

Faith ... and a Strong Stomach

Would you drink a frog smoothie? Would you enjoy a bowl of monkey soup with a side of fried ants? I didn't try these popular delicacies when I was in Peru recently. I stuck with the grilled guinea pig. It is actually quite tasty, as long as you don't think about the fact that you're eating a rodent.

Ever since God showed the apostle Peter it was OK to eat unclean meats (see Acts 10:9-16), Christian missionaries have faced amazing gastronomical challenges. After a Peruvian friend promised to fix me some *sopa de mono* (monkey soup) when I return to the jungle city of Tarapoto, I asked friends on Facebook to list the strangest foods they'd eaten on the mission field. They mentioned:

(1) Grilled dog in Honduras; (2) monkey brains, served raw in Indonesia; (3) goat head in Haiti; (4) cockroaches in Thailand; (5) termite larvae in goat's milk, in Central America; (6) field rat in the Philippines; (7) stewed wildcat in Honduras; (8) grasshoppers in Mexico; (9) boiled ant larvae in Thailand; and (10) mice-on-a-stick in Malawi.

It's a whole new meaning for "hot dog"! (And everybody said: "EEEUUUWWW!")

I don't claim to be that adventurous when it comes to food. I passed up the chicken heads and fried snake in China a few years ago, as well as the *muktuk* (whale skin and blubber soaked in fish oil) in Alaska. But I sampled cow udder in Colombia (way too much fat) and giant black snail in Nigeria (too rubbery—it tasted like an old tire!).

Whenever I learn about a strange new food in another country, I think about the Apostle Peter's sensitive stomach. He was raised in a kosher Jewish home. He had never tasted bacon, pork chops, fried shrimp, lobster or any other gentile foods.

Then, during his sojourn in Joppa, the Holy Spirit put Peter in a trance and showed him a vision of a giant tablecloth coming down from the sky—a sheet full of “four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air” (v. 12, NASB). It was like Peter’s own private screening of *Fear Factor*.

He must have become alarmed when a voice said, not once but three times, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat! What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (v. 13, 15). This directive led him to the house of Cornelius, an Italian guy living in Caesarea who had adopted the Jewish religion but certainly wasn’t kosher in his upbringing.

What happened when Peter preached to Cornelius’ family is one of my favorite scenes in the Bible. The Holy Spirit fell on a crowd of Italian immigrants! The extravagant display convinced Peter that Jesus doesn’t care about skin color, foreign accents or what foods we eat.

Ever since Peter bravely crossed that threshold into Cornelius’ house, Christian missionaries have been crossing barriers of race, language and culture to take the Savior’s love to everybody. Sometimes it costs them their lives. More often, they get lice or dysentery. And usually they have to eat strange foods.

This is the missionary spirit that Jesus wants to give all of us. God may not choose to send you to the other side of the world to preach, and He may not require you to eat monkey soup, frog smoothies or mice-on-a-stick. But He does want to make you a cross-cultural missionary, even if it’s in your own backyard.

Are you willing to go? Have you renounced all fear of people who aren’t like you? Please don’t let your distaste for another culture—even its food—block the flow of God’s compassion in your heart.

I'm praying that the Holy Ghost will baptize us in the same zeal that compelled a kosher disciple like Peter to face his prejudices. Despite our backgrounds, one day we will all sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb—and nobody will complain about the heavenly food on that menu.

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