

## Dracula, Tragedy, and the Palm Sunday Passion

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The first Bible story that speaks of children goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel were the offspring of Adam and Eve, and out of **jealousy** Cain killed Abel. Children have been killing each other ever since, and yet, we are surprised by violence among our children today as if it is something new, something unusual.

We don't have to go very far in our own nation's history to remember the horror of our own children killing each other in the Civil War, and if you are of the opinion, like me, that all the people of the earth are our family, then, there has never really been much of a break from violence.

One of the most peculiar cases of bloodshed was in the 1400's. A man by the name of Vlad Tepes, or Vlad the Impaler was a ruler in Eastern Europe. You might know him by another name, Vlad Dracula. The name "Dracula" in Romanian means "dragon" or "devil," and he, himself, signed that name in order to elicit fear from his subjects, and to warn

other rulers who might try to threaten his reign. The only way to really describe this devil is to say that he was bloodthirsty. He impaled people on large stakes outside of his castle walls and at the borders of his country. Christian monks, foreign dignitaries, even his own people were impaled, either out of anger or out of fear of losing power and control. It was a warning that said, “Do not cross me!”



It becomes easy to see how legends of vampires evolved from this terrible person. Tearing flesh and taking blood, the very essence of a person's life, as an attempt to prolong his own life and to solidify his power and dominance. It is my opinion that virtually all of the problems in human history is because the typical response of human beings is to

take. Take. Take. Take. Fast forwarding to today, not much has changed, has it? Children are still taking the lives of other children. It is tragic. TRAGIC! Even in our schools, innocent lives are being taken.

These shootings have led to much debate in the political realm. We must take away guns, any argue, but wait, you can't take my rights. I am not here to tell you which side you should take in this debate or how to vote. The truth is, that there are good and valid reasons for both viewpoints. Instead, my job is to point out the operative word, Take! Everything is about taking.

However, as people of God, we know there is another way. A different approach, other than taking. Our story is that in the beginning . . . God gave us life. When the people became slaves in Egypt . . . God gave freedom. In the desert, when they cried for water . . . God gave water. And when food was needed, God gave food. The Almighty gave the people a wonderful land in which to settle and the opportunity to prosper. And when another country came and TOOK it from them . . . God gave them a chance to return, to rebuild and try again. God gives, that is what our Lord does. A giver, not a taker.



# Exodus

And one of the reasons that we know Jesus to be from God is because, in much the same way, Christ was a *giver*. Christ *gave* sight to the blind, *gave* healing to those who were sick. Jesus *gave* wine at a wedding and *gave* life again to Lazarus. Our Lord *gave* powerful teaching, and ultimately . . . *gave* himself.

We experienced the fullness of this giving as part of Palm Sunday. This year the story seemed somewhat different to me. What was new is the understanding that Jesus endured every possible emotion that we can have as a human being, and *gave* himself to meet the people in those circumstances and those emotions. The story begins on the mountain with people singing and shouting songs of praise, “Hosanna in the highest!” So, Jesus knows what it feels like to be “on top of the world”.

To be the popular kid in school, or the successful person in business or academics that everyone looks up to. Christ understands the triumph and the struggles of success. But then, as Christ descended down that mountain for that final week, he was betrayed by one of his very own friends. Most of his other friends let him down and scattered. People took his clothes and they cried out Crucify . . . so as to take his life. Jesus knew every form of bullying and temptation. He knew physical pain, emotional pain, and on the cross when he cried out, “Why have you forsaken me,” it demonstrated that he also knows what it means to be in spiritual pain. In all of those situations, Jesus continued to give. Christ gave his back to be whipped Gave his face to be spit upon. Gave his head to be crowned, initially with shame, but eventually with glory. Jesus gave his hands and feet to be pierced. Finally, Jesus gave forgiveness. Even though no one asked, “Forgive them,” he said, “For the know not what they do.” The message of Christ is one of giving. In this world filled with taking, the response of God is to give.



