

*You give them
something to eat*

Mark 6:37



LIVING WITH DISRUPTION

The covid lockdowns bring disruption in all of our lives; for some the impact is enormously distressing, for others it is bearable even though we share a longing for the uncertainty to be over. While still in lockdown on this 17th Sunday of Ordinary time, the eucharistic themes of the readings may increase longings for the end of lockdown when we can once again gather in person and participate in the Eucharist. In Mark's version of *Feeding the Five Thousand* (6:30-44), when Jesus' disciples wanted to send the people away so that they could find something to eat, Jesus says to them, 'You give them something to eat.' (6:37). While we wait for Eucharist in real time, we can be fed from our generous tradition of prayer and from the wisdom of many spiritual guides.

JESUS IS PRESENT WITH US

Fr Thomas O'Loughlin, a priest of the UK diocese of Arundel and Brighton, reminds us of the promise of Jesus, 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am with them' (Mt 19:20) and of the ancient Christian saying expressed in the *Didache*, a first century guide for disciples; 'Wherever the things of the Lord are spoken about, there the Lord is present.' In the very smallest of gatherings perhaps on zoom, in a phone call or in prayer on our own, Jesus is with us.

A TIME FOR REFLECTION

In *Let Us Dream, the Path to a Better Future*, Pope Francis writes about 'stoppage' in our lives:

'A stoppage' can always be a good time for sifting, for reviewing the past, for remembering with gratitude who we are, what we have been given, and when we are going astray.

These are moments in life that can be ripe for change and conversion. Each of us has had their own 'stoppage', or if we haven't yet, we will someday: illness, the failure of a marriage or a business, some great disappointment or betrayal. As in the Covid lockdown, those moments generate a tension, a crisis that reveals what is in our hearts.

In every personal 'Covid' so to speak, in every 'stoppage,' what is revealed is what needs to change.

... What is the greatest fruit of a personal Covid? I'd say patience, sprinkled with a healthy sense of humour, which allows us to endure and make space for change to happen. (p 36)

SLEEPING WITH BREAD

HOLDING WHAT GIVES YOU LIFE

This is the title of a small book written about the Ignatian prayer of Examen. The authors state that this is the 'simplest book we have ever written. It is about asking ourselves two questions: For what am I most grateful? For what am I least grateful. These questions help us identify moments of consolation and desolation. For centuries prayerful people have found direction for their day and for their life.' (p 3)

The Examen is also very flexible and adaptive. It can be prayed to review your day or to focus on a particular issue. It is a way of becoming aware of where you are experiencing God's grace and goodness and where there is space in your life for growth.

Why is the book about the Examen called *Sleeping with Bread*? From page 1 of the book:

During the bombing raids of World War II, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But many of these children who had lost so much could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally, someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, 'Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow.'

THE EXAMEN PROCESS

Preparation

You may wish to light a candle. Be comfortable in the chair you are sitting in, place your feet flat on the floor, take a few deep breaths from the bottom of your toes, up through your legs, your abdominal muscles and your chest. Become aware of God's presence surrounding you; breathe in God's love, when you breathe out, fill the space around you with love.

1. Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are *most grateful*. If you could relive one moment, which one would it be? When were you most able to give and receive love today?

Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude you felt and receive life again from that moment.

2. Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are *least grateful*. When were you least able to give and receive love?

Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and allow God's love fill you just as you are.

3. Give thanks for whatever you have experienced.

You may wish to keep a prayer journal and write about your experience of prayer.

Adapted from p 30 *Sleeping with Bread*

For a guided Examen, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H90ueH0k358>

For additional Examen resources, go to:

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>

VISIONING A POST COVID TIME

Pope Francis sees Covid as a sign of our time, to which he applies the methodology of *See Judge Act* to the many social injustices of this time in his most recent encyclical on fraternity and social friendship, *Fratelli tutti*. He uses a slight variation on this methodology in *Let Us Dream*. Among the many ways of making dreams a reality on the other side of Covid, Pope Francis wants to develop the ancient practice of synodality of walking together, not only for the Church, but as a service to all humanity.

This synodal approach is something our world now needs badly. Rather than seeking confrontation, declaring war, with each side hoping to defeat the other, we need processes that allow differences to be expressed, heard, and left to mature in such a way that we can walk together without needing to destroy anyone. (p 82)

In the dynamic of a synod, differences are expressed and polished until you reach, if not consensus, a harmony that holds on to the sharp notes of its differences. This is what happens in music: with seven different musical notes with their sharps and flats a harmony is created that allows for the better articulation of the singularities of each note. Therein lies its beauty: the harmony that results can be complex, rich, and unexpected. In the Church the one who brings about that harmony is the Holy Spirit. (p 81)

The disruption of Covid has turned the tables, inviting us to stop, alter our routines and priorities, and to ask: What if the economic, the social and the ecological challenges we face are really different faces of the same crisis? What if they have a common solution? Could it be that replacing the objective of growth with that of new ways of relating will allow for a different kind of economy, one that meets the needs of all within the means of our planet?

... What is the Spirit telling us? What is the grace on offer here, if we can only embrace it; and what are the obstacles and temptations (p 60)