

Mind the Gap

In this morning's Reading from the Book of Revelation, we eavesdrop on a conversation classically understood as taking place at the end of time:

I looked, and there was a multitude that no one could count...standing before the throne and before the Lamb.... Who are these...and where have they come from? These are they who have come out of the great ordeal...”

Do we realize that they are talking about us and the times when we have felt like the end is near? No need for a show of hands, but how many of us have struggled in and, yes, lived through a “great ordeal”? Perhaps that is why you are here. The worry, trials and tears of your challenging personal times—the best you could be under the circumstances you were in at the time—was all you could do; and, somehow, you started to realize that was good with God; and then you began to sense and believe from your experience that *the one who is seated on the throne will shelter you...will be your shepherd and guide you*. Or, you might be saying to yourself, “I have not been through such an ordeal, others are faring much worse than I ever have. Compared to them, I am quite fortunate”. If you are saying such things, maybe you should be a bit more gracious with yourself because God doesn't compare you to others. God loves you as you—as you are and with what you have to deal in your life. God cares and, in all honesty, we all are here hoping

in believing that if and when faced with a threatening ordeal, our creedal assertion of God's eternal love will be confirmed in the moment of comfort when *God will wipe away every tear from your eyes.*

We are here, today, celebrating the fact that people are graced, blessed: We do come through our great ordeals . The situation that brings apprehension and fear also can be the time and place of faith and transformation. *For this reason we are before the throne of God worshipping...Amen! Salvation belongs to our God...Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.*

Yes, we have met the great multitude that no one could count, and it is us—
from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.

Blessed are those made poor in spirit by radiation and chemotherapy.

Blessed are those who yet feel the wound of loss when we pray for All
Faithful Departed.

Blessed are the meek who don't get much because they can't sell
themselves.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for a job and by occupying a bit of
street and park call for setting things right between us.

Blessed are the merciful who object to negative cafeteria and
schoolyard talk before it mutates into bullying.

Blessed are the pure in heart who feel in their heart that ‘there but for the grace of God go I’ is not Christ’s response to street people and subway beggars.

Blessed are the peacemakers, but where are the peacemakers? Does our economic ordeal, both in church and state, distract us from acting prophetically or even facing the continuing maiming and death of Occupy Iraq and Occupy Afghanistan?

Blessed are those who are persecuted for their faith—for being Christian in a non-Christian land; for not being Christian enough in a presidential race; for being Muslim in a land where fear imagines every mosque as the next manger of a terrorist.

Yes, we live in tumult. We see tribulation. We are experiencing the ordeal of so many gaps—gaps that are not going away but seem to enlarge the more as we try to exert control over holding on to what we want and fearing we know not what. This, too, is why we are here, because we know we fall short. We know the gap scares us. We know that in our uncertainty and fear of the unknowable, we are tempted to declare that certain others are the cause of our fear, the very reason for the gap, and that, once neutralized or eliminated, things will return to our kind of normal (!) Yet, if that were the order of the universe, we know that God would have eliminated us all long ago. So we gather here in prayer and song *in loud voice saying Salvation belongs to our God* not because the Almighty holds a

threatening sword over our heads but because we *see what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God.*

When there are gaps in our relationship with God, God does not disown us but sends the Son. Therefore, when we experience gaps in this world, we are called to remember the love we are shown and not to disown our brothers and sisters. *Beloved, we are God's children now; what will be has not yet been revealed.* The unknown will remain; God will not deliver us from the gaps. There are limits to our knowledge and our reach. But God is and will ever be God with us. We are here because *what we do know is that Christ will be in the midst of us...the shepherd, centering us. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves.*

We want resolution of specific problems but Christ first calls us to address the basic human dilemma: our crying need for reconciliation with each other. Just listen to the noise: People are blaming each other; this or that party insists they know the way to get rid of the gap. It is not true. The gap will always be with us and is the very time and place for people of faith to live, move and become like the saints. The saints of God do not only give thanks in times of abundance but at all times and in all places, including the gaps. Blessed are those who instead of demanding that things be different are so transformed as to commit themselves to making the difference.

When Jesus says *Blessed are you*, we are not eavesdropping. He is teaching us, leading us, equipping us with the grace to lead the life of the saints. *Virtuous and godly living* does not mean mistake-free; after all, the saints were sinners. The procession of saints through history could just as easily be the shuffling walk of a chain gang were it not for God's second chance in Christ. And even though after New Birth the shackles are removed, we still walk with both feet on the ground. And whether the conditions underfoot are dry and firm or muddy and treacherous, *we rejoice and are glad, for our reward is great in heaven.*

“In heaven”? Now, this is not a phrase denoting some far off day at ‘the end of time’ for we do, in fact, experience end times in the here and now, in the gap ordeals of our lives. Our reward being great in heaven is rather a statement about attitude—in the navigational sense of how we are going to orientate ourselves in and through faithful pilgrimage in this life. If we strive to live this life of both feet on the ground in a heavenly way, if we try to get our bearings this way even during times of anxious fear and unknowing, then the rewards will be great. What is this way of the saints? Why, even the psalmist sings of it: *I sought the Lord in a time of terror; I considered my options and chose to call on God in my affliction. The Lord heard me and saved me from all the more troubling.... If you look at this life as God's table set for us, then you will taste and see that God is in all things. In times of lack, the young lions who are on the prowl to make a killing will suffer*

hunger and act out their ravenous craving but those who seek the Lord lack nothing that is good. They take their places at table and invite others to join.

And that is why we are here, *that we may come to those ineffable joys that God has prepared.* Here we are in the midst of everything that can threaten and here, too, is God, in the middle of it all, serving us blissful joy. Let us then humbly yet courageously seek to quell the noise of our world with the Church's heavenly festal shout, "Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, Alleluia."

In the midst of ordeals and gaps, scarcity and fears, the Church sends out an invitation, to a banquet—a party for all! Let us pray that we are duly prepared for the world hearing these words as prophetic speech, and for the church carrying them out. Amen.

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