



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Articles:

- 📖 Hunger in Christian Art
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 36-42)

- 📖 Love Serves
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 58-61)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:
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A Moment of Recognition

Anyone can take a dish of food to someone, but not everyone does this with love. Vincent de Paul taught the Daughters of Charity to serve others as we would serve Jesus Christ – always seeing our Lord in those who need us.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:13-35

Responsive Reading:[†]

Here, O our Lord, we see You face to face;
here would we touch and handle things unseen;
**here grasp with firmer hand eternal grace,
and all our weariness upon You lean.**
Here would we feed upon the bread of God,
here drink with You the royal wine of heaven;
**here would we lay aside each earthly load,
here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiven.**
Too soon we rise; the symbols disappear;
the feast, though not the love, is past and gone.
**The bread and wine are gone; but You are here,
nearer than ever, still our shield and sun.**
Feast after feast thus comes and passes by;
yet, passing, points to the glad feast above,
**giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,
the Lamb's great bridal feast of bliss and love.**

Reflection

At the center of Luke's account of the Emmaus supper is the wonderful moment of recognition when the disciples' "eyes were opened" to be aware of Christ's presence. Their insight followed immediately after Jesus "took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30-31). Perhaps they recognized Jesus' grateful and generous way of satisfying their physical and spiritual hunger, for these four gestures echo from the feeding of the multitude and the Last Supper (see Luke 9:16; 22:19).

Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* calls us to their table. "We are more than onlookers; we sit next to an unnamed disciple and participate in his moment of recognition," Heidi Hornik writes. "A delicately balanced bowl of fruit, laden with grapes, teeters precariously on the edge of the table, about to fall into our space. A scallop shell (a symbol of baptism) perches on the disciple's vest on the right, and he beckons us to join their fellowship."

Hornik suggests that like Caravaggio's painting, "Gerard Straub's photographs draw us toward a moment of recognition.... We recognize the face of Christ in the poor, and the ministry of Christ in the ministry to the poor and hungry." Straub portrays the hungry in the context of their poverty. A man in a Philadelphia soup kitchen eats with quiet dignity; a young man, his baseball hat askew on his head, gathers valuables in a Jamaican garbage dump; and a young girl among nondescript objects of her poverty, holds her doll dearly to her face and welcomes us into their private space. Next to another image of a man living on the streets of Philadelphia, that 'city of brotherly love,' the artist writes, "The essence of Jesus' message is:



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Make every stranger, no matter how poor and dirty, no matter how weak or unlovable, your neighbor. Tough message.”

Straub helps us to notice the hungry around us. In the U.S., food insecurity (defined by Bread for the World as “a condition of uncertain availability of or ability to acquire safe, nutritious food in a socially acceptable way”) affects 12 million households, with 35 million people. In relative terms, 11% of all households, containing 12% of the population, are food insecure.

In 1977 in downtown Los Angeles, Sister Alice Marie Quinn, D.C. had eyes to see the Lord in the faces of the elderly who could not get and fix food for themselves. From her concern grew the St. Vincent Meals-On-Wheels Program, which delivers over 2,400 meals daily to people who cannot leave their homes.

“God puts people in your path when He has a special mission for you,” Quinn says. After checking out several meal programs for the elderly, she found the food was not very good. “The seniors had to wait in line with their canes, walkers, and numerous parcels. Often the atmosphere was uninviting and even dirty, with little bugs flying around. I’m sure the food was nutritious, but it was not served with love.” In a small lunchroom, she set up “a lunch program befitting the Christ-like elderly poor.”

“While most of the people we serve are elderly, we do not have an age limit,” Quinn reports. “We are here for anyone who needs us. Our meals are hot, nutritionally balanced, and delivered with love. Our visit, brief as it is, may be more important than the food we deliver. Often we are the only people our clients will see all day. I think their greatest poverty is loneliness.”

Study Questions

1. How does the story of the Emmaus meal echo the feeding of the multitude and the Last Supper? (Compare the language and context of Luke 24:30, 9:16, and 22:19.) In Caravaggio’s *Supper at Emmaus*, do you find hints of one or both of these events?
2. How does Sandra Duguid’s poem, *Road to Emmaus (Food and Hunger*, p. 34), shed a different light on the Emmaus meal?
3. Does George Herbert’s poem, *Love bade me welcome (Food and Hunger*, p. 35), reveal another aspect of the Emmaus meal?
4. If we were, in the words of Vincent DePaul, “to serve others as we would serve Jesus Christ—always seeing our Lord in those who need us,” what practical differences would this make in our ministry to the poor and hungry?
5. “Do you want to honor Christ?” asks John Chrysostom (c. 347-407). “Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked” (*Food and Hunger*, pp. 34-35). How could we restate his point for today?
6. Do individuals or families in your congregation suffer food insecurity? If so, how does the congregation support them? How does your congregation help other people in the community who are food insecure?

Departing Hymn: “Where Is Bread?”

† “Here, O My Lord, I See Thee,” by Horatio Bonar (1855) (verses 1, 3, 6, and 7, altered).

