

The Devil's dainties

Posted vicariously for Garry W. Johnson, written April 8, 2011

The sly one got over on me today, and boy is he slick this time of year ...

Extras come few and far in between in prison, even when what qualifies as “special” covers such a wide range: A shaving razor with three blades, a tooth brush rated above “soft,” any kind of privacy, quality clothing, real food ... peppers, black olives, name-brand cheese – all barely exist behind the fence and worth their weight in gold.

I have never been one to barter for the extras. Inmate-to-inmate transactions are against policy, and I trust God provides me with all I need. Celebrations aren't big on my list either – I pay little attention to birthdays (the ones in scripture never turned out well), and the only “sanctioned” holiday here involves a fat elf who encourages nominal Christians to banquet. So being somewhat of a separatist when it comes to the perks most inmates vie for has been a long standing practice with me, and one I should have stuck with today.

The Spirit of Festivity

The prison recently went through an inspection, which our library passed at 100% (notice I didn't say “pop” or “surprise” inspection). I share an office in the library with the inmate clerk, my side of which I refer to as the “News Desk.” In congratulation for the effort of the inmates, the officer who runs the library got approval to have a small meal for the workers. She came around the week before and asked those who would attend if there was anything they couldn't eat.

Having made it a point for years not to discuss “religion” with the staff – at least beyond the general and seasonal necessity – I relied on the Adventist, the Muslim and the Healthy Eater to decry pork (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14). They of course did, as I witnessed, and I continued through my week knowing everything was in order.

The library opened for the afternoon schedule today with a worker pushing a cart of food – pizza and cake made by the Food Services class, extra large slices for all. After the first round was served, the Muslim legal clerk began checking with each of the rest of us, making sure we all had gotten two slices of pizza before he went back for seconds. I was finishing my second slice when I heard the officer apologizing and saw the Muslim give away the pizza he had just piled on his plate.

Paying the Piper

For roughly nine years I have avoided unclean foods, suffering no more than the very rare mistaken bite (Acts 10:14). My stomach has churned for several hours now, and I can tell several more are surely on the way. I can hardly believe I let my guard fall so low, especially this time of year (1 Corinthians 5:6-7; 1 Peter 1:13-19).

The wily one loves to party. Look at all the empty occasions he provides for his fallen world to celebrate (Luke 21:34). And when we've learned to see through his holidays, he still finds reasons for a special meal.

As we head into Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread remember not to trust the unconverted with your menu, the majority with your doctrine, or the devil with your passivity (1 Peter 5:3). You'll loose every time.

Garry Johnson is member of God's Church and an inmate in the Tennessee Department of Corrections.