

Today, we're continuing our series on the book of Revelation.

Where some people use the book of Revelation to sow hatred, we want to use it to sow love.

Where some people use it to sow hurt, we want to use it to sow forgiveness.

Where some people use it to sow fear, we want to use it to sow faith.

Where some people use it to sow despair, we want to use it to sow hope.

Where some people use it to sow shadows, we want to use it to sow light.

Where some people use it to sow sadness, we want to use it to sow joy.

In the light of our scripture passage for today's sermon, I want to use it to sow a vision of the church.

Oscar Romero is one of my heroes.

He's a role model for me as I try to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

He's a role model for me as I try to pastor this Beloved Community in a good way.

Yes, he's a role model and a hero.

Born in El Salvador in 1917, he was a Roman Catholic priest and later Archbishop of San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador.

Initially known for his conservative views, he experienced a profound transformation as he witnessed the suffering of the poor and violent repression in his country.

The 1970s were a time of great political turmoil in El Salvador, with extreme poverty, systemic injustice, and brutal military crackdowns.

After the assassination of his close friend, Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande, he began to speak

out boldly against oppression and human rights abuses.

He became a prophetic voice for the voiceless, preaching a message rooted in the Gospel's vision of an upside down kingdom—a world where the last are first, the poor are honored, and justice rolls like a mighty river.

He aligned himself with the Church's preferential option for the poor, calling for liberation not through violence, but through love, solidarity, and nonviolent resistance.

In his weekly homilies, broadcast across the country, he challenged the rich and powerful, demanding an end to injustice and the building of a beloved community—a society rooted in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

His fearless advocacy made him a target of the regime.

On March 24, 1980, while celebrating Mass, he was assassinated by a death squad.

His martyrdom galvanized global attention and inspired movements for justice throughout Latin America.

In a sermon in March of 1977, he proclaimed that we should “organize life according to the heart of God.”

Today, in this time, in this place, among this people, his vision of life is my vision of the church.

The church is a people who organize life according to the heart of God.

The drunks were the ones that sought him out the most. They say that his brother Gustavo had drinking problems and died of it, and that he had gone staggering drunk around the streets of San Miguel and that everybody knew it. They say that he would come to the parish looking for his brother, Father Romero, and that Romero would scold him, but that he also had a lot of patience with him.,And with drunks you have to have a lot of patience because they'll drive you crazy!

We saw his patience with my brother Angelito. If Romero were there when Angelito came

home after a big drinking spree, he wouldn't let any of us reproach him or hassle him.

"Come here, Angelito," he would say, "Sit down next to me and play the flute for me."

So he'd play Mexican and Guatemalan folksongs, which he could do really nicely, and the music would calm Angelito down. So you see, Father Romero always had a soft spot for drunks and for the downtrodden in life.

(María López Vigil, Monseñor Romero: Memories In Mosaic, pp. 7-8, memory of Elvira Chacón)

Verse 15 describes those before the throne serving God "day and night," evoking the gospel call to live a life of constant devotion, not confined to cloisters but expressed in everyday acts of love and care for the poor, the sick, and the marginalized.

The gospel sees service to others as a form of worship, especially service to those in whom Christ is most clearly revealed — the least and the suffering.

The Lamb at the center, who is also the shepherd (v. 17), represents Christ's dual role: the innocent sacrifice and the loving guide.

This paradox is central to the gospel life, which sees Christ as both humbly human and divinely divine — a mystery revealed in the gospel life's love for the poor and reverence for creation

A Pope in Muddy Boots: The Unmistakable Footprint of Leo XIV

He did not emerge from behind gilded curtains but from the muddy lanes of a flood-ravaged town in Peru.

Long before he appeared on the Vatican balcony, Pope Leo XIV had already made his message clear — not with encyclicals, but with a pair of black boots and rolled-up sleeves.

In Peru, he walked through rising waters, not as a visiting dignitary but as one among the

afflicted. He served food in a modest kitchen, not as an act of charity, but as a gesture of kinship.

These images — serving rice, listening to grief, walking through ruins — have already etched a theology more potent than sermons: one of proximity, presence, and shared humanity.

His chosen name — Leo — reaches back to another turning point in Church history. Pope Leo XIII, who gave voice to exploited workers in the age of industry, reshaped Catholic conscience with *Rerum Novarum*, the Church's first social encyclical. Leo XIV inherits that legacy not merely in word, but in living example. If Leo XIII defended labor with his pen, Leo XIV affirms dignity with his hands and feet.

He does not arrive to restore power but to restore nearness.

There is something unmistakable in his posture — less a ruler than a companion; not one who visits the poor, but one who understands what it means to be poor in spirit and circumstance.

His papacy will speak in the language of humble witness, not clerical command. This is not leadership from above, but alongside.

At a time when the world teeters under the weight of nationalism, cruelty, and widening inequality — when brute strength is too often mistaken for vision — Leo XIV brings a different kind of authority: that of one who walks with, not over.

The word pontiff comes from pontifex — bridge-builder. With Leo XIV, the Church has perhaps found a man who can build bridges across our most painful divides: between privilege and poverty, doctrine and doubt, power and tenderness.

