REVELATION

SLAM POET KAI: We call this one Doomsday.

SLAM POET LIBBY: You're in trouble, you say. You're afraid.

SLAM POET KAI: Each new story and newspaper leading you astray.

SLAM POET LIBBY: It's Doomsday, boy, girl, we, us ...

SLAM POET KAI: It's Apocalypse!

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

LIBBY: Hi, I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Welcome to Catholic Central.

LIBBY: Today, we're talking about the Book of Revelation. The last book of the Bible.

KAI: It's full of last things like the end of the world. You may have heard it referred to as the Apocalypse, because of its Greek roots. Remember, the New Testament was originally written in Greek.

LIBBY: Apocalyptic literature is found in Western cvilization since earliest Jewish times. Even today, look at all of the books, movies, video games, and TV shows that center around the End Time. Destruction of the current order, descent into chaos, rising forces of evil ...

KAI: Zombies, plagues, asteroids, aliens, nuclear war ... It's all apocalyptic. The end is near. Or maybe it's now. Or maybe it's already a done deal, and it's really hard for the good people to remain hopeful.

LIBBY: What do all of these have in common with the Book of Revelation? They tell us that survival depends on hope, fidelity to what's important, and heroic courage. Even when, in real life, the world hasn't literally ended, we've been in times of rapid, drastic change that make it seem like it.

KAI: Changes in the economy, war, an epidemic, the rise of a dictator.

LIBBY: The Catholic Church included the Book of Revelation in the Bible with the hope that all would find inspiration for the End Times.

KAI: The study of the End Times is called eschatology. It's a branch of theology that looks at these things.

LIBBY: Essentially, you can summarize the eschatological message of the Book of Revelation in two words: God wins!

KAI: He wins? Like in Jeopardy, Alex?

LIBBY: Well, think bigger. It's the belief that in times of upheaval, change, and violence, personal or societal, God will overcome and save people.

But let's begin at the beginning.

SLAM POET KAI: When will the beginning end? Confusion, hurt, hurricane wind. Bleeding out, but breathing in.

LIBBY: It's the early ‘90s A.D., about 60 years after the resurrection of Jesus. Way before scrunchies ‘90s.

The Roman Empire has conquered much of Europe and Asia. The Emperor Nero commands that all Christians must comply with traditional Roman religious practices.

KAI: Forced pagan worship, huh? Sacrifice to idols, calling Nero god? Got it.

LIBBY: The persecution evokes fear and confusion among all Christian communities.

KAI: It's a time of huge stress. Many of these early communities are barely surviving and on the brink of losing their faith.

LIBBY: When in the middle of all of this turmoil, John, the one known as "the beloved Apostle" in the Gospels, receives a vision from God.

JOHN: Whoa!

LIBBY: The vision he records in the Book of Revelation.

KAI: As the youngest apostle, and last to die, John recorded his Gospel, three letters, and now, this vision that urges everyone to persevere.

V/O: Then I saw an angel standing on the sun. He cried out in a loud voice to all the birds flying high overhead, "Come here. Gather for God's great feast, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of military officers, and the flesh of warriors, the flesh of horses and of their riders, and the flesh of all, free and slave, small and great."

KAI: Kind of weird and super cryptic. How do we read this Book of Revelation?

LIBBY: Well, you could divide it into two parts. The first three chapters are short, pastoral letters for the benefit of seven churches in present-day Turkey.

KAI: Ah, the seven sealed letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia ... not the one with the cheesesteaks ... and Laodicea. Which was an old girlfriend's name, by the way. Yeah.

LIBBY: Oh, I hope she's watching.

John calls for a renewed faith, unity, and courage, and predicts the downfall of the Roman Empire.

KAI: Inviting them to take the long-term perspective on God's work in this world.

LIBBY: The second part, the remaining 19 chapters, are less concerned with pastoral problems, and focus on evil and persecution at large.

KAI: Oh, these must be the visions.

LIBBY: Yes. A series of visions that begin with the resurrected Christ, and end with his eternal reign. You'll find poetic imagery, and language similar to the Old Testament prophets.

KAI: Now think Ezekiel, Zechariah, Daniel, Isaiah. Apocalyptic literature is generally focused on the forces of evil, and its hold on the world in times of transition and chaos.

LIBBY: Pay attention to John's numbers, as well. He uses four, seven, and 666 liberally.

KAI: Four references the elements of the earth and physical creation. Think of the four points of the compass as representing all earthly directions. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse bring havoc to the four corners of the world.

LIBBY: Seven signifies completeness and perfection. The opening of the Seven Seals in chapters five through eight mark the second coming of Christ.

KAI: And 666 ... in our culture, it means serious trouble.

LIBBY: This superstition got started in chapter 13, where the number 666 could be a codename for Satan's Beast, and emphasize unfulfillment.

KAI: It's like the Beast is stalled at six and can't reach the covenant perfection of seven. He's sentenced to perpetual anticipation and never finding triumph.

LIBBY: Again, God wins!

KAI: Oh! And don't forget angels!

LIBBY: John's vision has more angels than a Midwest Christmas play. You know what I'm saying? But forget those spotless winged things, these angels are total warriors.

KAI: St. Michael, the archangel, is the Great Guardian, defending people from evil. And is often invoked by Catholics for protection.

LIBBY: In chapter 12, a spectacular war arises in heaven between Michael and the dragon, who is ultimately defeated along with his demonic hoard.

KAI: We can still feel the effects of Satan's rage at defeat. See our episode on The Seven Deadly Sins. His temptations are powerful.

LIBBY: Okay, so does John say this whole end of the world thing is coming soon?

KAI: Well, his coded language does appear to predict the fall of the Roman emperor at the time, and of the Roman Empire itself, which occurred within a few centuries. But in every age, there have been people who make connections between the angst and tribulation of their own time, and the imagery of Revelation.

LIBBY: We get a lot of prophets of doom, who have predicted that the end of the world is next Tuesday.

KAI: Other ideas about the End Times also trace back to Revelation.

LIBBY: But not all. Keep in mind that the antichrist and Rapture aren't actually mentioned in the Book of Revelation.

KAI: The antichrist is a term for deceivers in John's letters.

LIBBY: But John is clear the Jesus's second coming will be a swift surprise, "like a thief in the night." The Book of Revelation is more of a how-to than a when.

KAI: The "how-to" is making sure our lives are in union with God, and that we seek the good for ourselves and others, no matter what is happening in the world.

LIBBY: Acknowledging John's humanity, we can probably say he didn't intend his writings to be a prediction for the 21st Century.

KAI: But acknowledging God's divinity, Catholics trust that God sees people's sufferings, tyrannies, and persecutions.

LIBBY: In the end, as it says in chapter 21, "He will make them a new heaven, and a new earth, and will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning."

Thanks for watching. I'm Libby.

KAI: I'm Kai. We call that one Revelation.

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