

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Clouds in My Coffee

The question popped into my head as I was settling down to satisfy my morning addiction: Did Jesus drink coffee?

Is it possible? Did He jump-start his day with a jolt of java? Did He dunk a piece of pita into a warm stone mug before setting out to preach, teach, convert and heal? Did He shake off His human weariness with a strong sip of something that—to my humble sensibilities—has to be considered divine?

Clearly, if I'm asking myself these kinds of questions, I have too much time on my hands. But it's also symptomatic of something else. I'm a die-hard coffee lover.

Let me be clear. Not cappuccino (though I do appreciate the fact that it was invented by Catholic monks), not espresso, not any fancy whipped blend with a latte-this or a frappe-that or a Starbucks-y overpriced combination of unpronounceable beans that taste too sweet, or too burned, or are otherwise indigestible.

Just good, strong, black American coffee. No cream. No sugar. Just the hard stuff. Straight up. That, to me, is heaven.

My wife considers my love of coffee something ominous—a habit that she tries to discourage. She tells me about medical studies that link it to various diseases, and I tell her about other studies that debunk that and imply that it actually *prevents* some diseases. Once, she even secretly tried to switch our house coffee to decaf. She felt guilty about it and told me. I didn't speak to her for a week. But I digress.

Back to my original question. Did Jesus drink coffee? I did a little digging and found that it's unlikely. The good people at Wikipedia claim that the earliest mention of coffee in history is the tenth century. But there seems to be some mystery about when, and how, the beverage was created.

“The origin of the word *coffee* is thought to be derived from the region of Kaffa in Western Ethiopia,” the Wikipedia entry notes, “where the coffee bean was first used to give the natives energy and keep them awake when they traveled to hunt for numerous days.” It notes: “There are several legendary accounts of the origin of the drink itself. One account involves the Yemenite Sufi mystic Shaikh ash-Shadhili. When traveling in Ethiopia, the legend goes, he observed goats of unusual vitality and, upon trying the berries that the goats had been eating, experienced the same vitality. A similar myth attributes the discovery of coffee to an Ethiopian goatherder named Kaldi and the Legend of Dancing Goats.”

Okay, so tenth-century Ethiopia isn't exactly first-century Palestine. But you never know. Nothing is impossible with God, right?

Wherever it comes from, my doctor assures me that drinking coffee is essentially harmless. But I have to admit I had my doubts many years ago, when I worked the overnight shift at CBS News Radio. I consumed so much bad coffee, so consistently and frequently, at so many odd hours, that everything I ate tasted like the grainy bottom of a styrofoam cup. (I've since learned to stick to the really good stuff—for everyday coffee addiction, nothing beats Dunkin' Donuts, 7-Eleven and a particular blend I get through mail order that is made by Trappist monks in Venezuela.) Instant? Only if I'm desperate. And decaf? Don't get me started.

Finally, I take spiritual solace and encouragement in my coffee addiction from these words by Danish writer Isak Dinesen: “Coffee, according to the women of Denmark, is to the body what the Word of the Lord is to the soul.”

Further evidence, I say, that if Jesus *didn't* drink coffee ... He probably would have liked to.

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