

CLUB SODA TASTE TEST BEER-SPIKED MUSTARD FINDING THE BEST JIGGER

imbibe

LIQUID CULTURE

Simple Cocktails

A 4-ingredient
Challenge

Easy
Homemade
Sodas

A New Orleans
Cocktail Tour

America's Best
Cream Ales





departments

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A Priest Walks into a Bar

For Father Bill Dailey, hospitality is the key to success in both priesthood and bartending.

It's not often that you see a priest in Roman collar at a bar. The profundity implied by a man of the cloth is not always easily reconciled with the salacity of a bar scene. But Father Bill Dailey is a regular at some of the best bars in the country. The 41-year-old Catholic priest and lawyer has become a spiritual voice for the cocktail crowd, regardless of denomination or devotion. He has drawn together parallels between the priesthood and bartending—fellowship, ritual and hospitality—and in addition to being honorary chaplain for the D.C. Craft Bartenders Guild, he has presented at Tales of the Cocktail on the historic role alcohol has played in the development of religious ceremonies and the spirituality of hospitality.

Story by Derek Brown
Photo by Matthew Gilson



Father Bill Dailey at
Barrelhouse Flat in Chicago.



Father Bill Dailey continued

How did a priest end up immersed in an industry more often associated with sinners than saints? Like many prominent bartenders, Dailey is a tour de force. While he strikes a quiet stance, it's in conversation where he becomes animated, weaving in and out of topics and arguments grounded in both theology and humanities. Speaking with him is an exercise in literary and philosophical prowess, and those of us who have issued a challenge to Dailey have often left feeling bested. Many of his connections to bartending were born from these discussions. Nearly all of them involved a cocktail in hand.

His first thought of joining the priesthood was as a youth while admiring his family's parish priest in Warren, Ohio, Father Joseph Malik. But it wasn't entirely because of Father Malik's presentation of the gospel—Father Malik would also come by the Dailey family's house to watch boxing and drink Scotch. Dailey remembers being struck by his father pouring Scotch, which was not a common pour in his household. Father Malik was clearly someone special.

Dailey attended Notre Dame as an undergrad, where he received a philosophy degree, and after a stint as a lobbyist in Washington D.C., he returned to earn a Master of Divinity. His next stop was New York City, where he earned a law degree from Columbia University. For him, New York was an extraordinary place to live as a priest. "[The congregation] drew better preaching out of me," he says.

That became especially true of the rectory where Dailey lived, adjacent to Holy Trinity at 82nd and Broadway. The parish was run by Monsignor Thomas Leonard and was a true house of hospitality—Monsignor Thomas loved to throw parties for parishioners and guests, and the dinner table opened up every night to group discussion. That experience helped fix Dailey's mind on how to live as a priest and interact with the community at large. "My role as a priest is to make people feel at home in the world," he says.

Dailey began holding his own gatherings for parishioners and fellow law students after realizing that many of the socials organized by his law school consisted of discounted drinks and chicken wings. He started a reading club that served wine and cheese and even tried making Sidecars. When he finished school and moved to Washington D.C. to work for a law firm in 2007, the rectory he lived in didn't have communal meals, so he often had dinner at the Tabard Inn near Dupont Circle, where he quickly found a community among the inn's bartenders and other regulars. "The places where I have become a regular I was a short-term resident," he says. "...Without ties, as a traveler, you are looking for fellowship. If you have good news, you want to celebrate. If you've had a bad day, you don't want to be alone."

His experience with the Tabard led him to seek out similar spots in Washington D.C. and landed him at bars such as Bar Pilar, the Gibson and Cork. Around the same time, I met Dailey at the Tabard Inn. A Catholic myself, we found common ground in cocktails and catechism. But our professional collaboration

began when Dailey attended the D.C. Craft Bartenders Guild Repeal Day Ball in 2008 as a member of our host committee, and his role as chaplain was soon cemented. The following year, his expertise was put to use when the Guild visited the grave of legendary bartender George A. Williamson who invented the Rickey. Williamson was a devout Catholic, and I asked Dailey the most respectful way to honor Williamson's contribution to the cocktail world, graveside. Dailey agreed to commemorate the grave with a prayer.

Dailey was once again called to New York in 2009 as a visiting scholar at Columbia Law School. There he visited a bar at the epicenter of the New York bartending community for late-night drinking, The Randolph at Broome. He met Jason Littrell who admits that though he's not a religious person, "The first time at The Randolph he was wearing his Roman collar ... I had a nervous respect for him. He refused to give me any direction aside from 'stirred.' I forget what I actually made him, but if it wasn't his speed, he quietly suffered through it."

Dailey enjoyed the drink enough to visit Littrell regularly at The Randolph and later Death & Co., where Dailey met even more New York bartenders and learned of new spots in the Lower East Side. "I met people whose broad intellectual interests and engagement thoroughly infused their hospitality—from teaching me and my guests about the nature and history of spirits to introducing me to their own friends in the industry or elsewhere if they thought there was a potential for a meaningful connection."

These days, Dailey is stationed in South Bend, Indiana, where he's a professor of law and a dorm rector at Notre Dame. He still finds fellowship at local bars and regularly visits a slew of Chicago's finest, including Barrelhouse Flat, The Aviary, The Whistler and Sable. But most of his drinks are made in his apartment, where he introduces fellow priests and professors to classic cocktails like the Savoy Tango (composed of sloe gin and applejack) and 2:1 Martinis. "Promising top scholars a world-class and educational drinking experience has proven a good way to get bible scholars in the [same] room with architects, engineers and legal historians," he says.

He admits to loving playing toastmaster to those kinds of gatherings, taking cues from some of the bartenders he's admired. "I'm entirely indebted to my friends in the bartending community for having at least half a clue about keeping the party going and helping the conversation to be lively and eclectic," he says.

Dailey isn't worried that people might misinterpret his interest in cocktails, and some of the country's best bartenders couldn't be happier to have him visit their bars. "I'm sure a lot of people may be surprised to discover how a priest has endeared himself to the bartender community," says New York bartender Jim Meehan of PDT. "But... [Dailey's] crusade closely parallels our mission to introduce our guests to our craft through hospitality." ■

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Louisiana Sunrise Recipe

1 Shot Rougaroux White Rum
1 Fresh squeezed satsuma
1 kumquat - Muddled
6 drops Bittermens 'Elemakule
Tiki Bitters

*Pour ingredients into a shaker
with ice. Shake; ice glass and
pour ½ oz grenadine over ice.
Pour shaker ingredients over
ice and serve.*

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