

Session 9: The Beasts and the Mark

What We Found

The dragon delegates. From the sea rises a beast assembled, in the widely held reading, from Daniel 7's four beasts in one (leopard, bear, lion, ten horns): state power absolutized, wearing Rome's face for the first hearers and resurfacing wherever politics demands what belongs to God, with the deception's supreme form, the Antichrist, still ahead (CCC 675–676; a personal figure in the common expectation). From the land rises a lamb-horned, dragon-voiced beast (the false prophet): religion and propaganda in the first beast's service, enforcing worship through the market: no buying or selling without the mark. And we discovered that evil creates nothing of its own: it corrupts, misuses, and counterfeits the goods God made. A parody trinity (dragon, beast, false prophet); a parody resurrection (the mortal wound healed); a parody seal (the mark on hand and forehead, aping the seal of God's servants and Deuteronomy 6's command to bind God's word on the hand and as frontlets between the eyes: deed and thought). On 666: the leading scholarly reading finds Nero Caesar's name-number (with the 616 manuscript variant matching), the symbolic reading hears six falling short of seven three times (a human number, 13:18), and the Church's earliest word on it, from St. Irenaeus, is a warning against guessing games. Revelation ties the mark to deliberate worship and allegiance, not to accidents: no one is damned by a barcode. And the answer stands on Zion: the Lamb, and the sealed thousands with HIS name on their foreheads, who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. Twice the chapter pauses to address the reader: a call for the endurance and faith of the saints (13:10), and a call for wisdom (13:18).

And then the second seal opened. The inventory we have been meeting since Session 1 (the Lord's Day, the lampstands, the priestly robe, the Sanctus, the incense that is the prayers of the saints, the altar, the ark) assembled into one discovery: heaven's worship is the worship the Church enters at every Mass, a participation in the one sacrifice of Christ, made present and never repeated (CCC 1090; 1366–1367). We did not learn a new fact about Revelation; we learned where we have been standing on Sunday morning all along.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies, Book 5*

St. Irenaeus knew the number 666 from the ancient copies, weighed candidate names himself, and warned, in substance, against asserting any: safer to await the fulfillment; had the name needed proclaiming, the seer would have proclaimed it.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *City of God, Book 14*

Two loves have built two cities: love of self, reaching contempt of God, the earthly city; love of God, reaching contempt of self, the heavenly. The study's application: the beast's empire and the Lamb's Zion contend for every heart, in every age.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr · *First Apology (summary)*

We worship God alone, St. Justin told the emperor in substance, but in all else we gladly serve you: taxes paid, prayers offered, adoration refused. Everything lawful to Caesar; nothing of God's.

Live It This Week

- Do one act of costly allegiance this week in the place you named: small and real beats large and imaginary.
- This Sunday, attend Mass with our inventory in mind, from the sign of the cross to the final blessing. Count what you now recognize, and thank God for one item by name.
- Read Daniel 3:16–18 once, and pray the three friends' words over your situation: in their compressed motto drawn from Daniel 3:18: but if not, we will not serve.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. (Revelation 13:10, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 14:6–20.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 675–676; 2113; 2242; 1090; 1137–1139; 1326; 1366–1367.