

Inebriates of Christ (from 2000 revised)

In discussing the recent Sunday Gospel readings regarding Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and fishes, John's Gospel ends up revealing that Jesus is ultimately the Bread of Life symbolized by the multiplied loaves – it is he we must consume, his message, his style of being. But may we not also see in this multiplication of loaves to feed so many a signal of his other miracle: to multiply us, you and me, to be the bread of life to others? All of us to become nourishment like Christ to restore our world to life, to save it from starvation in the desert this world can become? I mean that's one way to ponder these recent readings: *you* are the bread of life.

But let me switch to another Euchaistic reference, the Book of Daniel. It starts off with a story about four Jewish youths who are supposed to have lived back around 580 B.C. They were exiles, whom the Babylonians transported to Shinar (Iraq) after destroying Jerusalem in 587 B.C. It wasn't uncommon in those days for an empire to assimilate young captives into their culture to fill various bureaucratic jobs. The Egyptians long ago did that with young Moses.

As selected aliens, these Jewish lads were therefore privileged to dine on the very food and wine served at the king's table. But they refused to eat non-kosher fare. Their nervous Babylonian mentor complained, "If you don't eat, you'll lose your ruddy complexions and weight and the king will have my head!" But Daniel, one of the four said, "Don't worry. Just serve us vegetables and water and we'll be fine." And indeed after ten days, "they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youth who ate the king's rich food."

This story was written around 167 B.C. to encourage Jewish youth then living under Greek oppression to emulate ancient Daniel and his friends. It encourages Jewish youth to abide by kosher food laws. But on a deeper level it says, "Don't become consumers of Greek culture; don't accept the stuff your conquerors dish out to you. Eat their cuisine and you'll soon be consuming their ideas, their polytheism, their purely rational philosophy."

The same goes for us today. Consume the junk food served up to you on every channel of television or radio (the commercials; a comic's cynicism; the "philosophy" inherent in the pop lyrics; the celebrity cult; the paranoia of the news and talk shows; the vindictiveness of politics) and, far from your being the consumer, it is *you who will be consumed*, swallowed up by a culture that can chew you up and spit you out as it does the natural resources of our world. Assimilate whatever the culture feeds you and ultimately it is you who will be assimilated.

But won't we starve if we ignore modern culture's vast display case? No, because like Daniel, we have an alternative diet. We dine at the table of Christ. We first assimilate his Word, served up to us by our homilist and then a special bread and wine. In the process we may assimilate Christ and his mentality, his way of being, to share his vision of reality. We become his Body, ourselves the Bread of Life, Christ's poetic

Presence in the world, an epiphany of what a free, divinely radiant humanity must be. Emily Dickinson, intoxicated by Nature, once boasted: "I taste a liquor never brewed / - From Tankards scooped in Pearl." And so say we, inebriates of Christ.