A Moment of Recognition

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Luke 9:10-17
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (skim all)	Discuss your response to food insecurity
Questions 4 and 6	Questions (selected)	Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions 4, 5, and 6
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To interpret the Emmaus meal in the context of Luke's Gospel and through Christian art.
2. To explore what practical effects on ministry would result from our seeing Christ in the poor and hungry.
3. To examine how the congregation responds to hunger and food insecurity within its membership and in the surrounding community.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Food and Hunger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

"Rabbi Mendel wanted to know what heaven and hell looked like, and the prophet Elijah took him to show him. Elijah led him into a large room where a big fire was burning and where there was a large table with a huge pot of spoons that were longer than their arms, and because the people could not eat with these spoons, they sat around the table and starved. Rabbi Mendel found this room and what he saw there so terrible that he quickly ran outside.... Then Elijah took Rabbi Mendel to heaven and into another large room where a big fire was burning and where there was a large table with a big pot of steaming soup on it. And around the table sat people with the same spoons, but they did not have to starve because they were feeding each other" (told by Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity*).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by praying that the Spirit of God will guide members to experience Christ in the face of a family member, a friend, and a stranger this week.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 24:13-25 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

This study traces the idea of recognizing Christ in the stranger through the story of the Emmaus supper in Luke 24:13-25, the artwork by Caravaggio and Straub, and Sister Alice Marie Quinn's experience with the St. Vincent DePaul Meals-on-Wheels Program in Los Angeles. Consider extending the discussion to two sessions: the group might follow this interpretive thread in the Emmaus meal and the Christian art in the first study session, and then focus on how the recognition of Christ in the stranger impacts our response to the hungry in the congregation and community during a second session.

Study Questions

1. The same four actions – taking, blessing (or giving thanks), breaking, and distributing – are in Luke 24:30, 9:16, and 22:19, though in the feeding of the multitude Jesus gives the pieces of bread and fish to his disciples to distribute. Each story involves not only physical hunger, but also an acknowledged spiritual need.

While Caravaggio depicts the foods mentioned in the Last Supper – a goblet of wine and loaves of bread – he also includes a roasted bird and fresh fruit. (Another artistic tradition, because of the link with the feeding of the multitude, shows a fish and bread as the Emmaus meal.) The inviting gesture by the unnamed disciple on the right reminds us of the disciples' role in distributing the food to others in the multitude. Art historians usually identify the standing figure as an Emmaus innkeeper (not in Luke's account); he does not share in the moment of recognition and exhibits no reaction to Jesus' act of blessing the bread.

2. The spiritually deadening violence in the world around us can blind us to Jesus' presence, just as it blinded the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:18-20) – "There have been crucifixions, too, / in our town." Sandra Duguid vividly describes how we respond to such violence by retreating into "our well-hammered and nailed / kitchens and bedrooms." As the stranger, Christ, is "spelling out the history of the prophets / and a future: / Ought not Christ to have suffered these things / and to enter into his glory?", the poem raises the crucial, searching question, "Could our hearts still burn within us?"

Encourage members to reflect on how violence, as reported in the newspapers and on television, shapes how we see the poor and hungry in the world.

3. George Herbert's poem primarily has the Lord's Supper in view, but this makes it applicable to the invitation to join the Emmaus meal. We may resist the invitation of Love – the Christ – because in our sinful unkindness and ingratitude, we feel dirty and not "worthy to be here." The poet says we intentionally look away from Jesus in shame, for we have "marred" our eyes. In an amazing image, Herbert pictures the Lord taking our hand in his (nail-pierced?) hand, and reminding us "Who bore the blame?" The recognition of Jesus depends on an acknowledgement and acceptance of His grace.

Encourage members to reflect on how unkindness and ingratitude can deform our ability to see Jesus' welcoming glance in the poor and hungry in the world.

4. Sister Quinn suggests that we would respond to the poor and hungry with love, rather than merely out of a sense of justice or pity. We would be concerned for their loneliness as well as their poverty and hunger. Consider the loving details she describes of the St. Vincent DePaul Meals-On-Wheels program and *Hotel Dieu*.

Members might reflect on how Mother Theresa saw the poor: "Hungry not only for food – but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing – but naked for human dignity and respect. Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks – but homeless because of rejection. This is Christ in distressing disguise" (*Food and Hunger*, p. 33).

5. Read the entire quote from John Chrysostom (pronounced "CHRI-so-stom") in *Food and Hunger*, pp. 34-35. (The text of *Homily 50* is online at www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf110.html.) John Chrysostom encourages us to honor Christ by use our resources to care for the poor rather than to build elaborate sanctuaries with fine furnishings. How much money and time is "too much" to spend on a worship center?
6. Food insecurity encompasses "uncertain availability of or ability to acquire safe, nutritious food in a socially acceptable way" and can result from poverty, lack of knowledge, or inability to prepare food. It can be a transitory condition. How does the congregation know about the members' food needs? Is there a program to purchase, deliver, and prepare nutritious food? What food programs exist in the community? Are members involved individually or as groups? If so, how do they share these ministry experiences with the congregation?

Departing Hymn

"Where Is Bread?" is on pp. 44-45 of *Food and Hunger*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.