

Weekly Bible Study group – February 17, 2010

This week's reading: Revelation 12:1 – 16:21

Reflection by Bob Zurinsky (bob@spu.edu)

In our text this week we're confronted with a whole new set of visions and images, but the message is the same as what we've seen all year, both in the Gospel of John and in Revelation.

John sees a new "sign in the heavens" – a great red dragon, who calls forth hideous beasts from the land and sea. In John's vision, these represent the powers and the empire that is set against God's plans for the world. And John gives us a very powerful clue about what he's talking about. He says that the symbol of this beast is "666" and that a wise person will know how to interpret that number, because "it is the number of a man." It just so happens that the Hebrew letters for the name "Nero Caesar" add up to 666 – not a very veiled reference! As the most notorious of the emperors of his day, the name Nero Caesar represents the whole powerful world system "that says in her heart 'I rule as queen!'" It is the subtle, charming world of power, beauty, violence, and wealth – all that tempts us to gradually sell our souls and forget our true identity and mission on earth. It's the system that seems to be *winning* when you look around the world – something that is just as true in our world today as it was for John in his own context. But this is the world kingdom that we're called to resist at all costs.

John also sees another sign. The dragon and its beasts are chasing a pregnant woman. She gives birth to a son, and then the son, the one who is destined to one day rule the whole earth, is snatched up to heaven. The dragon keeps chasing the woman, and she flees into the desert, where God himself takes care of her. This image of the great woman is generally thought to be a symbol of "the people of God" – the faithful ones who refuse to cooperate with the empire of the beast. The son is Christ, who is truly destined to rule the whole earth, but who, for the time being, has been taken up to God, leaving the woman to endure her time in the desert, waiting for the reign of the son to begin.

We will resist and wait. We will pledge our allegiance only to the Lamb and his Way.