



THE FIFTH HORSEMAN

April 2020

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

Easter is the solemnity of solemnities, the culmination of the liturgical year; it is the celebration of the Risen Lord, of the victory of Life over Death, of the ultimate Light over the deepest of darkness. Easter is not about petty matters, though it encompasses even small things. It is a revelation of the definitive meaning of human life, the great *Alleluia* of the human story in general; but it is also a story about real human beings, of those who were and are caught up in the drama of the God-Man, the One Who was and is the Son of Mary as well as the true Son of God the Father. It is about our living link to the Word Incarnate, to the very Word of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”¹



The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse² have been riding the streets of the world these past forty days, carrying with them war, famine, death, and pestilence—especially pestilence. But today on Easter, as we may interpret the Book of the Apocalypse, following the mention of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, rides forth a Fifth Horseman, a rider of an entirely different order.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called faithful and true, and with justice doth he judge and fight. And his eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many diadems, and he had a name written, which no man knoweth but himself. And he was clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood; and his name is called, THE WORD OF GOD. And the armies that are in heaven followed him on white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp two edged sword; that with it he may strike the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty.

¹ John 1:1, 4-5.

² Cf. Apoc. Chapter 6.

And he hath on his garment, and on his thigh written: KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that did fly through the midst of heaven: Come, gather yourselves together to the great supper of God. . . .³

Indeed, this is the Risen One of whom we read, according to the traditional interpretation, in the Book of Isaiah:

Why then is thy apparel red, and thy garments like theirs that tread in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the Gentiles there is not a man with me: I have trampled on them in my indignation, and have trodden them down in my wrath, and their blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my apparel.⁴

Today we see, perhaps as never before, how the Word is the light of the world, how it shineth in the darkness, though the world of darkness neither comprehends it, nor is able to capture it: *et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt . . . et mundus eum non cognovit.*⁵ It might seem incongruous to speak on Easter of the victory of the Word over all His enemies, but this is a great theme of the Easter liturgy: *Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando*, we sing in the Sequence, *Death and life in wondrous strife did meet.*⁶ Beyond the Fifth Horseman's victory over the beast and the antichrist, it is the definitive defeat of Satan that is at the heart of this mystery of the victory of the Word Incarnate, blood-spattered, and yet clothed in incandescent white. How we all long to see the forces of darkness that still rule this world utterly defeated!

In the meantime we must move along the road toward our final destiny, amid the "slings and arrows" of human existence, including a great number of unanswered questions regarding the current health crisis and the response our president and our bishops will make in the face of changing conditions. Will America get back to work in the next few weeks? Will the doors of Catholic churches across the nation open up at least for Sundays in the near future? What is certain is that God is "He Who Is," whereas man is "he who is not," as Saint Catherine heard it in a locution with which God the Father favored her. While remaining responsible and prudent, let us not be overly impressed by the ever changing advice of various task forces and experts, especially not to the point of forgetting the overarching Truth of God and simple common sense. The really big news is not the latest coronavirus report, but that "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon."⁷ Whatever happens, may Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, help us abide in the joy of the Resurrection of her Son. Amen. Alleluia.

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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³ Apoc. 19: 11-17.

⁴ Isaiah 63:2-3.

⁵ John 1: 5,10.

⁶ From Sequence of the Mass of Easter Sunday.

⁷ Luke 24:34.