

The Parish of Felixstowe

St John the Baptist with St Edmund



The Food He Ate

An Agapé Meal with Jesus

An Agapé Meal

The word, *agapé* (ἀγάπη) is the Greek word used in the New Testament for the highest and broadest kind of self-giving Love, the kind of Love that is our source, our true life in this life and our eternal reality. We have no word capable of describing the God who is Love in any language, but *agapé* seems to come the closest to approximating the limitless and overflowing fullness of Divine Love.

An Agapé Meal, or Love Feast as it is also called, is an ancient tradition of table fellowship. The practice of holy hospitality precedes the Church, going back to the hospitality Abraham showed to his three unknown visitors (Genesis 18). In the early Church, agape meals were a time of fellowship for People of the Way as the earliest Christians were called.

The Eucharist, our Christian sacramental celebration instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, was often a part of these meals. Probably between the late 1st century and the mid-3rd century, the two feasts became separate. Its use has waxed and waned over the centuries, but *Love Feasts* enjoyed a revival in the 18th century in the Methodist Church with the Wesley brothers, particularly in the United States of America and partly because of a lack of ordained ministers to celebrate Holy Communion in the New World.

An Agapé Meal is a ritual meal that does not require an ordained person and yet acknowledges our *koinonia* (κοινωνία) which in Greek means community and sharing. Such meals seek to strengthen communal bonds and foster a spirit of harmony, goodwill and congeniality. The meal is another way of living out Jesus' *mandatum* (or commandment) that we love one another with the same self-emptying love, mercy and forgiveness with which he has loved and still loves us.

The aim of this version of the meal is to experience the life of Jesus and God's call on our lives through the tastes experienced by Jesus and his disciples as well as by listening to the Words of Jesus.

*Before the meal the table is set with The Starter.
A plate with small amount of each of the foods is set at the Leader's place.
In the centre of the table, on a separate cloth, is placed a chalice, a cruet
of wine, and a loaf of bread.*

The Welcome

We come to serve One God,
who calls us to unity as the family of God.
Wherever we are,
even when apart,
we are one people,
followers of Jesus,
united in Him.

Grace, mercy and peace be with you
And also with you.

The Greeting

Candles are lit.

Out of darkness came light;
and the power of God was revealed
in the running wave and the flowing air,
in the quiet earth and the shining stars.

Out of the dust came life;
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

Out of justice came freedom;
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.

And God looked at the creation,
and behold, it was very good.

The Starter

*As the meaning of each of the foods is explained
the guests have a small taste of them.*

In the Vineyard

*Everyone pours wine (or other celebratory drink) to those next to them.
Glasses are refilled as desired. The Leader holds up some grapes.*

Reader: Jesus said, I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. *(John 15v1-2)*

Leader: Blessed are you Lord God, Ruler of all
You give us the fruit of the vine to gladden our hearts.
May we bear the fruit of your love for all people.
Blessed be God for ever.

All eat of the grapes.

In the Desert

The Leader holds up 'locusts' and honey.

Reader: And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to meet John and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals.' *(Mark 1v5-7)*

Leader: Blessed are you Lord God, Ruler of all
Even in the desert of our sin you provide for us.
May your word to us always taste sweet.
Blessed be God for ever.

All eat of the 'locusts' and honey

At the Lakeside

The Leader holds up some fish.

Reader: As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea - for they were fishers. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.' *(Matthew 4v18-19)*

Leader: Blessed are you Lord God, Ruler of all
For you have called each of us to follow you.
Make us to be joyful in our service,
and eager to leave all to follow you.
Blessed be God for ever.

All eat of the fish.

In the Garden

The Leader holds up figs and bread.

Reader: On the following day, when they came from Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' *(Mark 11v12-14)*

Leader: Blessed are you Lord God, Ruler of all
You have commanded us to bear good fruit at all times.
May we be ever ready to proclaim your Name.
Blessed be God for ever.

All eat of the figs and bread.

The rest of The Starter is eaten

The Meal

The Leader holds up a Bitter Fruit

Before we begin our meal we remember that the last thing our Saviour tasted before He died was sour vinegar.
As we taste this bitterness may each of us repent of our sins and rejoice in the salvation won for us on the Cross.

The Bitter Fruit is eaten in Silence.

Grace

We are invited to this table to share in this Feast.
Here we are brothers and sisters in the Holy Family of God.
Taste and see that God is good.

The Meal is served.

The Sharing of Bread and Wine

After the Meal has been eaten the table is cleared except for the chalice, cruet of wine and the Bread. The Leader reads of the Lord's Supper.

The Leader holds the bread in their hands.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

The Leader breaks the bread and passes it amongst the guests to eat.

The Leader pours wine into the chalice holds it in their hands.

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

The Leader passes the chalice amongst the guests who take a sip from it.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. *(1 Corinthians 11v23-26)*

Thanksgiving

Generous God

As we have shared this bread,
we give you thanks for our daily bread
for the food which delights and nourishes us
and for the companionship that sustains us.
We thank you for wine to quench our thirst
and for the Living Water with which you surprise
and enrich and transform our lives.

We give thanks for this feast in which all can share
a foretaste of the Holy Realm.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Rejoicing in the generosity of God,
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray.

**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.**

The Blessing

God bless each of us as we travel on.
In our times of need may we find a table spread in the wilderness
and companions for the journey ahead
and, until we meet again, may God hold us in the palm of his hand.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ.
Amen.

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