

Worship on Earth as in Heaven

How many of you have seen snow? How do you explain what snow is to someone who has never seen it? Perhaps you could say it is white, like cooked rice, but is very cold, like ice. Sometimes it is nearly liquid, like ice cream, but other times dry and powdery, like sand.

When we see something that our friends have not seen, we need a point of comparison and words that they understand. But at times it is difficult to explain something that they have not seen.

The prophets and apostles had visions like that. In our Old Testament lesson for today, the prophet Isaiah had a vision of the glory and majesty of God. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah wrote an account of his vision. He said this: *"I saw the Lord sitting on a high and lofty throne. The train of His robe was filling the Temple"* (Is. 6:1). What he was trying to say was the Lord appeared to him as a King above all kings, and His glory filled the Temple of Jerusalem like the train of a royal robe.

What else? He was attended by seraphim. What is a seraph? A powerful angel. The Bible speaks of different ranks or orders of angels, but not in great detail. Psalm 99:1 reads, *"The LORD reigns. Let the peoples tremble! He is enthroned above the cherubim."* Cherubim generally means angels lower in rank than the seraphim. However, the prophet Ezekiel describes four cherubim directly in front of God's throne, each with four wings (Ezekiel 1:4-11). In the book of Revelation, chapter 4, the Apostle John describes four "living creatures" in front of the throne, each with six wings, like the seraphim in Isaiah and "full of eyes all around and on the inside" (4:8).

It is difficult for us to understand the differences between John's "living creatures," the seraphim of Isaiah and the cherubim of Ezekiel because these are not earthly beings. To say they have four or six wings and are full of eyes is like saying snow is white like rice, but sometimes is solid like ice, other times nearly liquid like ice cream, or that it can be dry and powdery like sand.

Furthermore, in his vision of God's glory (Daniel 7:9-14), the prophet Daniel says there are thousands upon thousands and millions upon millions of angels gathered in front of God's throne.

And what is this vast multitude of angels constantly shouting? *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!"* (Is. 6:3). Why say "holy" three times? It implies the three Persons in one divine Essence, that is, the Holy Trinity. The prophet Daniel speaks of the "Son of Man," that is, the Second Person, incarnate in Jesus Christ, appearing with God the Father (Daniel 7:13-14). In Revelation, chapter 1, Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of Man, and, in Revelation 2:18, identifies the Son of Man as the Son of God.

Furthermore, in the vision of Revelation, chapter 5, we find the Lamb of God, that is, Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of God the Father. Seated at His right hand means the Son is equal to the Father and possesses the same authority in heaven and on earth.

Also, the presence of the Holy Spirit is symbolised in Revelation 4:5 by seven lamps of fire. In the Old Testament, in Exodus 25:31-40, Numbers 7:89-8:4, the seven lamps represent the omniscient Spirit of God.

There is something else in John's vision: The presence of human believers in front of God's throne. The 24 elders symbolise the faithful of the Old Testament (the 12 tribes of Israel) and of the New Testament (12 apostles). Because of the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross, we may approach the throne of the Triune God and worship Him in faith and in love.

So the vision of the worship of God by the court of heaven is the model for our worship. God is present among us in the preaching of His Word and in the precious Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. Therefore, we respond as we say in the liturgy, "with angels and archangels" as we contemplate the presence of God, offer praise without ceasing, and with all the celestial chorus, always sing: *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts! His glory fills the whole earth!"*