

AGAPE MEALS IN EARLY CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The Agape feast (also called Love feast) was a loosely structured early Christian service that typically included a social fellowship meal. Because food was often eaten, it is often presumed to have a connection with the liturgical Eucharist. If indeed connected, it was separated from the Eucharist by the early second century, when Pliny the Younger reported that the Christians regularly met "on a stated day" in the early morning to "address a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity", and later in the day would "reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal". Neither Scripture nor any documents of the early church ever equate the Agape with the Eucharist and any putative relationship between them had virtually ceased by the time of Cyprian (died 258). Early canons of the church restricted the social meals of Agapes from being given in church sanctuaries. The prominence of the Agape in the church Fathers suggests that this informal service was second in church life only to the devotional Lord's Supper.

An Agape Meal is a very happy way for Christians to enjoy each other's company!

This Fellowship Meal not only goes back to the early days of the church (believed to date between 50 and 120 A.D. and recorded in the Didache), it was brought into the church from the parent-faith, Judaism. The meals enjoyed by Jewish religious fraternities, the meals described in the Gospel stories, the meals in Jewish homes today on Sabbath Eve or Festival, records in early Christian writings all help us to understand what an Agape is. In modern times the Agape was revived by the Moravians, and through them by the Methodists, and also by early Evangelicals under the name "Love-Feast".

Such meals could be held in the evening, like the Jewish 'shabbat' meal when the candle-lighting takes on a special significance if it is literally dark outside... There is another kind of darkness around us, but the light of Christ will still overcome it! Some of us may be living with our families so can celebrate together, but many, like me, will be unable to get together with our loved ones in

person. I believe that Jesus' words about 'when two or three are gathered together' will cover us too when we take part in this gathering virtually. This service is designed to be shared out amongst all who are gathered – including children!

- ***Have ready bread, drink (wine or grape juice or any other drink),***
- ***a candle (and some way of lighting it)***
- ***and a cross on a table in front of you, next to your screen if possible.***

There are spoken words and please decide at the beginning who will read which parts

Reader One

Reader Two

and Reader Three for Scripture

Reader One: Jesus Said: *"Where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them."*

Matthew 18:20 (NIV)

CALL TO THE LOVE FEAST (AGAPE MEAL)

Reader Two: Out of darkness came light

All: And the power of God was revealed in the running wave and the flowing air, in the quiet earth and the shining stars.

Reader One: Out of the dust came life;

All: And the image of God was revealed in the human face and the gentle heart, in the warmth of flesh and the depth of soul

Reader Two: Out of justice came freedom;

All: And the wisdom of God was revealed in the need to grow and the will to love, in the chance to know and the power to choose.

Reader One: And God looked at the creation,

All: And Behold, it was very good.

Reader Two: *'I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.'* Psalm 34:1

A PRAYER OF ADORATION

All: I will keep on thanking God With constant words of prayer. I will glory in the living God: The humble will hear and be glad.

Reader One: Let us pray.

Living God, our loving parent; you cherish your creation and We praise you With earth, air, water,

fire: in our element as your children, We praise you..

With our lips, with our lives, in all our diversity, each one made in your image, We praise you. Because, in Jesus, you came to share our human lives, our sorrow and joy,

We praise you. Because your Spirit is at work today: encouraging, enabling, surprising us, We praise you. Poor as we are, you give us hope. Salt of the earth, you give us meaning and purpose and We praise you. **All: Amen.**

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PRAYER OF CONFESSION (Mark 9.50)

Reader Two: Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it?

All: Giving God, you blessed us with saltiness, But we became bland.

Reader One: You trusted us with your Word,

All: But we did not keep it.

Reader Two: You lit a flame in our midst,

All: But we hid it under formality, Smothered it with our fears.

Reader One: God, in your mercy:

All: Forgive us.

(silence)

Reader Two: Forgiving God, we believe that you have called us

All: To be salt and light;

Reader One: That you offer us time and space and strength

All: To begin again.

(silence)

Reader Two: Giving and forgiving God,

All. We thank you.

Reader One: Have salt in yourself and be at peace with one another.

All: AMEN

Reader Two: Jesus Said: *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* John 8:12 (NIV)

Light the candles. *Others joining virtually should light their candles at the same time.*

We all say: You are welcome to this house. May the Lord give us a happy time together. Let us offer a prayer over the candle.

Reader One: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Reader Two: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Reader One: We give thanks to God for light: the light that shines from the candle, sign of Christ our Risen Lord: the light we give each other as we share our joy, our trust, our hope. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

The Peace

Reader One: Lord we thank you

That through Your death and resurrection, mercy and truth have met together

Justice and peace have kissed each other

So we may live together in love Jesus said: *"My Peace I Give You"* *Let us offer each other a sign of peace*

The Peace is shared virtually

Reader One: "Peace be with you" and **All reply** "and also with you"

Song and scripture reading, meditation or homily

INTRODUCTION TO SHARING THE FEAST

Reader One: At our tables we come as brothers and sisters in the Holy Family of God. Taste and see that God is good.

Sharing; *please have your wine and bread ready*

Reader Two: Be present, be present, Lord Jesus, as you were in the midst of your disciples; and make yourself known to us as we share this food together: for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. **All: Amen.**

Reader One: *We “break bread” – share our food and drink together;*

Pause while we do this and Enjoy our time together

Reader Two: *we give thanks and say the prayer that Jesus taught us:*

All: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Sending out with a Blessing

Reader One: Loving God, bless all who have gathered round our shared table (virtually) God bless each of us and in our times of need may we find a table spread in the wilderness and companions along the way. May we know the fullness of Your presence at every meal and in all our sharing.

All: Amen.

All: Jesus is risen!

All: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Epilogue

Sister Margaret Basso, a spiritual retreat Reader, once said, "When the bread is broken open for us, that is Eucharist. When we break ourselves open to each other, that is also Eucharist."

"Perhaps that is why something remarkable happens when people sit down to eat together. We share food and conversation. We become a part of each other's lives. We break ourselves open to one another".

May this be true for all of us.



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