

Monkey Soup, Frog Smoothies and the Missionary Spirit

Written by J. Lee Grady

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The strange foods I've eaten on the mission field remind me that Jesus crosses all cultural barriers.

Would you drink a frog smoothie? Would you eat a piping hot bowl of monkey stew with a side of fried ants? I didn't try these popular delicacies when I was in Peru last week. I stuck with the grilled *cuy*, better known as guinea pig. It is actually quite tasty, as long as you don't think about the fact that you are 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 when venturing into new cultures. 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. Here are some of the dishes mentioned, and where they are served:

"Have you renounced all fear of people who aren't like you? ... Is your distaste for another culture—even

(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.

And everybody said: "EEEUUUWWW!"

I don't claim to be that adventurous when it comes to food. I passed up the chicken heads, chicken feet and fried snake in Zengcheng, 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 with a kosher Jewish mother. 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

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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 especially 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—and they began to speak in tongues just like the disciples did on the day of Pentecost! This extravagant display of God's love convinces Peter that the Holy Spirit doesn't care about skin color, foreign accents, clothing styles or what foods we eat.

Ever since Peter bravely crossed that threshold into Cornelius' house and broke the barrier between Jew and Gentile, Christian missionaries have been crossing barriers of race, language and culture to take a globally relevant message of 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 pour into each 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 is in your own backyard.

Are you willing to go to the house of Cornelius? Have you renounced all fear of people who aren't like you? Have you become so safe and comfortable in your own culture that you look down on others? Is your distaste for another culture—even its food—blocking the flow of God's compassion in your heart?

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I'm praying that the Holy Ghost will freshly baptize us in the same zeal that compelled a kosher Jewish disciple like Peter to face his cultural prejudices. No matter what our backgrounds, one day we will all sit down to the marriage feast of the Lamb—and the food on that menu will be heavenly.

J. Lee Grady is contributing editor of *Charisma* and author of the new book [The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale](#). You

can follow him on Twitter at

[leegrady](#)

. You can join our reader forum (below) to share your experiences with exotic foods on the mission field.