

Eating as a Sacred Obligation **[Deeper Sheet 8.09.09]**

Read 1 Corinthians 10v23-33

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul makes clear that one significant aspect of community is being sensitive to the community around you. In the intensely individualistic world of the 21st Century, Paul's words are profoundly countercultural. Couched in this communal encouragement are detailed instructions regarding food, specifically how to eat together. Food, it turns out, is extremely important in the Scriptures.

In Genesis chapter 2 God places Adam in the Garden of Eden, which means "paradise," in order to work and take care of it. In the Torah, the Hebrew verbs "to work" and "to take care of" are used almost exclusively to describe worship of God. In essence, Adam's act of worship was to take care of the garden. The first temptation in all of the Scriptures was the temptation to eat. In the garden stood two trees, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life isn't mentioned again in the Scriptures until Revelation 2v7: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." The biblical story begins and ends with eating: paradise lost and paradise regained.

Throughout the Scriptures, eating continues to play a central role in the story. In Matthew 26v26-28 Jesus takes bread and wine, symbols of his body and blood, and invites those around him to eat and drink. This very same practice became a vital experience for the early church. Three out of four requirements for Gentile converts in the early church had to do with eating. If eating has played such a central role in the text, then what does it mean to eat to the glory of God?

More than anything, eating to God's glory has to do with thanksgiving. Eating is an opportunity to recognize that everything is a gift and that God is the source of every gift. So we eat with thankful and grateful hearts. Many Christians begin a meal by asking God to bless the food. In the Jewish mind, God already has. So prayer at a meal is an opportunity to bless God for having blessed the food and for being the source of every good gift. What's more, in Eastern cultures, to share a meal is to share life together. Something happens when we eat together. It's an intimate act. There is conversation, laughter, debate, but more than anything there is human interaction: community. Eating to God's glory is also an opportunity to be mindful of what we eat and where what we eat comes from.

It's interesting to see the many ways in which eating is central to the biblical story. How mindful are you of the role that eating plays in your life?

In a culture obsessed with body image, it's easy to think of eating primarily in terms of its effect on the body. But we're whole people: body, mind, and soul. What effect do you think eating has on your mind and soul?

In what ways do we abuse or misuse the gift of eating?

Think of some of the meals you've shared with people over the years. Why do you think eating together is such a significant experience?

Communion, or the sacred meal, is rooted in the memory of what Jesus did: giving his body and pouring out his blood for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you eat this week, be rooted in the memory of Christ's sacrifice and bless God for being the source of every good gift.