

Sermon: All Saint's Day

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Year A
Revelation 7:9-17
Psalm 34:1-10, 22
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12

When I was a young adult... when I was Jewish... I can't tell you exactly how I came to hear... or maybe read this passage from Revelation... but some of these images... disturbed me... they made no sense to me... they seemed wrapped up in a kind of fundamentalist theology... i mean... it's lambs that are supposed to be shepherded by people... not the other way around...

When I was a young adult... this one image from Revelation... having robes washed... and made white... in the blood of the Lamb... troubled me... blood was something you'd try to get out of robes... not put robes into... we'd use hydrogen peroxide to get blood out of things... or cold water and a brush... and often the stain would become almost invisible... but you might never be able to get rid of it completely...

And according to Kosher food laws... as I remember my grandparents living into them... no blood could remain in cooked meat... no "juice" as my mother euphemistically used to say... and in Hebrew... the word Kosher means to make holy... ancient people knew the connection between blood and life... and only God could give life... could make it holy... and you shall be holy unto me... for I the LORD am holy...

Now this image of God wiping away every tear from our eyes... now that's one I can get on board with that... it reminds me of Isaiah 25... where God destroys the shroud that is cast over all people... and swallows up death forever... it reminds me of how we die to our small self in baptism... and are reborn with Christ to eternal life...

But Revelation also contains one of my favorite images... I referenced it... coincidentally... last Sunday when I mentioned the Eucharistic Prayer from Enriching

Our Worship... and there was a great multitude that no one could count... from every nation... from all tribes... and peoples and languages...

These people are the Saints... they are the ones whose diversity does not exclude them from the Heavenly Banquet... these are the Saints... whose differences are affirmed... these are the Saints... whose experience is that unity doesn't require uniformity... that diversity wasn't intended for division... because Revelation doesn't say that these great multitudes all had to become like each other... all had to become indistinguishable from one another... before being welcomed to the banquet Table...

No... there is something else which unites them... and us... something else which made them saints... and makes us saints too... our differences make us unique... but we are made One... by something deeper... by something that allows us to maintain our individuality... and yet experience that which connects us... we are made saints through something which affirms us as we are... something which invites us in to increasing fulfillment... and satisfies all of our hungers...

J. Scott Turner... Priest-in-Charge at St. Martha's Episcopal Church in Colorado... writes that Jesus uses images of hunger and thirst... to describe our right relationships with God and creation... because what's at stake is life and death... and if the loss of all relationships is spiritual death... then relationships which are to some degree distorted... lead to spiritual illness... which can then lead to even more distorted relationships... and in the end... even the religions which claim to represent the deepest and the highest... can become distorted too...

Turner wrote: maybe this is original sin... *that all humans are born into an environment of distorted relationships... which can then distort our ability to grow and adapt... and our underlying purity... our original righteousness...* I would interject our original Kosher-ness... *longs for this to be made right... but sometimes... in our attempts to adapt... we choose crude and ultimately destructive strategies which further distort...*

we idolize sex and separate it entirely from love and mutuality... we substitute alcohol and soda pop for clean water... and junk food for nourishment... but we are wired... we were created to move... from It's all about me... to being one member in the body of Christ... something more universal...

Believe it or not... a Roman Catholic priest first proposed the Big Bang Theory as the origin of the universe... in 1927... Georges Lemaître... a Belgian priest... astronomer... and physics professor... suggested that the expanding universe might be traced back to a single point of origin... a singularity...

As Franciscan Sr. Iliia Delio describes it... *[It] appeared like a little quantum-size blip on the screen... creation out of nothing... and inflated rapidly like a balloon... and since that time... it has been expanding...*

And out of this insight... come implications for every human... she writes... *Every human person desires to love and to be loved... to belong to another... because we come from another... we are born social and relational... we yearn to belong... to be part of a larger whole that includes not only friends and family but neighbors... community... trees... flowers... the Sun... Earth... and stars...*

We are born of nature and are part of nature... that is... we are born into a web of life and are part of a web of life... we cannot know what this means... but we must see ourselves within the story of the Big Bang... human life must be traced back to the time when life was deeply One... a Singularity... whereby the intensity of mass-energy exploded into consciousness... deep in our DNA we belong to the trees... the stars... and the galaxies...

I was thirty-seven years old when I was baptized... I wanted to let go of the crazy idea that it was all up to me... that sink or swim... it was all up to me... I wanted to get the dead weight of spiritual death off my shoulders... to become part of something much larger than myself... and to be filled by that which has no form or substance...

If original sin... as Turner suggests... is that we are born into an environment of distorted relationships... into some degree of dysfunction in our families of origin... if as he suggests... All Saints' Day is a safe place to recognize the utter futility of self-righteousness... then we can see in those who proclaim no need of God... or some greater source of life... we can see in those who have been handed wealth... or who think they created it all by themselves... we can see in this kind of smug individuality... we can see in this kind of spiritual isolationism... a kind of *Unlife*... which is perpetuated by the *Father of All Lies*...

William... and we... may hold on to the mistaken idea that we can never get all the blood out... may never feel able... to fully and totally eliminate the spiritual distortion that comes from a world which refuses to say that the Emperor has no clothes... William may not remember his baptism... they way I do... but his godparents... his parents... and this community... have promised and will promise to uphold him in his life in Christ... will promise to tell him the Truth... and guide him into all Life...

And while the images from Revelation... may confuse and vex scholars far more scholarly than I am... my hunch is... maybe... when one of the elders asked John who those in robes were... and he said... *These are they who have come out of the great ordeal*... maybe he meant... these are they... who have contended with discarding the self-righteousness of the world... these are they who have let go of the belief that it's all up to them... these are they who have been grafted onto the body of Christ... these are they who know they can be who God created them to be and still be a part of something infinitely larger... so they can take on the mind of Christ... wear the pure garments of

Christ... so they can have kosher lives... holy lives... lives that come from... and draw life from... a unified Singularity... After all... these are the only lives that God offers us...

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