

**Readings:** Acts 5:27 – 32, 40,41; Psalm 29(30):1,2–5, 11-13; Apocalypse 5:11-14; John 21:1 – 19.

Today's reading from the Revelation to John takes us to the heart of the heavenly liturgy which the seer is privileged to see.

John has already seen the throne on which God the Father sits, surrounded by twenty-four elders and by four living creatures, which lead the heavenly liturgy with the song which is echoed in our worship at mass: *Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.*

Then he has seen a *Lamb standing, as though it had been slain*. This Lamb has taken a scroll, which will reveal God's plan for his creation. The living creatures and the elders, holding harps and *golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*, sing a new song of praise to the Lamb: *You were slain and by your blood you have bought for God people of every tribe, language, people and nation.*

This vision shows that the worship of heaven is addressed both to the eternal Father, because he *created all things, and* to Jesus, the Lamb, because he was *sacrificed to create the people of God – a kingdom and priests to our God.*

Our reading is the conclusion to this vision of the worship of heaven. Around the throne, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders can be heard the voices of a vast number of angels, singing the praise of the Lamb. To music-loving English speakers the words will be known as the climax of Handel's *Messiah*.

*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood.* In the final words of praise the singers are joined by *all living things in creation* in praising the Father, *who is sitting on the throne*, and the Son, who is the *Lamb*.

The *four living creatures* are first found in the visions of the prophet Ezekiel, where they carry the chariot-throne of God. We have become familiar with them as winged symbols of the four Evangelists: Matthew's man or angel, Mark's lion, Luke's ox and John's eagle. But in John's Apocalypse they seem to represent the whole of God's ordered creation.

The Book does not identify the *twenty-four elders*, but they probably symbolize the People of God, and they may represent twelve Old Testament prophets and twelve New Testament Apostles.