He may not shout reform. But his life already whispers revolution — the kind rooted not in strategy but solidarity.

The promise that “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (v. 17) speaks to the gospel hope in God's tender mercy.

It is not a triumphalistic salvation but a compassionate one, where God is intimately close

to human suffering.

St. Francis often referred to God as a mother, emphasizing divine tenderness and nurturing care.

The vision of consolation in Revelation 7 aligns with this vision of a loving, healing God who dwells among the lowly and brings comfort to the sorrowful.

Notes from the Street

Every morning, before I go into the walls of the church, I sit on a brick wall in front of the building that protects our sidewalk from the busy 4 lanes of Stone Avenue.

I sit beside people who are experiencing homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness and all sorts of things that weigh heavily on their hearts, minds and bodies.

I hope you noticed that I didn't say that I sit beside homeless people, drug addicts, alcoholics, and the mentally ill, as if these adjectives are THE defining words of these folks I'm sitting with.

If I'm not careful, it's easy to define these folks with these adjectives as if these descriptive words describe the entirety of who they are.

If I'm not careful, it's easy to use words that dehumanize these folks, and I don't want to do that.

Dehumanizing people is the great evil of our time, IMHO.

People are not homeless, addicts or mentally ill.

They're experiencing these things.

But they're not these things.

They're a person who was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer and who sits beside other people after he's done with his chemotherapy at the cancer center while they're

undergoing their own chemotherapy so they won't be alone.

They're a person who drove a cab in Greenville county longer than I've been alive and who has a depth within his blue eyes that are as far reaching as the sky on a cloudless day and a depth with his stories that are as fathomless as the human heart.

They're a person who is as cantankerous as cantankerous can be, and who was in the hospital all by herself and didn't have a single visitor until I tapped on her door and asked if I could sit beside her and pray for her. "I'm leavin' here and goin' back out on the streets," she told me.

Now, every time I sit beside her on the brick wall as she waits to go inside of the church building and talk with one of our heroic social workers about the goals she's set for herself, she smiles at me and says, "You're the only one who came to see me in the hospital," and for a moment her cantankerousness turns to loving kindness.

They're no longer THEY who are defined by what they're going through.

They are neighbors who need a friend, as am I a neighbor who needs a friend.

And we become friends on the brick walls outside of the church building.

And that is beautiful.

The image of the "great multitude that no one could count" (v. 9) from "every nation, tribe, people and language" affirms the gospel ideal of the brotherhood and sisterhood of all creation.

This vision of Revelation reflects the radical inclusivity at the heart of the gospel life — a recognition that all are invited into communion with God, regardless of religious beliefs, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, or skin tone. It reflects the deep belief in the imago Dei — the image of God — present in every human being.

"The Table"

It began with a table.

Not the kind you buy from Postcard from Paris for a perfect kitchen.

No, this one was chipped, crooked-legged, and too small for the number of chairs around it.

And yet, it was for something holy.

Miss Ruby found it in the alley behind a thrift store on Poinsett Highway.

She dragged it out with the help of a young mechanic named Manuel who smelled like diesel and dreams.

They set it in a vacant lot where grass broke through concrete like resurrection, and Miss Ruby said, “This is where we eat.”

People came.

At first, just the ones who knew Miss Ruby—folks from the mission, the halfway houses, and the corners where buses hissed like tired prophets.

Then came the teachers.

The poets.

The grocery clerks.

The undocumented.

The too-proud-to-ask-but-always-hungry.

No one asked who brought the bread or the beans.

No one asked who deserved a plate.

They passed it around like communion, and somehow, there was always enough.

Miss Ruby called it the Upside Down Kingdom.

“Where the last are first and the hungry are full,” she’d say, her hands stirring a pot like chanting a psalm.

“Where the table’s big and the gate’s broke on purpose.”

Manuel called it liberation, though he didn’t know that word until a woman named Pastor Mattie sat next to him and said, “You’re more than what you survived.”

He cried into his cornbread, and she passed him the collards.

They built benches from scrap wood.

Painted signs that said All Means All and Justice is the Meal, Not the Dessert.

People laughed more than they should have, given how hard the world is.

That was part of the rebellion—joy as resistance.

Every so often, someone in a suit would ask, “What’s your mission statement?”

Miss Ruby would nod toward the table and say, “This.”

The city tried to move them once.

Cited codes and permits.

But when the workers came, they found the table covered in flowers and prayers scrawled on napkins.

The bulldozer went away.

One night, someone spray-painted The Beloved Community on the wall behind them.

They left it there.

It wasn't graffiti.

It was gospel.

The table still sits there—though no one can quite explain how it survived the years.

Some say the legs were mended by angels.

Others say it was Manuel, who comes by to fix it every Thursday.

But everyone agrees on this:

If you're hungry, come eat.

If you're tired, come rest.

If you're angry, come speak.

If you're ready, come build.

Because in the Upside Down Kingdom, nobody owns the table.

And that's what makes it sacred.