

of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” The conventional interpretation is that, following Nero’s and Domitian’s persecution, John wrote Revelation to the churches, to reassure them that the Roman Empire would fall and Christ would be victorious. Scholars have doubted this interpretation, but persecution of Christians is writ large in the Book. It may be that John was painting on a much broader canvas. He regarded Roman persecution as part of the travails which Christians had faced and would face for the sake of Christ. Sporadic Roman persecutions continued during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, followed by widespread, officially sanctioned persecutions in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Although Christianity became the official religion of the Empire under Constantine, major persecutions have continued in various places up to and including the present day. Revelation encourages faith in the face of terrible adversity, in the sure knowledge of Christ’s victory. As one theologian wrote of John of Patmos (1): “...his history does not refer to one or two major figures like Nero or Domitian. These two figures are part of a wider social context that believers experienced as deeply threatening,.... His text takes his readers on the sorrowful journey of the faithful through the ages. In depicting this journey, John transcends his own time and his own historical situation”. (1) De Villiers “Persecution in the Book of Revelation” (2002)

**-Stephen. S**

**Entrance antiphon: In a resplendent cloud the Holy Spirit appeared. The Father’s voice was heard: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.**

**First Reading: Daniel: 7: 9-10, 13-14**

**Responsorial Psalm: 96. Response: The Lord is king, most high above all the earth.**

**Second Reading: 2 Peter 1: 16-19**

**Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! This is my Son, the Beloved, he enjoys my favour; listen to him. Alleluia!**

**Gospel: Matthew: 17: 1-9**

**Memorial Acclamation: Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.**

**Communion Antiphon: When Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.**



## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (*The Transfiguration of the Lord*)**

### **Cycle A, 2023 Weekly Reflection: Christians and Romans: (3) Early Christian attitudes to Roman Authority:**

The first Roman persecution of Christians took place at Nero’s behest, starting with the great fire (64 AD) and concluding with his death in 68 AD. It is thought that both St Peter and St Paul were martyred in the period after the fire, St Peter probably by crucifixion and St Paul, presumably because he was a Roman citizen, by the ‘gentleman’s death’ of beheading. Scripture recommended Christians to respect the pagan authority of Rome while being true to Christ. Jesus, in answer to the question whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, responded: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” St Paul, in his letter to the Romans (13:1), wrote in the mid-50s AD: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”. In the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of Peter (2:13-17) the sentiment is even more firmly stated: “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. ....live as servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor”.

After Nero’s death in 68 AD, the next reported major Roman persecution was by the Emperor Domitian (90-96 AD). It is generally believed that this was when the Book of Revelation was written by St John of Patmos. John may well have been exiled to the isle of Patmos at the beginning of Domitian’s persecution. Whatever the historical context, the Book of Revelation is unique in that it is the only New Testament text which directly attacks the political power of Rome. In particular (at 17:3-6) John likened Rome to the Jewish nemesis Babylon. He wrote of Rome: “I saw a woman .... on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth’s abominations.” And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood