

Revelation 7:9-17

⁹After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" ¹⁴I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. ¹⁶They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Matthew 5:1-12

⁵When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Paving the Way for Others

The first full-time job I had after college was as counselor in a group home. I supervised boys and girls in a group home, teaching them life skills and doing occasional crisis intervention. Most of the children in the group home were there because of dysfunction at home, criminal behavior, emotional disturbance, or some combination thereof. In my third year in this vocation I worked with a boy of about ten years of age who was a bit violent, often getting into fights with his peers. The boy connected with me, and to some degree his violent behavior diminished. But one particularly bad evening he was agitated and provoking his peers, and as a consequence for hitting another resident I gave him a 2-day suspension, upon which he hit me! I was shocked as children rarely hit staff members, and this boy in particular had a good relationship with me. When I shared the story of the incident in a staff meeting the following day, I remember that the social worker commented that this was a good thing. I hardly thought

it a good thing, but as she explained, “It shows that he feels comfortable with you.” Personally I thought that this boy felt a little too comfortable with me, but the more I reflected on what the social worker told me, the more I understood. People often lash out at those they feel closest to. It’s quite often those who are nearest and dearest to us who say the harshest things to us, and to whom we say the harshest things. And to be the *object* of someone’s anger often means that you are *special* to that person in some way. We don’t like being punched, but that fact that we are means that we mean something to someone.

If Jesus could speak on the subject, he might say, “Blessed are those who are punched, for they are instruments of healing” or something to that effect. He spoke thus to a crowd on a mountain when he said, “Blessed are the poor...those who mourn...those who are persecuted.” These are not conditions we enjoy, but Jesus tells us that we are blessed. Why? Because God sees our struggle. He knows our pain, and he will rescue us. Perhaps not in this lifetime, but we shall all enter his glory someday. The hard truth is that our deliverance does not always come in this life; in the movie *The Lion King*, we meet Simba’s uncle, Scar, whose first words are, “Life isn’t fair,” and he’s right. But as Christians we have faith that one day life will be fair, and that one day you will be joining the saints in heaven. In the meantime we rely on faith to get us through the hardships and injustices in this life.

And your perseverance through the struggles in this life may pave the road for someone who comes after you. That is, in part, what ALL SAINTS DAY is about, people we recognize as saints in our life, who may indeed be the reason that we now have faith. I remember one such person when I was in college, a person who was a friend and an inspiration to me in a very stormy time of my life. And I bet some of you could tell stories of how those we remember today exercised extreme patience with you, perhaps when everyone else had given up. And because that person didn’t give up on you, you are here now, to NAME that person. And because you are here now, you may be the inspiration to someone else. Perhaps that young boy, whose name I can’t remember, will look upon me as someone who exercised patience, restraint with him, WHO TOOK THE PUNCHES, like Jesus took the punches from all of us.

And that brings me to our first reading from Revelation, John’s vision has saints gathered around the throne WORSHIPING, not patting themselves on the back, saying, “Worthy am I, for I was good enough to be brought into heaven.” They’re praising the lamb, who brought salvation to all of us. This scene from John’s revelation should remind us of a similar scene that took place here on earth, when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to a fanfare crying “worthy is the lamb.” The difference, of course, is that the worship and glory didn’t last one week then. John’s vision is of ETERNAL worship, ETERNAL praise, not for ourselves for making the cut, but for the one who went before, who paved the way for our salvation, the one who inspires us, by taking our sin, our shame, and declaring us forgiven and is now worshiped and glorified by the multitudes who went before us and paved the way for us to embrace faith, the one who took the punches for all of us. Jesus is the one who continues to inspire us to pave the way.