



BULLETIN INSERTS

August 13, 2023 – Pentecost 11 (A) Jonathan Daniels

Jonathan Daniels' name resonates as one of the civil rights heroes and martyrs of our time. Giving his life at the early age of 26, Jonathan Daniels dedicated himself completely to his work, both inside and outside of The Episcopal church.

Born March 20th, 1939 in Keene, New Hampshire, Daniels grew up devoutly religious. Drawn to the rich system of traditions and rituals, Daniels became a practicing Episcopalian early in his life. This same desire for tradition, order, and organization led him to attend the Virginia Military Institute where he eventually graduated as valedictorian of the class of 1961. A fellowship that would finance his graduate studies then led him to Harvard University's English literature department. Not long after entering Harvard, Daniels discovered that his true calling was for ministry, so he left to pursue the priesthood.

Less than a year later, Daniels began his studies at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the epicenter of a world of social activism. Meanwhile, the southern portion of the United States found itself in the midst of chaos with protests, killings, and racism running rampant. Minister and activist Martin Luther King, Jr. called upon northern clergy to go to Selma, Alabama, one location experiencing some of the worst of these atrocities.

Jonathan Daniels decided to answer this call and moved to Selma, Alabama in the early 1960s. His time there changed his life forever. He became passionate about civil rights work and was involved in as many ways as he could.

In August of 1965, he participated in a voters' rights demonstration in Fort Deposit, Alabama where authorities arrested him. On Friday, August 20th, 1965, he was released from the county jail without warning and without bail. Daniels and other released activists walked across the street to buy soda at the corner store. Thomas Coleman, local and volunteer deputy sheriff, blocked their way and ordered them off the property while wielding a shotgun. He aimed his gun at 17-year-old Ruby Sales, an African-American activist. Daniels instinctively pulled her back and stepped into the line of fire, dying instantly but saving Ruby's life. Coleman stood before an all-white jury facing charges of manslaughter, not murder, and was acquitted of all charges.

While Jonathan Daniels' life was cut dramatically short by an act of violence, his heroic legacy of selflessness and compassion lives on in schools, history, and the Church, even today. The Episcopal Church made Jonathan Daniels an official martyr of the church and added him to the Lesser Feasts and Fasts calendar of commemorations in 1994, designating August 14th, the day of his arrest, for his feast.

