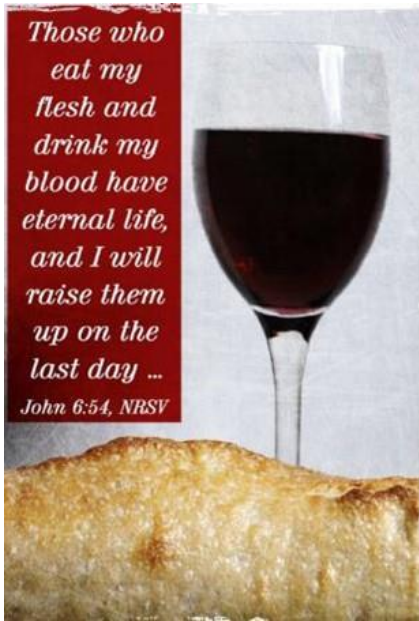


In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Introduction



In our NT Lesson from Ephesians, St. Paul gives us a small glimpse into the life of the Early Christian Community.

In one of those glimpses, we hear about their celebration of the Eucharist.

Rather than the Pagan feasts that were focused on drunkenness and debauchery – Paul says the Ephesians' feasts should be “filled with the Spirit” – they should be focused on Christ and his love for us.

Commenting on this passage comparing the Pagans and Early Christians, Dr. William Barclay said, *“You’ve got to fill a person with something. The heathen found their happiness filling themselves with wine and worldly pleasures; the Christians found their happiness being filled with Christ.”*

I. Body and Blood

A. We hear again about being “Filled with Christ” in our Gospel reading as Jesus says, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.”

1. Now to outside ears, this may sound a bit ghoulish or even cannibalistic – but as we have learned these past few weeks, Jesus in John is

speaking **spiritually** of our participation in the Eucharist, and by receiving the Bread – we are receiving Him.

2. WE, with 2,000 years of Christian Culture behind us, hardly bat an eye when we hear Jesus say, “Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.”

3. We automatically translate flesh and blood into bread and wine.

4. But there was no such translation for Jesus’ original audience, and those who heard it first had a very different reaction.

5. Now, the people Jesus was talking to would be very familiar with the sacrificial customs of the Temple in Jerusalem.

6. Again, Dr. William Barclay points out that when an animal was offered at the Temple, the whole animal was not sacrificed.

9. Usually, a portion was given to the priests as payment for the ritual and another portion was given to the worshipper so that they could have a feast with their family and friends.

B. So the people were quite accustomed to concept of eating sacrificial animals.

1. They believed that when an animal was sacrificed to a god, that the god actually entered into the animal,

- so when this meat was eaten, the participants were actually taking into themselves the character and power of the god.

2. When the people concluded the feast they believed themselves to be literally god-filled.

3. So it’s not eating the FLESH that’s the problem – it’s drinking the BLOOD.

4. Because an animal or person died when its blood was drained, Jewish teaching always equated BLOOD with life, and all life belonged to God.

5. So Jewish dietary laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy strictly prohibited consuming blood under any circumstances;

- animals slaughtered for food had to be bled first, to make sure all the blood had been drained out of them.

6. And now, here's Jesus saying they must drink his blood, no wonder the people said, "This is a difficult saying," and a dispute broke out.

C. Yet, it is this very concept of blood being the "life force" that is in play when Jesus says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

1. Before going forward, we need to remember two things:

- first, that John often writes on two levels at once – both the physical and the spiritual

- and secondly, that John's Gospel was written at the end of the first century so HIS readers would have had 60 plus years of gathering to share the Eucharist behind them.

2. So while the people who first heard Jesus say these words might have been rocked to their core – John's audience knew them well and would understand them in the context of the Eucharist.

3. John doesn't include the "Institution of the Eucharist" in his story of the Last Supper as Matthew, Mark and Luke do.

- (In fact, some scholars see this passage as John's version of the Eucharist.)

4. Yet, we know from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians that the practice of breaking the bread and sharing the cup was a part of the Christian Community from early on.

5. And so WE gather, as Christians have for thousands of years, to share the Eucharist, that our lives may be filled, and that we may be empowered to live a “Christ filled life” in the world.

II. Jonathan Daniels



A. In these days when there are those who are actively working to vacate the voting rights of others – I’d like to share with you the story of a young man who actively lived out his “Christ filled life” in the world.

1. **Jonathan Daniels** was a student at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1965, when, like thousands of other students, he headed South for his Spring Break.

2. Only Jonathan did not head for the beaches of Sunny Florida: he travelled to **Selma, Alabama** to help register people to vote.

3. Jonathan wasn’t a rabble-rouser, anything but.

4. He was born in Keane, New Hampshire in 1939, and joined the Episcopal Church while in High School.

5. He enrolled at Virginia Military Institute (VMI) and was elected Valedictorian of his graduating class.

6. During his sophomore year, he began to feel uncertainties about his religious faith which were probably influenced by the death of his father and the prolonged illness of his sister.

