

**MOTHER'S BEAN SOUP**

My mother's bean soup was not a favorite meal of mine when I was a kid. When I say "meal" I mean that is all there was, - besides bread. I detested the day that we had bean soup. Perhaps, it was not so much the soup as the day itself on which it was served. Well, actually, it was not served. It sat in a large kettle at the back of the stove, and you helped yourself.

Bean soup meant that it was wash day. Wash day was an all-day activity. I detested wash day. The ringer was set up in the middle of the floor. This was a contraption, which unfolded to form two stands with two rollers powered by a crank between them. A galvanized metal tub rested on each of the stands. One would hold hot water and the other cold. The water was heated in a copper boiler on top of the wood-burning stove (right next to the soup).

After the clothes were given a brutal rubdown on the brass washboard in the tub with hot water (having been generously lathered in Fels Naptha soap), they were passed through the ringer and fell into the tub with the cold rinse water on the other side. Of course, someone had to crank the rollers. (Guess who was given that honor.) Eventually, the clean clothes were taken outside and hung on the lines that were permanently strung up in the yard, in order to dry in the fresh air. On wash day, the whole neighborhood could see what kind of underwear the various members of a family wore. (In those days, not much was secret in a neighborhood.) And, so, if and when you wanted to eat, you helped yourself to some bean soup.

The soup was made of speckled cranberry beans, after they had soaked in water over night. The mixture included such ingredients as carrots and bacon rind for flavoring. And, of course, there were the heavy egg dumplings. The whole concoction turned out a dark brown in color and was quite filling, - filling you up in more ways than one. Actually, it did not taste badly either, and I would pay to have a bowl of it today. But, that is not the point. That soup represented wash day, and I detested wash day.

One could say that, in my mind, I threw out the soup with the wash water.

Do we not do something similar, as we transition from the old into a new year? We let an unpleasant experience or two taint all of our experiences. An unfulfilled expectation becomes the "poster" for the year. You might hear people say something like, "I'm glad 2010 is over with." That is like "throwing out the soup with the wash water."

I suppose that every year could have been better. But, it also could have been worse. Besides, it is not the year but our approach to it that makes the difference. That applies to bishops, as well. I did not get what I wanted in 2010 and there was a disappointing experience. But, all in all, it was not a bad year. There was a lot of good "soup." It may not have looked appetizing at the time. However, taking the time to savor the moments, I would not mind having them again in 2011.

Those moments are God's speckled cranberry bean soup. It sits on the back burner while other things are going on around us. If we do not help ourselves, it is our own fault.

One of these days, in my retirement, I am going to attempt making my mother's wash day speckled cranberry bean soup. My mother's ironing day is another story.