
OPENING:

We generally begin a meal with a blessing, or prayer... tonight we are going to reflect on the meal we just shared, pausing and engaging with our senses as we bring our meal, and time of silence to a close.

Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and bring to mind the image of the meal you ate. Imagine its colors, textures and aromas wafting around you.

Think of all the words we have to describe our meals...

Amazing, appetizing, delightful, enticing, exquisite, divine, luscious, delicious, sweet, savory, mouth-watering, finger-licking, delectable, yummy, scrumptious, lip smacking, distinctive, spicy... to name a FEW. Yet how often do we use those same words to describe an experience of God?

Think about the elements of your meal and what these elements mean:

- bread: presence of divine, the body of the Christ we collectively represent
- butter and/or oils - we are anointed and we anoint each other, we acknowledge the sacredness of each person here
- Fruits and Vegetables: We grew up out of earth... we are each a creature of planet earth, living, breathing, growing, dying and emerging again in so many ways.
- Sweets: sweetness of life, reminder of being gentle with ourselves and others after difficult times
- Protein: a reminder we are here to nurture each other, a symbol of groundedness, stability and support
- Spices and seasonings: the diversity of the flavor of life, the uniqueness of each one of us and our experiences, yet a shared humanity at the same time

(silence while people recall, remember, bring to life in themselves)

- ***After each SENSE, a question for them to write ONE WORD answer on a piece of paper or index card***
- ***Perhaps have paper or index cards and markers on the table or in a basket nearby you bring out for this last piece.***

With the experience of the meal alive within yourself, we turn our attention to the 5 senses you have just brought to life. Just as each of our physical senses broadens the depth and texture of our physical life, so too do our spiritual senses draw our focus to experience all that God is.

The spiritual senses are sacred symbols for the physical sense, for of the activity of Spirit inviting us into communion. They prompt us to be more engaged with all the beauty, joy and suffering that is ever-present. Through prayer we develop our spiritual senses and we touch divine wisdom.

Let's start with SMELL...

Like pleasurable aromas to our external sense of smell, we are attracted to that inner experience of grace, to the center of our being. The spiritual sense of smell comes alive as our inner attraction for prayer and the silence, to be still and wait to be drawn into oneness with

loving attention. It's not that we are going to physically smell an aroma of Spirit, but rather it's as if the divine perfume is an irresistible and inescapable attraction to our encounter with our Source.

We long to know and belong with God, real, attentive and authentic. We experience the sweetness of this attraction as though Spirit were that delicious fragrance, like morning coffee, fresh flowers, or an ocean breeze, arising from within us and all around us.

What did you notice at this meal... take a moment and breathe in the meal you just had, and notice what lingers in the room. The fragrance brings the whole world into me.

Take a moment and reflect on this question and write ONE or TWO words on index card:

What scents are coming to you and what do you smell soulfully that reminds you that you are the Divine in expression?

Let's move to TOUCH...

Touch, which is a symbol for our closeness to the divine, that feeling of being embraced and belonging. The presence of God is not only an irresistible attraction, but through touch, we are unified in our inmost being, we experience oneness.

Touch opens us, heals us and ultimately brings profound peace.

What did you notice at this meal... take a moment remember what you touched, perhaps ate with your fingers, held someone's hand, held your own hands together, hugged another, held a fork and knife? Notice what feelings linger as you recall all the things you touched during this meal.

Take something from the table and hold it in your hand for a moment.

Take several moments and feel the object in your hands. Slowly explore it with your fingers: the shape, texture, temperature and size.

Take a moment and reflect on this question and write ONE or TWO words on index card:

As you notice how it physically feels, in what way does this mirror your experience or relationship with God, or Spirit? OR Which textures remind you of God's presence?

Let's move to TASTE...

Think for a moment about what you ate just minutes ago. See yourself taking a bite and remembering the tastes filling your mouth. The more we desire to taste our favorite treats, the more we activate an unbridled thirst for the food we love.

We begin to anticipate the pleasure we will experience by slowing down and allowing our mouth to enjoy the sensations. Too often we move through our meals in quick, unconscious ways. The divine presence infuses all its "flavors" whenever we consciously choose to slow down and pray. We taste Spirit wherever and however we gather to connect, listen and honor each other. In other words, taste symbolizes the most intimate experience of knowing the divine - here in our human form. Only then is our whole being rooted in God.

Close your eyes...what did you notice at this meal... take a moment remember what you tasted. Notice the sweet and savory flavors that linger as you recall all that you tasted during this meal.

Take a moment and reflect on this question and write ONE or TWO words on index card:

Describe the experience of God in a similar way... appetizing, delightful, luscious, delicious, sweet, mouth-watering, yummy, scrumptious, lip smacking, or spicy...

Let's move to HEARING...

The practice of hearing, is sitting quietly long enough to let go – allowing the external sounds to pull us inward, rather than trying to follow them with the activity of my brain. By letting go of the conscious mind and hearing our inner world we expand our capacity for attentiveness to God in our lives.

Peace begins by cultivating this practice, and becomes our way of being. Then we can leave our world with a legacy of peace. Slowly, through my spiritual sense of hearing, the sheer awareness of the divine presence in my life becomes more alive, overflowing into my ordinary, everyday life.

Close your eyes...what did you hear at this meal... sounds from outside, your own heartbeat, crunchy chewing, utensils ringing against the plate... notice the sounds lingering in the room from our shared meal...

Take a moment and reflect on this question and write ONE or TWO words on index card:

Which sound in this room, in your life, is a call to prayer, to be in the silence and listen to your inner world?

Let's move to SEEING...

More often than not our capacity for seeing requires us to rest in that stillness of prayer and wait for an opening in my heart. While resting in the silence offers these moments of opening, in truth, they happen everyday, in the most ordinary times - especially during meals.

So even though nothing around me ever really stops, and I don't live my life in the silence, I can prepare myself for seeing Spirit during the ordinary of my day. It's like building a faith muscle; we are readying ourselves to be open when we least expect it to see Spirit regardless of what's going on around us.

Look around the room... what did you see, what images do you recall from the meal? The food, colors of the chairs or clothing, decorations... notice the sights lingering in the room from our shared meal... or close your eyes and remember what you've seen during our meal

Take a moment and reflect on this question and write ONE or TWO words on index card:

Within the "ordinary" of the evening meal, what one extraordinary thing did you see during our shared time together eating in the silence?

Take the 5 cards you have, hold them in your hands, against your heart maybe, and breathe...

Each sense awakens us to an expanded world; each sense broadens the depth and texture of life. We are more open and alive to ourselves, more alive to our world and curious to what subtle invitations await as each sense is activated every moment.

Prayer is a foundational practice that brings me into relationship with the divine, spirit, the Christ, God, whatever you call it, through the senses. It is the practice through which God insinuates itself into my awareness, and continues to unfold and express as my spiritual attentiveness expands.

AMEN