7. In the fall of 1961 he entered Harvard University to study English literature, and in the spring of 1962, while attending Easter services at the Church of the Advent in Boston, he underwent a profound experience of grace.

8. Soon after, he made the decision to study for the priesthood and enrolled in Seminary in the fall of 1963.

B. In March 1965, Jonathan answered the call of Martin Luther King, who was recruiting students and clergy to join the movement in Selma, Alabama, to secure for all citizens the right to vote.

1. Jonathan wrote that the conviction of his calling was deepened at Evening Prayer during the singing of the Magnificat: “*He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things...’ I knew that I must go to Selma. The Virgin’s song was to grow more and more dear to me in the weeks ahead.*”

2. Jonathan and several other seminary students left for Alabama on Thursday, intending to stay the weekend.

- This placed him in a time and place where the nation’s racism and the Episcopal Church’s share in that inheritance were exposed.

- After he and his friend Judith Upham missed the bus home, they had second thoughts about their short stay.

3. The two returned to the seminary just long enough to request permission to spend the rest of the semester working in Selma, where they would also study on their own and return at the end of the term to take exams.

4. They returned to the seminary in May and passed their exams; Judith went off to do her hospital chaplaincy work and Jonathan returned to Selma in July, where he worked to register voters.

5. That summer, on August 2, 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act which when signed by President Johnson provided broad federal oversight and enforcement of the constitutional right to vote.

- Before that, blacks had been effectively disenfranchised across the South since the turn of the century, deprived of their right to vote and other rights as well.

C. On August 14, 1965, Jonathan was one of a group of 29 protesters who went to Fort Deposit, Alabama, to picket its whites-only stores.

1. All of the protesters were arrested and were transported in a truck for hauling garbage to jail in the nearby town of Haynesville.

2. The group spent 6 hot August days in a jail with no shower or toilet facilities. Jonathan led the group in singing hymns and prayers, trying to boost their morale.

3. Then, on August 20th, they were suddenly released – the jailers just opened the cell doors and said they were free to go.

4. Now released, they had no transport back to Fort Deposit, so while the group waited for rides to be found, Jonathan, a Roman Catholic Priest, Fr Morrisroe, and two black girls, Joyce Bailey and Ruby Sales, walked to a small store that served non-whites to buy sodas for the group.

5. There they were met by Thomas Coleman, an unemployed highway worker who also served as a volunteer deputy, holding a shotgun.

6. Coleman threatened the group and leveled his shotgun at 17 year old Ruby Sales.

- Jonathan pushed her down and caught the full blast of the shotgun and was killed instantly.

- Fr Morrisroe grabbed Joyce Bailey and began to run with her – Coleman shot him, wounding him in the lower back, and then stopped firing.

D. The murder of an educated, white seminarian who was defending an unarmed teenage girl shocked members of the Episcopal Church and other whites into facing the violent reality of racial inequality in the South, and soon more help poured in as the Church became more involved in Civil Rights.

1. President Johnson ordered a federal investigation into the murder.

- And when Jonathan's mother had trouble getting his body returned from Alabama, the President had his aides assist in transporting the body.

2. Thomas Coleman was arrested and acquitted of manslaughter charges by an all-white jury who, the story goes, all shook hands with him as he left the courtroom.

3. As a result of this, the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity filed suit along with other members of the National Council of Churches and other groups to INTEGRATE Southern Juries - ending the systematic exclusion of African-Americans and women from juries.

4. And Ruby Sales went on to finish her degree at Tuskegee Institute and became a Civil Rights activist.

- She later received her Masters of Divinity degree from the Episcopal Divinity School in 1998, the same school Jonathan Daniels attended.

- She is 73 now, and still travels around the county giving talks on race, class and reconciliation.

6. All this because one man stood up to actively live out his “Christ-filled life” in the world.

III. Living it out

Thankfully, not all of us are called to take a bullet for someone else – but we are called to bring our own “Christ filled Life” to the world.

How are WE called to live to overcome OUR challenges – OUR doubts – OUR struggles with our faith – and live out OUR own “Christ filled life?”

When we come to receive the precious Body of Christ may we too hear these words, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.”

And then remember that when Christ abides in us – we are carrying Christ into our world – and that can make all the difference.

The Episcopal Church celebrates the life of Jonathan Daniels as a martyr and one whose life is an example for us to follow.

His feast day was yesterday; I close now with his collect:

O God of justice and compassion, you put down the proud and mighty from their place, and lift up the poor and the afflicted: We give you thanks for your faithful witness Jonathan Myrick Daniels, who, in the midst of injustice and violence, risked and gave his life for another; and we pray that we, following his example, may make no peace with oppression; through Jesus Christ the just one, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

To read more about Jonathan Myrick Daniels, [click here](#).