

The Book of Revelation is probably the most controversial book in the Bible. Heavy with symbols, the book invites a variety of interpretations. Some people think it's a code to predict the end of the world. I side with those who say it was a code to comfort Christians suffering persecution at the time it was written; that is, it has more to do with the past than with the future.

Still, people comb through Revelation seeking answers to a very basic spiritual question, who will be saved? Whenever the end comes to the world or to an individual's life, who will be in and who will be out?

Some Christian preachers say Catholics are definitely out. We worship false images. We rely on good works. We are the whore of Babylon. When the rapture comes, they continue, God will take up to heaven those who are faithful, but the rest, including Catholics, will be left behind. It's exasperating, but some people actually believe those things about us.

Of course, Catholics have condemned a lot of other people too. Thanks be to God, Pope John Paul II tried to heal some rifts with the Orthodox Church during his trip to Greece this week. We need to be careful about judging people. It is Christ who judges and Christ who saves.

In our own families, we still condemn too easily the child who dies before baptism, the teen who fell away from the church, and the neighbor who does drugs. The formula for salvation is complicated by God's justice and mercy.

In today's second reading, John sees a multitude of the saved worshiping before the throne of the Lamb day and night. Last week we heard that the Lamb was found worthy to open the scroll. In between that passage and today's, the Lamb opened six of the seven seals and things got very ugly. But this passage offers a climactic vision of peace.

The great multitude cannot be numbered, and consists of people from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They have survived persecution and martyrdom. They wear white robes as a sign of their victory. They have remained faithful in spite of opposition. And their number is limitless. They spend their days worshiping God. They will no longer hunger or thirst, feel heat, be lost, or cry.

The goal of human life, it appears, is to be numbered among that multitude. This comforting vision tells us the number is not small, and the people are not all the same.

Whenever we baptize an infant or an adult, we give them a white garment and ask them to bring it unstained into everlasting life. We all got one of those at our baptism, and we all received the same charge.

Although we might think that admission to heaven is exclusive, it may be more inclusive than we realize. We may be surprised to see who else is dressed in white, worshiping at the throne of the Lamb. This vision of heaven won't settle the controversies over the Book of Revelation, but it should humble us before the mystery of God.

kids: a time you got lost. How did it happen? How keep from getting lost.  
Jesus as good shepherd

At the forum two weeks ago I announced that St. Regis was among the parishes being considered for a new pastor this summer. The personnel board is still meeting, but they have reached their decisions relative to St. Regis.

Bishop Boland has invited me to become the new pastor of St. Munchin Parish in Cameron, Missouri, about an hour north of here, and its mission St. Aloysius at Maysville. Replacing me at St. Regis will be Fr. John Bolderson, who has been assisting the last few years here in our own neighborhood at St. Matthew Parish.

These changes take effect on July 1, so this is not goodbye yet.

But I want you all to know I have enjoyed every day at St. Regis, every day. I thank you for sharing your faith with me and ask you to please extend a warm welcome to Fr. John when he begins his work here later this summer.