

## **St. Mary the Virgin and commemoration of Jonathan Myrick Daniels**

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my Spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”

We are doing something a little out of the ordinary today in our liturgy. We are transferring the feast of St. Mary the Virgin from this coming Wednesday to today....actually that's not so unusual because we've been doing that for the past eight years reasoning that Mary the mother of God deserves to have her feast day on a Sunday....the rubrics give us during ordinary time, which we are in now in the lectionary cycle... the rubrics give us a window of permission as it were to transfer feasts (as long as it's O.K. with the bishop). What is unusual today is that we are also commemorating the feast day of Jonathan Myrick Daniels, martyred during the civil rights movement and added to our calendar of saints in 1994. His feast day is the day before Mary's feast and quite coincidentally enough the Gospel reading called for on each of these days is the same....Luke 1: 46-55 known as the Magnificat....Mary's revolutionary song of praise.

The Magnificat, that great piece of poetry that governs the narrative of Luke, finds its literary roots in Hebrew scripture...Luke drawing upon the rich tradition....in the song of Hannah exulting over the birth of Samuel who would lead ably the people of Israel...the song of Judith praising God for God's liberating favor...the song of Miriam praising God for the freedom from Egyptian tyranny and slavery....Luke is connecting through the song of Mary the mandate of scripture that if one is open to God's way in earth then there one finds hope and possibility....the mandate to say yes to the way life would and could be in God's imminent commonweal, God's reordering the social, the political and the economic way of things (that is the theme throughout the whole of scripture. Old testament and new....the persistent theme of an imminent just and merciful and nonviolent world, a world which is truly our native land) ...and then also to say NO to the powers and principalities that would stand against God's purposes in earth....Mary says yes to God's favor...his regard for her and her meager estate...and then says no to the unjust order of her world...her song infuses Luke's narrative with hope and possibility and life and radical critique of the powers that be....we see the theme in the beatitudes and their corresponding woes....in the story of the rich man and Lazarus....the theme so artfully captured in Mary's song dare I say articulates the Myth of being human....yes myth I say with all due reverence...myths are the way we humans speak of the most profound truths woven into existence...myths open our eyes to the truth of who we are and

the truth of the cosmos of which we are contingent parts....myths are not falsehoods, the way popular culture speaks of myth....but myths are truer than we can imagine and yet they give us a taste of the whole of things....a glimpse into the deep mystery of being.

I was in the Winn Dixie just the other day, and I was in the checkout line behind a woman who was obviously poor, her clothes, her demeanor... she was fumbling in her worn billfold for her EBT card...her face was worn too....lined and wrinkled by years of struggle, pain and perhaps regrets, love and loss....God only knows what her life story must be...Our eyes met... through her eyes she seemed to say to me I'm sorry to be holding you up...I asked her how she was doing...and she replied...as so many of you who live in Mobile or in the south have heard before...she replied, "I'm blessed." I thought of Mary of Nazareth an abased pregnant, unmarried poor teenage girl...whose song is astoundingly all about hope and potential...hope and potential that are not naive illusions....but hope and potential, a vision of reality itself breaking into our world.

How can it be that the broken among us are the oracles of hope?... perhaps it is a decision....or perhaps when broken we are more able to see the possibility of hope and potential.... or we can choose despair, which is to close God out...sister Joan Chittister a Roman Catholic nun whom I guarantee you the Vatican doesn't want to mess with...she says that the work of the faithful is to live in a posture of openness....because that openness...openness to change and possibility engenders the transformation of the world....Perhaps in the brokenness we all experience, rich and poor... is a golden opportunity to say as Mary says...let it be God...whatever it is that is next...let it be....and hope will find a way into our hearts and minds through the very cracks of our brokenness...and to that hope and possibility for a new way ahead...a new way forward we must say yes, we must say yes for the world's sake....and to the forces of our world which would hinder this new creation that as we speak is upon us, we must say no....and there we take our stand.

Just yesterday hundreds of pilgrims from our diocese and the diocese of Alabama met in Hayneville, the site of Jonathan Daniels' martyrdom... Daniels and his companions were in Hayneville registering African Americans to vote as many of you know...and these pilgrims walked in his footsteps...from the still functioning squalid jail where he and his companions were held... to the now boarded up grocery store to which they walked to get a coke... where in order to protect his friend Ruby Sales a sixteen year old girl....he stepped between her and the shotgun wielding deputy sheriff, and took the blast himself killing him instantly....Jonathan

made the choice to say yes to the possibility of a new just world...and said no to the evil structures of our society that disadvantage the least among us...and the power of such structures did him in....as such power has done in many ...thousands, perhaps millions of the faithful come before.

But I want to say today that as long as the least of us, as long as our outcasts, our poor our abased have hope, and still the wherewithal to praise God for such hope; and still despite the weight of the world on their shoulders say the words, "I am blessed," then the world will indeed change... these faithful quite ironically in God's world are our hope!...Ours as the people of faith is to hear the call of hope and possibility from the least of our world...and to say yes to that call...and ours as people of faith is to say no to the injustices of our world and act with courage that is granted us by the Spirit of God to act for the reordering of a world into the revolutionary vision God has for it....a vision witnessed to by holy men and holy women throughout the ages....bearing the voices of the broken ones... those who have walked a stony road over weary years....singing a song of hopeful praise and calling out for the reality of God's vision to be made so....we have a choice brothers and sisters:...to choose power for ourselves which is to choose to be filled with vanity....or to choose to empower the vast least of our world and that choice is to be filled with life....Let us live into the great epic that is our mythology, let us live the story of our true humanity...like blessed Mary, like blessed Jonathan, like the many who chose life... let us choose to ever stand with all our brothers and sisters in the favored commonweal of God....our true native land.