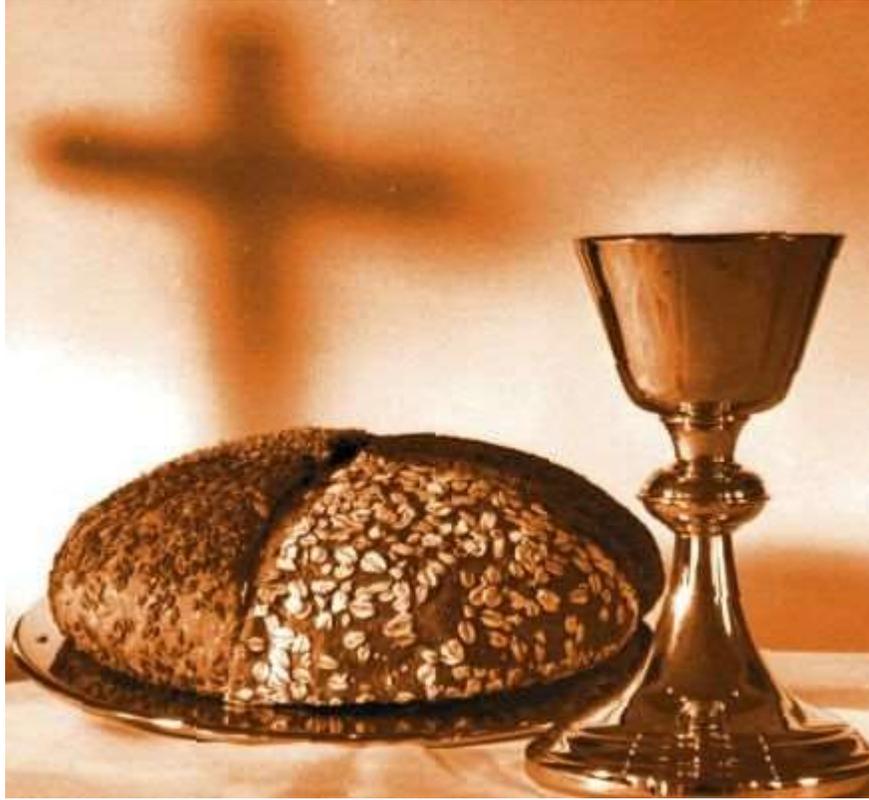
As I think about the tragic taking of flesh and blood in our schools, I’ve been wondering how we can respond more like Christ, by giving. Because, like our God, we want to be life-givers rather than life-takers. So we give support and care for those affected by these terrible shootings. And I believe there is a need to give preventative measures.

Identifying those young men who are troubled, and giving them the care they need. I believe that in virtually every one of those young people, something was missing in their life. To fill it, they started taking lives. That is, after all, the example from Cain and Abel, Vlad the Impaler, and so many more.

But God, God offers another way for us. Christ did not avoid the problems of this world like we tend to do so often, but engaged them with giving. So, rather than avoiding the uncomfortable temper tantrum of a fifth grader, engage that child with love and respect, find out what is needed, and give it, hopefully avoiding the escalation of those tantrums to the kind of violence we see all too often.

Now, the only way to give like God, is to be nourished by God. We've been speaking about the taking of flesh and blood. I wonder, how many of you thought of the bread and wine of Holy Communion? Because in it, Christ gives to us, the very essence of God.

It is important to point out an important difference: we are receiving, not taking. You take something that is not yours. You receive a gift, and this Bread and Wine are gifts of God, given for you. We feast on the flesh and blood of Christ, not because we are cannibals or vampires, but because we do not want to be the like the takers of this world, who, operating from anger and fear, leave a trail of blood and sorrow. Instead, we want to be a life-giver, like the God we seek to follow.



The truth is: there something missing in each and every one of us. People often try to fill what is missing by taking, taking pills, alcohol, or by taking life in one form or another. As people of God, however, we are not takers. But, in order to be like God, we must be filled with God. It is only after we comprehend that we , ourselves, are forgiven . . . that we can give forgiveness to others. In order to give the love of Christ, we must first be filled with that love. To give hope, we must be holding on to hope with both hands. So, I invite you, come to the altar where Jesus gives himself to you. Receive the Bread of Heaven and the Cup of Salvation. Receive God's blessing. Receive forgiveness, receive hope, receive the promise of everlasting life, receive the fullness of life in God, then be a giver of life to others. In this world of taking lives, be a life-giver through the power of our giving God.