

The Bread of Life



Recently I cooked a loaf of wholemeal bread. My hands kneaded the dough and an oven baked it. As it was a few years since I had made my last loaf of bread, I took a little while to find my recipe and remember how I tweaked the directions to fit with adding honey instead of sugar, and olive oil in the place of butter. However, my body needed no prodding to recall how to do the kneading, nor did it forget the delicious aroma that filled the kitchen as the bread cooked. In fact, the smell was so pleasurable that I paused to deliberately enjoy it and thank God for it. Eventually I cut a slice of the loaf to eat with butter and strawberry jam. My body savoured the taste!

Bread is a good symbol for food in general, and reminds us that food and water are essential for the lives of human bodies. But, if we are to be fully alive, we also need 'food' to nourish our minds and souls.

Each evening at dusk, I lock up my hens. Then I look towards the west to see if there is a sunset visible. If there is, I delight in it and praise God whose creative life shines through its ever changing beauty and colour. Briefly I lose myself in the sunset. It provides 'food' that nurtures my life.

We can all relate to nature and appreciate special moments. It may be that we stop to gaze at a delicate flower, or listen to a group of magpies singing in a Gum tree. For me, there are also occasions when the small Jack Russell dog that lives next door squeezes her little body under the fence and rushes to greet me. I feel affirmed in our relationship in which God's life is revealed.

Relationships, particularly with other people, can feed our lives. When I unexpectedly see someone I know in an Aged Care Facility or in the street and his or her face lights up, I am uplifted. The result of our meeting is that both of our lives benefit and grow in God's life of love. Should such meetings not take place because one of us turns away from the other, it is like a death—a refusal of life for both of us.

In John 6: 48 and 51, Jesus speaks about himself as 'the bread of life' and 'the living bread'. These are important and meaningful images, as bread is not only felt, smelt, and seen, but is also tasted and eaten, feeding our bodies, giving them life and becoming part of us.

As Christians we believe that God, who created us out of love, shares God's life with each person and with the whole of creation. In Christ we are, whether we are aware of it or not, in a loving living relationship with God and all beings. Further, I believe God wants us to experience and share God's eternal life of love in relationships here and now on earth. If we desire and develop such relationships, they will change us and the way we look at and relate to the food we eat, the animals that share our planet, and other people.

We are to care for our natural environment in the best way we can, for its own sake and for other people in the future. We will try not to waste food or pollute waterways. Living in a way that reduces greenhouse gases will be important. We may also support those caring for certain species of animals in danger of extinction.

When we accept that each human being is made in God's image and offered abundant life by Jesus, as in John 10:10, we shall want our actions towards others to be kind and loving. Close relationships can give us much pleasure, but also suffering, for we will share the pain of others.

Sometimes we are disgusted with the behaviour of people and it is difficult for us to relate to them in a loving way. We want to avoid them and ignore their very existence. How can we love and share our life and God's with such human beings? We have a choice. With God's help we can painfully decide to offer them the bread of life and even receive life from them, or reject them and prevent God's life from growing in them and us.

When baking bread we knead it and rest it in a favourable warm place allowing the yeast within to grow and raise the dough. Then we knock it down, knead it again and form it into a loaf which again rises before it is cooked. Finally we cut the loaf into slices to be taken and eaten, giving life to others and, amazingly, to ourselves.



To be fed by Jesus, the living bread, can take time, effort and God's help. Nourishment may be obtained through the words of Scripture that we try to apply to our lives; in experiences and relationships that form us; and by partaking with others in the service of Holy Communion.

When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we receive and share the same bread and wine, the life of Jesus. It enters our bodies and becomes part of us. When, as followers of Jesus, we engage with others in relationships, we are changed, broken, hurt, yet somehow filled with peace and love. Are we, as living members of Christ's body, willing to be taken, broken and used by God as life-givers to feed others with the bread of life in God's beloved world?

*Sr Dr Helen CSC
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