



Reflection for August 12, 2020

Commemoration of Jonathan Myrick Daniels [1939-1965]

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. [Amos 5:24]

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. [Luke 2:52-53]

The doctrine of the creeds, the enacted faith of the sacraments, were the essential preconditions of the experience itself. The faith with which I went to Selma has not changed: it has grown. . . I began to know in my bones and sinews that I had been truly

*baptized into the Lord's death and resurrection . . . with them, the black men and white men, with all life, in him whose Name is above all the names that the races and nations shout . . . we are indelibly and unspeakably one. [Jonathan Myrick Daniels, quoted in *Holy Women, Holy Men*, p. 526]*

"We must have hindsight, insight, and foresight. That is complete sight. It's not an 'I' sight, it's a 'we' sight." [Ruby Sales]

This Friday we will commemorate the life of Jonathan Myrick Daniels, who at the age of 26 took a leave from seminary to work for voters' rights in Selma Alabama. On August 14, 1965, he and three companions were greeted at the entry to a store by Thomas Coleman, a deputy sheriff armed with a shotgun. Jonathan Daniels stepped in front of sixteen-year-old Ruby Sales to protect her and was shot in the chest and killed. Thomas Coleman was later acquitted on the grounds of self-defense; Ruby Sales became a leading civil rights activist and founded the SpiritHouse Project, a *non-profit organization that uses the arts, research, education, action, and spirituality to bring diverse peoples together to work for racial, economic, and social justice, as well as for spiritual maturity*. It funds the Jonathan Daniels & Samuel Younge Institute to guide and support young activists.

Jonathan Daniels was in many ways what we imagine to be a typical child of the sixties—idealistic, uncertain of what path to take in his life until he was inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr., and guided by convictions about justice that are at the core of our incarnational theology, as ancient as the writings of the prophets and as modern as the 2020 marches. Like many young people growing up today Jonathan Daniels knew with an intuition honed by his faith that the divisions around him were not only wrongheaded and dangerous, but also a violation of the most fundamental principles of creation. As Sam Portaro has pointed out, (*Brightest and Best*, p. 142] the deadly encounter between Thomas Coleman and Jonathan Daniels was *a meeting of fear and faith, greed and hope, hatred and love*. This encounter continues to be lived out in our streets and schools, in our relationships and in our hearts. With courage, conviction, and grace, we can take action to make these encounters transformational, as

described so beautifully in the Song of Mary, a text that inspired Jonathan Daniels to trust the clarity of his own vision. With Mary, with Jonathan Daniels, with the hundreds of thousands of people whose dreams have brought them to the streets, we pray that, in the words of Sam Portaro: *fear may become faith, hatred may become love, greed become a prodigal hope.*

I share with you this prayer for social justice [socialjusticeresourcecenter.org]:

*We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end war;
for we know that You have made the world in a way that people must find their own path to peace
within themselves and with their neighbors.*

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end starvation;
for You have already given us the resources with which to feed the entire world,
if we would only use them wisely.*

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to root out prejudice;
for You have already given us eyes with which to see the good in all people,
if we would only use them rightly.*

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end despair;
for You have already given us the power to clear away slums and to give hope,
if we would only use our power justly.*

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;
for You have already given us great minds with which to search out cures and healing,
if we would only use them constructively.*

*Therefore we pray to You instead, O God, for strength, determination and will power,
to **do** instead of just pray, to **become** instead of merely to wish. **Amen***