

Invitation to a Meal

With a Reflection for You and Your Child Celebrating First Eucharist

Throughout the Gospels, it seems that many significant events and important teachings are set within the context of a meal. And so it is appropriate that our own most significant encounter with Jesus takes place in a meal setting as well—in the Eucharist. A look at the role that meals played in Jesus' life helps us recognize the significance of the Eucharistic meal for us today.

- **INVITATION** Stories of forgiveness and peace are expressed in stories of meals. Jesus' statement to the tax collector Zacchaeus, "Come down quickly for today I must stay at your house," was heard by Zacchaeus as an invitation to conversion and to share what he had with the poor. Jesus makes clear that his invitation is open to everyone.
- **RESPONSE** In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells us that many had been invited to a great feast only to send excuses for not coming on the day the feast was to begin. The host then invited the poor and lame—those who would never be invited to a feast—to come in and enjoy his food. Jesus makes clear in this story that God's invitation requires a response.
- **RECOGNITION** At the end of Luke's Gospel we find the account of the dejected disciples on the road to Emmaus. They thought Jesus was dead. Although Jesus came to walk with them and tried to explain the meaning of his death and the promise of the Resurrection to them, they did not understand; they didn't even recognize him! But it was in the breaking of the bread that they were able to see him again. And in sharing that meal they were energized to go to the others and proclaim the new life that Jesus promised.
- **JESUS' GIFT OF HIMSELF** And, most important, it was in the context of a meal that Jesus took bread and wine and, after giving thanks, said: "This is my body which is for you...This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 COR 11:24-25). Jesus is giving us his very self and will be with us always in this meal.

Reflecting on these stories helps us name some key themes that are to be present in our celebration of Eucharist: the invitation to share in the life of Jesus through the Eucharist is open to us. The invitation requires a response from us—not simply showing up but living lives that place our relationship with Jesus at the center. Through the Eucharistic meal, we are united in Jesus' death and Resurrection and sent to proclaim the reality of God's love for all people in word and action.

Reflection on the Gospel of John

Read the following Gospel story, based on John 6:1-14, with your child. Pause throughout to let your imaginations explore what the people in the story might have been thinking and feeling. Share your reflections with one another.

One day, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. He wanted to be alone, to take time to rest and pray. But a large crowd came searching for him. When the people found Jesus they pleaded, “Jesus, teach us more about the kingdom of heaven.”

If you had been part of the crowd, what reasons would you have given for following Jesus?

By the time Jesus had finished teaching, it was late and everyone was very hungry. The disciples were worried.

“Jesus,” Philip said, “These people have no food.” “Feed them,” Jesus said. “But Jesus, there’s no food here,” Philip cried. “Shouldn’t we send them all away before darkness? No one could feed this crowd. There are just too many.”

Philip seemed worried. If you were Philip, what would you have been thinking? How would you have responded?

One of the disciples, Andrew, said to Jesus, “There is a boy here who has a small basket of food. But what good is one basket of food for so many?” Jesus turned and asked the boy, “What do you have in your basket?” The boy gave his basket to Jesus. Inside were five loaves of bread and two small fish. “It’s my supper, Jesus, but you may have it.”

Imagine that you were the child. Do you think you would have offered to share your food?

Jesus thanked the boy and said, “Have the people prepare for a meal.” The people sat down. There were about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves of bread, lifted them up to heaven and gave thanks. He blessed them and broke them into small pieces. “Here,” he said. “Serve this food until everyone has eaten as much as they want.” The disciples walked up and down the hillside, feeding everyone until they were full. The disciples ate too. When they had had their fill, Jesus said to his disciples, “Gather the fragments so that nothing will be wasted.” Twelve baskets were filled to overflowing with the left over bread and fish. When the people saw this, they said, “Jesus is truly the One who is to come to save the world.”

Jesus took the child’s gift. He gave thanks. He blessed it and broke it. And thousands were fed. How do you think the boy felt when he saw this? What gifts do you have that you can share with others?

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