



**"Robed in White" + Revelation 7:9-17**  
**All Saints Sunday, November 5, 2023**  
**Pastor Nancy M. Raabe**

In his great vision, the author of Revelation 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."

This week I was wondering whether my father, born on All Saints Day, is among them.

If he is, in a sense he must be among the least saintly of that great throng. Not because of anything he did, but because he never thought of saintliness at all. A college history teacher, he was a deep thinker who led a purely secular life. He cared for humanity and always sided with the underdog. In retirement he ran several local political campaigns for idealistic candidates who always lost, one after another. He was generous to a fault; when the group was out to dinner, always grabbed the check even though money was tight. Once a real estate deal my dad got several friends to go in on went bad because the perpetrator turned out to be a crook. He paid everyone what they lost out of his own pocket, even though it broke my parents' finances.

My father never thought of saintliness because he was raised in an anti-church household. His mother was a real character who wore her unsaintliness as a badge. Once when I was visiting at her retirement community, she stood up in the middle of dinner and loudly began reciting the Apostles' Creed, inserting the word "NOT" at every juncture: "I do NOT believe in the God, the Father almighty," and so on. The wait staff begged: "Sit down, Mrs. Miller, please sit down!"

When my brother and I were kids, our family never went to church. But when my parents moved into their retirement community they decided to start attending. The minister there was a leftist political firebrand called "Butch," who my dad adored. I don't know how much religion he really got, but something stuck. Because my father's last words, according to my mom, were: "Pray for me." So yes, he must indeed be among those white-robed multitudes.

And now we may envision among them those beloved members of Grace and our other loved ones who we remember today: / Dale Moyer, whose magnificent good humor and sheer love of life made him into a miracle man through illnesses that would have brought down anyone whose faith might have faltered, until the final round that took him so quickly. The memory of his sunny smile still lights up the room; / Mabel Hoepfl, serenely aware of the magnitude of God's blessings, who chronicled her gratitude every day in what became a bookshelf full of journals, and who moved into Christ's arms with a vision of heaven that she softly described as "very beautiful and peaceful, with birds and flowers"; / and Helen Godshall, who for years sailed through serious health conditions while refusing all medication and never giving her health a second thought. When she knew her last days were upon her, she kept repeating, "I am so happy" to whoever was in the room. I regret I didn't get to have the chance to get to know Abraham Rittenhouse or Ethel Rappold.

God's Word always finds us where we are. Here in Revelation 7 we have a great multicultural vision of multitudes who have passed in faith through the great ordeal, their tears of suffering dried and their robes having been washed, or conditioned, by the blood of Christ and which now shine in the spotless purity of the freedom from sin that is theirs through Christ's death.

What is this vision calling from us today - November 5, 2023 – two days, I might add, before election day? There must be more to it than a simple reminder of how Christians around the world gather on this day to celebrate the lives of all the saints who have gone before, and to be reassured that their suffering is over.

We can begin to see it if we step back and look at the big picture of the Book of Revelation. What we find is that the terrifying visions of those middle chapters are aimed not at believers but at *unbelievers*. The author's purpose is get them to recognize the magnitude of the spiritual danger they are facing, given that the ultimate object of their idol worship – which is who?...that's right, the devil -- *has already* been defeated in Christ's death and resurrection. In other words, if they persist in their idol worship, they will meet the same disastrous end that ultimately befell Satan himself.

John, Revelation's author, was in the midst of precisely this historical situation. He had been exiled to a remote island by the Roman emperor Domitian because he refused to comply with the Roman law requiring all subjects worship the emperor as a god. Domitian was highly skilled his use of propaganda, and erected a cult of personality around himself that allowed him to shape public and private opinion to his advantage. Christians who refused to participate in this cultic emperor worship were exiled or brutally executed. John's purpose here was to wake up the unrighteous to what their end was likely to be, if they persisted in throwing all their weight behind one who was supremely idolatrous.

Is this not the great charge facing us, the faithful ones? We already have faith. We are already confident in Christ. We already place all our hope and trust in him. But all around us the fabric of our society is being shredded, the world is being torn apart, because the those who are in it only for their own glory and power are getting the upper hand. What can WE do?

Today's great multitude tells us: Proclaim loudly, even in the midst of hardship or persecution, what we know to be true: That salvation belongs to our God. That wisdom and power and honor and glory belong to God, and no other --

- Wisdom to the one who cares for the dignity and personhood and fullness of life for each person who has ever lived!
- Honor to the cosmos that God lovingly sculpted with a brush so broad and intricacy so dazzling that science can never fully explains it!
- Glory to the seas, to the rivers, to the skies, to the expanses of forest teeming with the wonders of life and the joy of each creature singing, barking, croaking, mewling, or whatever it is supposed to be doing!

We can see the shredding of the fabric of our world happening before our very eyes, from school boards to warring nations. It is all insanity. People have lost their minds. And the world needs you.

If you are merciful, if you are pure in heart, if you are a peacemaker, then you must be vigilant in making God's truth known. You WILL be persecuted, you WILL be reviled. But Jesus assures you that you are in the good company of all the blessed. One day those shining robes of white will be yours. And now let us pray for the healing of the nations.