

Introduction to Agape Meal at Home for Holy Thursday

Wednesday of Holy Week (April 8, 2020)

Featured in today's prayer menu is a brief spiritual recipe for An Agape Meal (see page 4) – what early Christians did when they gathered. This is supplied to you a day in advance of Holy Thursday to give you time to connect with others and decide how you will link together on the telephone or computer to pray and feast.

Today at sundown, our Jewish sisters and brothers will begin celebration of Passover with the first Seder meal commemorating their liberation from Pharaoh's enslavement. God's intervention into human history has given hope down through the ages to people yearning to be free of yokes of oppression. Thus, it is no wonder that this Exodus story also gave hope to enslaved Africans and later generations afflicted by the terrors of the Jim Crow era. African American Christians have celebrated it in literature and song. The dialect poet Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote "An Ante-Bellum Sermon" in 1897, and thirty years later James Weldon Johnson also wrote of the Exodus in "Let My People Go" in his 1927 poetry collection, God's Trombones which featured seven poems capturing the content and the cadences of classic African American sermons. Predating both of these poems is the Spiritual "Go Down, Moses" which was written communally around 1800 by unknown bards. It was often sung as a coded signal on the Underground Railroad.

The Seder Meal is what Jesus and his disciples celebrated with each other. Its overarching meaning is "to remember" – which is what we do in our Eucharist: we remember our liberation from death and our dawn of everlasting life. As preparation for our experience of the Triduum, you are invited to read James Weldon Johnson's "Let My People Go" and also listen to a version of "Go Down, Moses" – here are two links:

- Harlem Gospel Singers version of "Go Down, Moses"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uz0sQDhx1rE>

- Paul Robeson's rendition of "Go Down Moses"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3OjHhLCDs>

Or you could sing it yourselves. Here are the lyrics:

Go Down, Moses

Traditional African American Spiritual

When Israel was in Egypt's land, Let My people go;
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, Let My people go;
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

The Lord told Moses what to do, Let My people go;
To lead the children of Israel through, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

The pillar of cloud shall clear the way, Let My people go;
A fire by night, a shade by day, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

As Israel stood by the water-side, Let My people go;
At God's command it did divide, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

When they had reached the other shore, Let My people go;
They sang the song of triumph over, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

Oh, let us all from bondage flee, Let My people go;
And let us all in Christ be free, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

An Agape Feast*

The Agape Feast can be used as a stand-alone ritual or it can be used at the beginning or end of a shared meal. “Agape” [pronounced ä-gä-pay] is the Greek Christian term denoting the highest form of love: “our love for God and God’s love for us.” In this time of “social distancing”, you may wish to do creative sharing of the prayers and meal with other households through the Internet or a smart phone.

Although not a Sacrament or even a “sacramental,” the practice of blessing, breaking and sharing bread is an ancient one, going back to the hospitality that Abraham and Sarah showed to their three visitors who turned out to be angels [Genesis 18:1-15]. Shared meals abound in the New Testament with numerous scenes of Jesus reclining at table at someone’s home. A key story in the Easter season is the meal in Emmaus where the travelers suddenly recognize the risen Jesus in the “breaking of the bread” [Luke 24:35]. Feel free to add familiar hymns at various points, such as those listed below. At the end, you could sing or recite the Lord’s Prayer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6IDRc8hZYA>

“Safe in His Arms” with Rev Milton Brunson & The Thompson Community Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PNnegn2ylQ>

“Walk in the Light” sung by Aretha Franklin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5A7aqIjz_o

“Sweet Holy Spirit” sung by North Carolina Mass Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-UdwIHSyqo>

* This worship aid for a home agape meal is based on a text included in the Iona Abbey Worship Book. Iona Abbey is one of the oldest Christian Centers in Western Europe, dating from 6th century. It is the island spiritual home of an ecumenical Christian religious order. The Secular Franciscan Order USA, an ecumenical-interfaith network, made it available on line, and we’ve adapted the outline for our use.

"Be Grateful" (1978) by Walter Hawkins and the Love Center Choir

WELCOME

Leader: We come as different people to serve One God, who calls us to unity as the family of God.

All: We are God's family.

CALL TO THE FEAST

Leader: Out of darkness came light

All: And the power of God was revealed

Men: in the running wave and the flowing air,

Women: in the quiet earth and the shining stars.

Leader: Out of the dust came life;

All: And the image of God was revealed

Men: in the human face and the gentle heart,

Women: in the warmth of flesh and the depth of soul

Leader: Out of justice came freedom;

All: And the wisdom of God was revealed

Men: in the need to grow and the will to love,

Women: in the chance to know and the power to choose.

Leader: And God looked at the creation,

All: And Behold, it was very good.

PRAYER OF ADORATION (Psalm 34:1)

Reader: I will keep on thanking God with constant words of prayer.

I will glory in the living God:

The humble will hear and be glad.

Leader: Let us pray. Living God, our loving parent; you cherish your creation and

All: We praise you.

Leader: With earth, air, water, fire: in our element as your children,

All: We praise you.

Leader: With our lips, with our lives, in all our diversity, each one made in your image,

All: We praise you.

Leader: Because, in Jesus, you came to share our human lives, our sorrow and joy,

All: We praise you.

Leader: Because your Spirit is at work today: encouraging,
enabling, surprising us,

All: We praise you.

Leader: Poor as we are, you give us hope; Salt of the earth, you give
us meaning and purpose and

All: We praise you.

Leader: Let those at the feast say....

All: Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION [taken from Mark 9:50]

Reader: Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can
you season it?

Leader: Giving God, you blessed us with saltiness,

All: But we became bland.

Leader: You trusted us with your Word,

All: but we did not keep it.

Leader: You lit a flame in our midst,

All: but we hid it under formality,

Smothered it with our fears.

Leader: God, in your mercy:

All: Forgive us.

(silence)

Leader: Forgiving God, we believe that you have called us

All: to be salt and light;

Leader: that you offer us time and space and strength

All: to begin again.

(silence)

Leader: Giving and forgiving God,

All. We thank you.

Reader: Have salt in yourself, and be at peace with one another.

PASSING THE PEACE – Display a peaceful gesture or bow in this
time of social distancing.

GIVING THANKS FOR THE WEEK

Leader: Call out single words or brief phrases of thanks for
something that happened during the week. A simple response may be
used such as “Generous God, we thank you.”

INTRODUCTION TO SHARING THE FEAST (PSALM 34:8)

Reader: We are all invited to the common table to share in an Agape Feast. At this table we come as brothers and sisters in the Holy Family of God. Taste and see that God is good.

Usually the feast consists of a passed around loaf of bread (or oatcakes, or a sweet bread) and passed around chalice of wine (or cider, or grape juice). In this precautionary time, you could pass a basket with sliced bread or bread chunks, and a tray of filled glasses.

PRAYER

(at the conclusion of each one drinking and eating)

Leader: As we share this bread, as we pour out this water, we thank you, God, for our daily bread for the food that delights and nourishes us and for the companionship that sustains us.

We thank you, too, for wine (or “drink”) to quench our thirst and for the Living Water with which you surprise, enrich and transform our lives. We give thanks for this feast, a foretaste of the Holy Realm. Let the feast say.....

All: Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer (in each one’s languages if possible)

BLESSING

Leader: God bless each one of us as we travel on.

In our times of need

may we find a table spread in the wilderness
and companions on the road.

May we who have gathered round this table

Know the fullness of your presence

At every meal and in all our sharing. Let the feast say...

All: Amen.

