**Homily for November 24 2024 Revelation 1:4b-8 “The Whole Enchilada”**

*Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.**To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him,**even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.**So it is to be. Amen.**“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*

The show debuted on March 30th, 1953. It was presented by NBC Radio, and it was called *The Phrase That Pays*! Contestants were given three clues to discover a common phrase, and if they got it right, they won a prize. Interestingly, all the phrases were submitted by listeners, and if the contestant couldn’t figure it out, the listener won the prize instead! Pretty fun and balanced, just like the sermon you are about to endure…

*The Phrase That Pays* today, the thing you need to take home and remember if you remember nothing else, is the American colloquialism **the whole enchilada**. This phrase predates the game show we just talked about, published in the Delta Democrat-Times out of Greenville, Mississippi, in 1951. Can’t imagine there was a lot of Mexican food in Mississippi in the 1950’s, but there you go. And this phrase the whole enchilada is a *noun*, friends. It refers to a thing, a physical entity; something that is complete, that lacks no components, and is, in fact, **the whole enchilada.** And today, this phrase that pays will refer to the text we have just heard, but also to all of Christian practice, and also to the majestic union of God and humanity.

We use **whole enchilada**-type language about God with appalling ease. My most common address to God is the Almighty. Think about that…all mighty, unable to be bested, strong and vital in every way. That name for God implies that God is the **whole enchilada**, which is certainly true, but there’s a lot more. But before I tell you more, let’s talk a bit about enchiladas themselves. My buddy Wikipedia says: *the*[*Royal Spanish Academy*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Spanish_Academy)*defines the word enchilada, as used in Mexico, as a rolled*[*maize*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maize)[*tortilla*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tortilla)*stuffed with meat and covered with a*[*tomato*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomato)*and*[*chili*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chili_pepper)[*sauce*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sauce)*. The name literally means ‘to season with chili’. Enchiladas originated in Mexico, where the practice of rolling tortillas around other food dates back at least to*[*Aztec*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_civilization)*times, and the Aztec word for this common food translates to ‘chili flute’! Enchiladas were prominent in the first Mexican cookbook, published in 1831.* And although there are endless combinations, and although this food has traveled the world, all of Central and South America, of course, but we Italians have our cannelloni, and the French have their crepes, and don’t get me started on the foods wrapped in flat bread in Mediterranean countries, the basic enchilada is classic and simple: corn tortilla, the main protein inside, a spicy sauce liberally applied, and the universal food glue of the Americas, cheese. Four ingredients, every one of them crucial if an enchilada, actual or metaphorical, can be called the **whole enchilada**.

This morning’s reading from the Book of Revelation began with a **whole enchilada** vibe: *Grace to you and peace from him who is and was and is to come.* That’s pretty comprehensive, yeah? God, of course, who is, and yet who was and yet also is yet to come. We assume with the writer the Biblical world view that God simply *is*, and always has been, and always will be. But before we just assume that God is the **whole enchilada** and take a little siesta, this writer is just getting started. He next writes of *Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.* Jesus Christ, whose witness about God and God’s ways got him killed, but not permanently, and in light of that witness his followers number in the billions today. He is the firstborn from the dead, the example of the resurrected life, and in a cosmic sense the ruler of the kings of the earth. More spice, you say? *To him who loves us…*what, wait, loves us? Sinful, depraved, wicked, selfish old us? *and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* Evidently this writer also thinks Jesus is the **whole enchilada**. However…

I mentioned earlier that the classic and authentic enchilada need four ingredients: tortilla, protein filling, spicy sauce, and cheese. I think we can concur in this analogy that God is the *filling,* the main event. Allow me to suggest that Jesus is the *sauce,* the one who adds spice to life, the one whose blood was also red, the one who surrounds and infuses the filling. That still leaves us two ingredients shy of a whole enchilada, so let me suggest that the Holy Spirit be granted the role of *cheese,* the binding, enwrapping, gooey goodness poured out on the world. Which just leaves us, friends, and we get to be the tortilla.

Please forgive me as I wax a bit metaphysical here, but just as every enchilada needs a tortilla, so God, in all God’s manifestations, needs some way to take form in the world. We understand God to be pure spirit, without flesh, without a physical presence. And for centuries we have been comfortable chauffeuring God around in the world through our choices and our lives and our physical presence. This isn’t heresy, the idea that God works through us. So God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, in enchilada terms, are just an assemblage of food in search of a wrapper. And that is where we Christians come into the kitchen: we package God, we provide form and structure, and the fusion of God and us becomes the **whole enchilada**.

In preparing for this sermon I got it into my head that I should *make* my first enchiladas. I’m a decent cook, how hard could it be? So, I prepared meat and sauce and cheese and bought some tortillas, but skipped a crucial step. I did not warm the tortillas, and after bathing them in sauce – there’s an image of our relationship with Jesus for another sermon – after *bathing them in sauce*, and filling them, I rolled them up. Sort of. Because these room-temperature tortillas just weren’t flexible enough to do what was needed, and they cracked. Not a little, friends; we are talking 350- pound plumber’s assistant level of cracks. They looked horrible! But you know, the Holy Spirit did her work, and once they were covered with melty cheese you would never know. Tasted fine, but could have been a disaster.

And this is the challenge of being part of the **whole enchilada** with God – we tortillas need to be warm, flexible, pliable, able and willing to bend. When Christians are cold and rigid and unbending, cracks appear and things get ugly. Maybe, like my first enchiladas, the Holy Spirit will smooth things over. Maybe. But what sobers me and humbles me, both as a cook and as a Christian, is knowing that God is devoted to this recipe, this **whole enchilada** way of being. God does not have a plan B; we are the way God gets from the pantry to the plate. And to do that job well requires us to maintain our warmth and flexibility in a world that sometimes feels like a walk-in freezer.

Today, in addition to the little cooking class we have been conducting, is also our Thanksgiving Sunday, *also* the last Sunday of the liturgical year, known as Christ the King Sunday, *also* the day we wrap up our Fall Financial Campaign and offer our pledges to God and church, and we even squeezed in a special offering for United Methodist Student Day! But we can handle all of these themes, explore and enjoy today’s range of emotions, pledge our best selves financially and spiritually, celebrate both our students and being students ourselves, we can handle *all of that*, and do you know why? We can handle all of that because here at Trinity we are faithful tortillas. We are warm! We are flexible, up to a point! We can wrap ourselves around ministries that many other churches avoid because we understand presenting God to the world as a privilege more than a duty. You are faithful tortillas, and your pastor is corny, so, there ya go. The nourishment of God, the zest of Christ, the surrounding warmth of the Holy Spirit, plated and served with compassion and willing hearts. That’s us, my friends. The **whole enchilada.** Amen!