

Blood and cats. 15th August, 2021.

By now most of you should be aware that it was Niko's birthday yesterday - and Ginny's - but the next story doesn't apply to her.

Let's suppose that I am a really nice owner to my dogs and that they actually like me. Then let's suppose that I want to be even nicer to them and give them all that they want; sounds great, doesn't it? But there's a condition...

I could say to Niko that he could have steak dinner every night, drink as much milk as he wants, have two bowls of yoghurt instead of one, have bones every week and throw them up back on my bed, and sleep on my bed every night - in other words - Niko heaven.

But the condition is this; he has to love my cat.

Actually, I don't have one, so he's safe there.

But just suppose that were the condition. I would be asking him to do something that dogs just are hard-wired not to do. It is in his genes to chase cats - that's what God created them for, for heaven's sake!

That seems like not only a huge price to pay for what, admittedly, sounds wonderful - but cats - please! That's positively insulting! There must be a limit!

So this is a cartoon representation of what Jesus is saying in our gospel - if you hadn't gathered.

To the Jews, this injunction to drink Jesus' blood is totally abhorrent. The Hebrew bible is peppered with references to abstaining from eating the blood of any animal. Genesis 9:4 says, 'But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.' God so valued humankind that he went on, 'And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal.' Animals who killed humans were to be stoned to death. 'And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.'

So blood is sacred to God, and was to be viewed the same by men. 'Whoever sheds the

blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made man.'

Thus, the daubing of the door lintels with the blood of the Passover lamb allowed the angel of the Lord to 'pass over' that house so that it would not be afflicted with plague that was coming upon the Egyptians, that we read about in Exodus 12. Blood is used again in the covenant that God made with Moses in Exodus 24, and again in the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

However, the specific injunction to refrain from consuming the blood of any animal comes in the following chapter 17: 'I will set my face

against any Israelite or any foreigner residing among them who eats blood, and I will cut them off from the people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may any foreigner residing among you eat blood." (I will preach on the significance of the 'blood of atonement' at another time.)

Finally, a further reference in Deuteronomy 12:16; 'But you must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water.'

Therefore, kosher slaughter and halal slaughter are very much the same process - a swift single cut across the throat of the animal that severs the carotid arteries, jugular veins and the trachea. The animal dies very swiftly and bleeds out rapidly. The only difference between the two is that halal killing is supposed to be done with the animal facing Mecca and invoking the name of Allah.

So to get back to our gospel, what Jesus is asking his fellow Jews to do is completely against all they have been brought up to believe. And Jesus' words cannot be misinterpreted here; Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh

of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.'

Notice that he says, 'unless...you...drink his blood, you have no life in you.'

This echoes Leviticus 17, where it says, '...for the life of a creature is in the blood.'

Jesus is thus asking his fellow Jews to go against all the teaching that they would have learned from the rabbis at the synagogue and heard repeated almost on a daily basis, and seen in the butcher's market where the

slaughtering would have taken place, and the animals bled out.

You have to eat me and drink my blood, or else 'you have no life in you'.

You want the best life, Niko, best you start making up to the cat!

Joking aside, this would have been hugely offensive to the Jews, and certainly make them wonder who on earth Jesus was, and where he got such weird ideas from. Perhaps not surprising then, that some thought he was off his head.

But hold on, there's a bit more, which, if left out, turns the whole thing around again.

And although it's a bit of a spoiler-alert for next week, it won't matter as I'll preach on something else then!

Jesus asks the people in verse 61, 'Does this offend you?'

Well, as they used to say on the old comedy show, Rowan and Martin's Laugh-in, 'You bet your sweet bippy!'

Jesus goes on to explain, 'The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life.'

So how do we square this away? Once moment Jesus is telling us that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood, and the next he's saying that the 'flesh counts for nothing - and it is the Spirit that gives life.'

What Jesus is asking us for is a **total buy-in to Him**. No reservations, no holding back - 'All of me - or nothing'.

In this passage he also says more than once, 'no-one can come to the Father unless the Father draws him.' So we are being led to Jesus, and now he's telling us what we have to do, which is to give ourselves totally, without reserve. Complete commitment - nothing less will do.

Are we ready to do that? Throw away our old ideas of what is 'OK' and what is not 'OK'? Take the risk, jump in the deep end, jeopardize our reputations for the sake of Christ - be proud to say we are Christian? Even like cats?