during that whole time in the hands of God.

But now the scene changes again. War breaks out in heaven. The angelic powers fighting against the demonic powers, locked in a cosmic struggle. Michael and his angels are fighting against Satan and his angels. And all of our troubles on earth, Christians, are but a reflection of that great spiritual war. As Paul says in Ephesians chapter 6: "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." This war goes on. It's being fought for the victory, fought over our souls. But do not lose heart, Christians! We already know how this war will end. Because Satan has been defeated. Christ sits on the throne. And because he is on the throne, there is nothing that the devil can do. Christ has silenced Satan's accusations forever. There's nothing more that he can do. Even though he tries to destroy us, even though he tries to bring us down, he can't do it, because Jesus is reigning as King. And all of those who believe in Jesus Christ have been forgiven their sins. God no longer lets Satan accuse us. There is now no condemnation for those who believe in him. And the saints have conquered Satan through the blood of the Lamb and through the word of their testimony. The victory is already ours, Christians. We already know how this war will end. And we can take heart knowing that.

And for that reason, there is no more place for Satan in heaven. He is cast down to the earth to wait for his final judgment, when he will be cast into hell to be tormented forever. His judgment will come soon, and he knows it. He knows that his time is short. He knows that he doesn't have very long. But that makes him angry. And because he's angry, he does the only thing that he can do. He goes after the Church. Verses 13 and 14: "And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child, but the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the

wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time and times and half a time." Maybe he can physically destroy her. Maybe he can send against her everything so that he will bring her down. And so he goes after her, hoping to devour her. But God protects her. God keeps her safe, giving her the wings of an eagle to fly away from him, so that he can do nothing. She is kept safe in his hands in the wilderness for a time and times and half a time, the same period as that 1,260 days. And no matter how many foes she faces in this life, Christians, the Church will never fail, because she is in the hands of God. And God will keep her safe until Christ returns.

But the devil keeps trying. Verses 15 and 16: "The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood, but the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth." If he can't destroy her, maybe he can get her with lies, with false teachings, with all kinds of wicked ideas. Anything that he pours forth from his mouth like a river, all in the attempt to destroy her. But he fails in this too. God protects her again. So that no matter how many traitors are in her midst, no matter how many false sons are within her pale, God will keep the Church safe until Christ returns. She is protected in his mighty hands.

But Satan still doesn't give up. Verse 17: "Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." He can't get the Church, so he goes after her children: individual Christians, you, me, anyone who believes in Jesus. He goes after them because in that way he hopes to destroy us, to bring us down, to make us fall. This is why we see all of the evils around us, Christians, in the world today. This is why we have bosses who tell us that we will lose our jobs if we want to do what God wants us to do. This is why we have a government trying to get us to accept all kinds of evil. This is why we have society calling us bigots, racists, even Nazis, simply for believing what Christians have always believed. But do you not see what's happening here, Christians? Do not see Satan behind it all? Because it is Satan who says that you are a bigot for believing that a man is a man and a woman is a woman. It is Satan who says that you're being hateful if you don't want to tolerate evil in society in any form. It is Satan who says that you should be ashamed of who you are and ashamed of your Christian ancestors. That is Satan at work behind it all, doing everything that he can to get you to break, to get you to bend the knee, so that you will deny God in the process. That's the war we are fighting, Christians. That's what we're struggling with. It is a war for your mind, a war for your body, a war for your soul.

So how do we deal with this, then? What are we supposed to do in the face of such evil? We hold on to the truth that Jesus Christ has already won. Jesus Christ is already victorious. Satan is a defeated enemy. No matter how fearsome he seems to be, no matter how powerful he wants to appear, he has already fallen. He has already been conquered by the blood of Jesus. Christ sits in victory at the right hand of the Father. Satan could not stop him, and Satan cannot stop those who belong to him. The victory is already ours through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Yes, it's true, we may still have to fight. Yes, it's true, we may still struggle because we are Christians. Some will lose their jobs. Some will lose their possessions. Some will lose their lives. But no matter what we lose, Christians, what waits for us is far greater. Because listen to what Jesus says in Revelation 2: "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about

to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." The crown of life waits for you, Christians. Eternal life with God waits for you. Jesus himself waits for you. So stand and fight!

Let the world call you names! Jesus is yours. Let Satan take away everything that you have! You have lost nothing, because the kingdom is yours. Don't be ashamed to be a Christian. Trust in God and do what is right, and you will have the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Stand and fight, Christians! Though the war be long, the victory is already yours, because Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us the victory through the blood of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us always to stand firm against a hostile world, knowing that what waits for us in heaven is far greater. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.