

Enjoy, Enjoy, Enjoy:

Homily at John Dear's First Mass

June 13, 1993, St. Aloysius' Church, Washington, D.C.

"Just as the God who has life sent me and I have life because of God, so the one who feeds on me will have life because of me." (John 6:51-58)

It gives me great joy to come together with you this morning to celebrate the good news that God is a God of life, to hear the good news that the Jesus we follow longs for us to have life in God, so much so that Jesus even wants to become our food and our drink so that we might live life to the full.

These days, I have been thinking of the many times this God of life has invited me, like you, to new life. My brother was reminding me this week, for instance, of our years as altar boys--until I was in 6th grade and I missed the annual altar servers meeting and the following week a letter came in the mail that said, "Dear John, We regret to inform you that your services are no longer needed for the church." I was thirteen when I received that letter and I've been struggling with the church ever since!

Today, I thought I would share a story with you about my journey towards this God of life. Eleven years ago this week, just two months before I entered the Jesuits, I flew by myself to Israel to make a pilgrimage to the land of Jesus. I had read how Ignatius Loyola and Francis of Assisi had made such a journey before they began their public ministry and it sounded good to me so I got an extra job, saved up money, told my parents I was going to Israel and prepared for the trip. The day I left, Israel invaded Lebanon and as I walked off the plane I was greeted by an Israeli soldier with a

machine gun aimed at me.

In the days that followed, I was abruptly awakened to the reality of war and injustice. I spent a month walking through Israel by myself. During my last week there, I camped out alone along the Sea of Galilee, pondering the Sermon on the Mount, and one afternoon, standing on the balcony of the Chapel of the Beatitudes on a hill overlooking the Sea, the words of Jesus finally began to sink in: "Blessed are the poor; Blessed are those who mourn; Blessed are the meek; Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice; Blessed are the merciful; Blessed are the pure of heart; Blessed are the peacemakers; Blessed are those persecuted for justice's sake, for My Name's sake."

Slowly, it occurred to me that afternoon that Jesus was serious about these words! So, I looked up at the sky and said, "Are you trying to say something to me? Are these words addressed to me? Do you want me to be a peacemaker? Ok, God," I said, "I will dedicate my life to making peace and hungering and thirsting for justice--on one condition: if you give me a sign."

Just then, there were loud explosions, sonic booms, and two black jets shot out of the sky in front of me, over the water, flying straight at me and over me and then dropped bombs along the Lebanon border a few miles away. I looked up, trembling and said, "OK God, I'll work for peace and I'll never ask for a sign again!"

Now I've learned that God doesn't really operate that way and I know that people of faith don't ask for signs, but at that moment, I saw the reality of war and death in our world as if for the first time. And even more powerfully, at that moment, I heard Jesus as if for the first time saying, as Jesus says to us this morning: "the God of life wants you to live, not to kill. Spend your life, rooted in God, living life to the full, promoting life for all. Work to stop war and injustice. That's what it means to be alive."

This morning, once again, I am amazed at this Jesus who stands before us, in today's Gospel,

who so passionately wants us to have life, even to the point of saying, "I want to become your food and drink so that you might live in God." But I can understand the people in today's Gospel who misunderstand and question Jesus' invitation because deep down they know, as all the early Christians who first heard this text knew, that to share in the life of Christ, to break bread and pass the cup, means to identify ourselves with Jesus and the God of life and that means inevitably speaking out against war and injustice and the false gods of death, and sharing our lives, risking our lives as Jesus did up to the cross, so that all might have life and justice and peace.

Today, given our world's addiction to violence and death, it is still hard for me and for all of us to hear this God of life, to take the risk of the Gospel yet Jesus still insists that we come to the table of life. "Be immersed in my life," I hear Jesus saying to us this morning, "Let me live in you and live in me, come what may. Share your life with everyone. Say No to all killing, no to violence, no to war, no to bombings in the former Yugoslavia, no to US bombings in Mogadishu in Somalia, no to nuclear weapons testing in the desert, no to all nuclear weapons, no to every injustice, including racism and the death penalty and the sexism which denies women, as well as married people, the right to ordination."

"Instead, see all life as sacred," Jesus says. "See every human being as your sister and brother and love them. Worship the God of nonviolence and become a people of nonviolence. Let God disarm your heart so that all might disarm and live and do this in memory of me."

As I look at all of you, I know that you are doing these things, that you share in the life of Jesus. In you, I see the peacemaking Jesus, the God of life. Each one of you has inspired me and taught me what it means to be a Christian and I thank you all.

Together, as we look at our world, we see the body of Christ broken by war, the blood of Jesus pouring out everywhere, beginning right here in this neighborhood, at the church's doorstep.

We are called to say no to war and death and all that demeans life, and we can do so rejoicing because we already share in the risen life of Jesus.

This morning, then, we accept God's invitation in today's Gospel to the banquet of eternal life. The good news today, my friends, is that, once again, the celebration, the meal of life is about to begin. And this morning, I hear the God of life saying to each one of us: Enjoy! Enjoy! Enjoy!

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