

Vegetable Faith

Well, it's that time of year. The miracle of the seed bearing harvest in the vegetable garden parallels our faith life, and it is time for the harvest in both worlds. When fresh tomatoes come in, usually the first part of July, fresh tomato sandwiches and blt's are the order of the day. They taste like a different vegetable from the rest of the year. So delicious, fresh, and melt-in your mouth goodness, they usher in the wonder of summer.

"I don't care what anybody says," writes Tom Vilsak. "Nothing is better than a tomato you grow. There's something about it that's different than a tomato you can buy. It's a great thing.

We won't get into whether it is a fruit or a vegetable, even though it has been designated the official vegetable of New Jersey and the official fruit and vegetable of Arkansas. That, like many theological questions, is one that just cannot be answered.

Our faith should always be fresh and delicious, never frozen or refrigerated. We must always seek to develop the fruit of the spirit-love, joy, gentleness, peace, etc., so that God's garden of faith will grow and flourish.

Another great fruit/vegetable of summer is the squash. I am partial to long neck yellow squash myself. Last year I enjoyed spaghetti squash as well, even though you almost need a chainsaw to slice one in half.

Mario Batali writes, "You know, when you get your first asparagus, or your first acorn squash, or your first really good tomato of the season, those are the moments that define the cook's year. I get more excited by that than anything else."

So don't squash the faith of others, or allow people to squash your own. We must discover all varieties of faith, and take the best of all of them to become God's instrument. My grandmother took a large gourd, which I think is essentially a variety of dried squash, carved out a big hole in the front, and put a manger scene inside, which connected the summer and winter in a faith display.

Then there is the watermelon. Don't get in my way when the watermelon is served! It is also in the fruit/vegetable category. It is 92 percent water, and 6 percent sugar. My sources don't tell me what the other two percent are.

Jason Schaynot of Georgetown, Texas, holds the world record for spitting watermelon seeds. In 1995, he spit a watermelon seed an incredible 78 feet 6 inches!

Now that is an example for faith. We didn't think we could tell our neighbor about Jesus, and then we told them and people near and far, and we realized how wonderful a thing it was when Jesus did this through us! This is where we need to be, not in a watered down faith which has a little sugar, but a concentrated faith, deep in its essence, which blesses the world when they partake of it.

Mark Twain, the great Southern writer, once said, "'The true Southern watermelon is a boon apart, and not to be mentioned with commoner things. It is chief of this world's luxuries, king by the grace of God over all the fruits of the earth. When one has tasted it, he knows what the angels eat. It was not a Southern watermelon that Eve took we know it because she repented.'

So, whether you love watermelon or could just as soon pass it up (although I find it hard to imagine this happening), be a person who rolls along with Christ at the center of your life. When your faith is sliced open, to share with others; may there be a richness, a seed-filled blessing to it that others cannot help but want to find.

Finally, dear reader, in this vegetable/or fruit moment we share together, a strange Cajun poem about gumbo. Maybe you can help me figure it out.

Gumbo is a soup made with rice, andouille sausage, shrimp, tomatoes, okra, and other magical ingredients. It is very important to the Cajuns of Louisiana, and another delicious food for us.

Here is the poem.

Martian Gumbo

One of dem Saucer land in da Bayou
Ole Boudreaux out huntin say "Jus who be you?"
Den he point him shodgun
And say "Lookee here son...
Jus found some green OKRA to seasonne my stew!"

So, as we combine our okra with other ingredients to make the faith of our fathers, mothers, and children, I puzzle over the meaning of this poem. A Martian lands in a flying saucer in Louisiana, a native named Boudreaux points a shotgun at him, and the first words the earthling utters are not about a flying saucer or a man from outer space, but about some delicious okra!

So, likewise, our faith should be so important, that nothing, not a Martian, not politics, not selfishness or sin should come before faith, the key ingredient in any worthwhile journey. So let it be said, so let it be done!