

A friend of mine once told me a story about her first year in college. She was in the laundry room preparing to wash some of her clothes as she had been doing for several months. Another student was doing the same in the machine next to her. He looked over and asked, "What are you sprinkling in the water?" She looked at him confused and said, "Soap." She could see the expression on his face. It drooped with a very sad realization. He then asked if he might borrow some.

John the Divine, in today's lesson from Revelation, is writing about cleaning clothes for salvation. John's juxtaposition of the words washed, robes, blood and white is peculiar. The words don't go together.

It is like that young college student not realizing that he needed soap.

It is important to see where this section of scripture falls within the context of the entire revelation. This passage is an interlude between the opening of the first six seals and the last one. The opening of these seals, by the lamb, brought conquest, war, famine and death. This was certainly not what you would consider good news.

And John's audience had probably lost their hope after reading about the injustice unleashed by the Lamb of God. And so this seventh chapter is a glimpse of hope. This vision, if read for what it says rather than what we expect to hear from the Revelation, tells of an uncountable number, as many as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashores, of people being saved, receiving salvation.

This is the part of the Revelation that those who feel especially blessed because they are confident that their place in God's Kingdom is assured and that the rest of us will languish in a pit of despair want to ignore. John makes it known that God's salvation is not given to a select few but instead to people from a wide variety of backgrounds, who are not there because of what they deserve but because of God's sacrificial gift of God's Son. This passage is an encouragement given by John that salvation is God's, not ours. And we should never claim it as our own but must always remember that salvation is God's unselfish gift to us. But the question is how do we avoid the violence of the seals and instead find the praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength that are God.

Look carefully at the words that John chose. He didn't say that those robes were "being" washed by God but that the great multitude was washing their robes in the Blood of the Lamb. And what this means is that there will be struggles, just like Jesus, in the face of the injustice of the world to know God and to live out God's love.

There are people today who think they have all the answers. That their way is the only way. Many of these people don't even know what their way is. They only know that it's right and that the other ways, which they also don't understand, are wrong.

The challenge of being in the great multitude is knowing that we are not there alone. That God's goal and mission and love are greater than any one of us or any group of us and are actually present in all people.

So our responsibility is to know God. We must grow in our relationship by experiencing the great variety of our world. And that will mean getting dirty, experiencing failures, taking risks, pushing ourselves beyond our regular routines in order to find all the people that God loves. It will be exploring the gray areas that take us away from easy answers and trite assumptions. It is finding the blood of the lamb where we can wash our robes so that they will become white. This pursuit is what led Jesus to his death and it will lead us to our death, our death in Christ, so that we can live anew in the risen glory of God.

This is a grand vision, but it is not one that we can accomplish on our own. It requires the work of the Church, which is not an institution, but a collective accomplishment endeavored by God's children to raise up the needs of all who need it.

We celebrate this feast of All Saints' to remember the lives of those who have particularly made us who we are. Our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, spouses, friends, colleagues, strangers, who have given something of themselves that blossomed into who we are.

I look back on my life and I see these saints in nearly every memory. I'm not talking about famous people like Martin Luther King Jr. I am thinking about the teacher, mentor, or family member whose love for you made you who you are. I want you to take a moment right now and recall one of these people. You can do this whether you are 3 years old or 103 years old. Recall that memory. Hold it there for a second. Now turn to someone and let them know who it is and why they are your saint.

We should do this every day. We humans tend to think that we are in control of our destiny and that we have pulled ourselves up, by ourselves, to accomplish great things. That is because we are all amazing people doing wonderfully good deeds, but that misses something. Without the community of saints that surround us, we wouldn't be where we are or who we are.

I encourage you to reflect each day between now and Thanksgiving about another person, from your life, who has been saint-like to you. That is the spiritual practice of this All Saints' Day and I don't think it is a bad idea to do it every day.

In the passage from Revelation this morning, we heard the words of John proclaimed to a saved people. He wanted them to know that God loved them. It is easy to believe that God is above, beyond, or before, it is easier to point to ancient examples of sainthood, but it is harder to realize that God exists within each one of us. God is in our souls and the souls of everyone we encounter. Our task is to discover God and to let God transform our lives. Our work at church is to deepen our awareness of the depth of our soul where God lives and moves.

We are part of the great multitude of saints. We are the Church living and breathing a way of being that transforms everything and everyone.

Consider that blessing in your daily life.