

Good morning, Sisters and Brothers and welcome to our beautiful church. Today I bring you greetings from Mother Carenda, who stopped by my work place yesterday and dropped off the key for me so I could open up this morning. I guess now that I have a key it makes me responsible. I was having some kind of time preparing for this homily when the subject came up of having a “go to” sermon for times when words were hard to come by or you had short notice to write. Then I realized that last week my regularly scheduled article for the Sentinel Newspaper was published. And as I began to think about the subject for the article, it gave me a clearer vision as to what message I needed to learn and you needed to hear.

That’s the way things work most of the time when we write sermons; the writer hears what he or she is supposed to learn and the people in the pews get to hear it. So from now when you listen to our sermons, and you don’t quite get the thought of “I needed to hear that today” you can say “Boy did God give them an earful yesterday!” And speaking of God speaking to us, that was the focus of my article for the newspaper column. How often do we carry on a conversation with God? Maybe we should do more of it. There’s a story of St. Theresa of Avila who constantly spoke with God. One day was not going particularly well for her and on her way home she fell in a creek. She yelled angrily “After everything else, now this!” The answer came back in a joking voice “That is how I treat my friends.” Theresa responded “Then no wonder you have so few!”

Taking that incident and those of our own into consideration, what can I learn and tell you about concerning today’s lesson from Revelation? I can tell you

trying to talk about Revelation is risky business. Years ago when I was getting my feet wet in the area of sermon writing, a wise priest gave me some advice. He said “If you ever have the opportunity not to write about a reading from Revelation, take that opportunity and preach on the psalm if you have to. But avoid this apocalyptic vision of John’s if at all possible.” Now the good padre probably thought I was wise enough to take his word for it; what he didn’t consider was that I am the type who would take those words as a challenge and go for it. As those close to me would guess what I would do, I now respond ‘challenge accepted!’

The first thing we see is John saying “I looked.” That might seem insignificant at first but don’t forget that this is a vision. It is as much a thing happening at this moment as it is a foretelling of a future event. We must never forget to look. Even when acting on impulse, we have to be able to see what we are doing or we’ll miss the mark, whatever that might be. To look upon something is to take in and observe what is before you. And while this is a vision from antiquity, don’t forget that Holy Scripture is a living Word. It penetrates our souls just as much now as it did two thousand years ago. So as John looked, so we need to look. We look as he did, upon a multitude of every people. Not just residents of Franklin County. Not just Episcopalians. Not just our nationality. We look – as he tells us – at people from every nation, creed, language, color, every soul and recognize that they are not just the same as us, but in the same place as us; at the throne in front of the Lamb. They stand before the same Lamb as we do. And for me, as I look at creation as a whole, I also look at the multitude of other creatures that cover our planet.

Allow me to take a detour here with mentioning the other creatures. It is our obligation to be care takers of this world and everything on it. Or as it's aptly put in one of our Eucharistic Prayers 'earth, our island home'. This Friday is Earth Day. It also coincides with the fourth anniversary of my ordination as a vocational deacon. Three years ago I started going on a three-day silent retreat to a hermitage in West Virginia during this same time frame. It wasn't until after I got back that I realized the significance of having both my ordination and the day we pause to look at how we are faring with the treatment of this island home on the same date. So I attempt to take the same three days each year and set them aside to immerse myself in prayer, silence, and writing. While being on a silent retreat alone is not something an activist normally does on a day that symbolizes his cause, it does allow me to focus on my writing and prayer. Through these gifts I might better serve others than being part of a crowd at a protest rally. Although I've been known to show up at those here and there, as well.

So back to the lesson, when John looks out at the multitude, all those who have given themselves for Christ, I imagine quite a few of them today would be representing their efforts in dying for causes that stood for creatures who have no voice of their own. Or for people who have a voice but that voice is stifled because of corporations and governments looking to profit off of things like giving people water full of lead or fracking chemicals. I see in that multitude a host of indigenous people who have courageously faced hostile enemies and lost their lives trying to save Sacred Burial Grounds of their ancestors. The graves obviated by the destruction of hilltops blasted apart so that a few royal families might sell the land and have a larger castle than the one they previously owned.

I see in that multitude the people, who through the course of time, were murdered simply because they chose to worship a living God instead of a dictator or king. And I see in that multitude the souls of those who followed the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ. There are those who follow different gospels; the gospel of prosperity, the gospel of success, the gospel of the perfect life here on earth. But look – look at what John is also seeing – look at who it is that stands before the throne. They are not the ones who thought they could eliminate pain and suffering from their lives. They are not the ones who tried to achieve owning all the stuff they could, thinking it would make them happy. They are not the ones who turned tails and ran to an idol instead of standing in a place with the One they know will take them home after the pain and suffering is over. They, the multitude, are comprised of every creature who followed that Gospel of Jesus. The Gospel that tells us that yes, there is pain in life. Yes, there is loss. Yes, there are times when it seems we've lost more than we ever owned.

We know that life doesn't seem fair at times, but at the same time we know that our hope and faith is not in a gospel of stuff. Our hope and faith is in the reason we celebrate Easter. It's in the joy that we've been shown that death is not the end, but a new beginning. It's in the comfort knowing that whatever confronts us here on earth will never exceed the love that awaits us. Not just in the afterlife, but in the present moment. That joy, that love, is promised to be with us always. Promised by the lamb turned shepherd. If we are his sheep, we know him. And we will know his voice. Just stop and look in the right direction and you'll hear it. So look. Look at every situation you encounter knowing that our shepherd is here right this very moment. I think that's what I needed to hear last night. I thank you for listening. Amen