



# Theological Reflections on Food and Hunger

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# Scripture

You could use these Bible verses as a stimulus for discussion or when planning times of prayer. Explore the stories, themes and messages around these passages.

## God's abundance

'On this mountain, for all peoples, the Lord is preparing a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines, of succulent food, of well-strained wines.' (*Isaiah 25:6*)

## Food and justice

Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But [the disciples] answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' So he said, 'Bring them here to me.' He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples, who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps left over, twelve baskets full. Now about 5000 men had eaten, to say nothing of women and children. (*Matthew 14:13-21*)

'Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean.' (*Mark 7:15-23*)

'For I was hungry and you gave me to eat ... in so far as you did this to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.' (*Matthew 25:35, 40*)

Then he said to his host, 'When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbours, in case they invite you back and so repay you. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you.' (*Luke 14:12-24*)

For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! (*1 Corinthians 11:21-34*)

## Food and work

By the sweat of your face will you earn your food, until you return to the ground, as you were taken from it. For dust you are and to dust you shall return. (*Genesis 3:19*)

They spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert? For there is neither food nor water here; we are sick of this meagre diet.'

## Food and the Eucharist

And as they were eating he took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them. 'Take it,' he said, 'this is my body.' (*Mark 14:22-25; c also Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:19-20*)

Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were open and they recognised him. (Luke 24:30-31)

For the tradition I received from the Lord and also handed on to you is that on the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and after he had given thanks, he broke it, and he said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' ... 'Whenever you eat this bread, then, and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes.' (1 Corinthians 11:23-27)

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# Catechism

The Catechism is the teaching of the Catholic Church.

*The Eucharist commits us to the poor.* To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognise Christ in the poorest, his brethren. (ccc 1397)

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# Encyclicals

Encyclicals are letters written by the Pope on important topics.

**Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (On the development of peoples), 1967, para. 3:**

The hungry nations of the world cry out to the peoples blessed with abundance. And the Church, cut to the quick by this cry, asks each and every [person] to hear his brother's plea and answer it lovingly.

**Para. 53:**

Countless millions are starving, countless families are destitute, countless men are steeped in ignorance; countless people need schools, hospitals, and homes worthy of the name. In such circumstances, we cannot tolerate public and private expenditures of a wasteful nature; we cannot but condemn lavish displays of wealth by nations or individuals; we cannot approve a debilitating arms race. It is Our solemn duty to speak out against them. If only world leaders would listen to Us, before it is too late!

**Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (One hundred years), 1991, para. 58:**

Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice. Justice will never be fully attained unless people see in the poor person, who is asking for help in order to survive, not an annoyance or a burden, but an opportunity for showing kindness and a chance for greater enrichment ... [It] is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of lifestyles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies.

**Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in truth), 2009, para. 27:**

The right to food, like the right to water, has an important place within the pursuit of other rights, beginning with the fundamental right to life. It is therefore necessary to cultivate a public conscience that considers food and access to water as universal rights of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination.

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## Second Vatican Council

In this Year of Faith, we are called to read the four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council.

### ***Dei Verbum***

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body... Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. (*Para. 21*)

### ***Lumen Gentium***

The Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ. (*Para. 8*)

### ***Sacrosanctum Concilium***

To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister... but especially under the Eucharistic species. (*Para. 7*)

### ***Gaudium et Spes***

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. (*Para. 1*)

God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and people. (*Para. 69*)

The right of having a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone ... If one is in extreme necessity, he has the right to procure for himself what he needs out of the riches of others ... Remember the aphorism of the Fathers, 'Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him'. (*Para. 69*)

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# Catholic Social Teaching

Teaching from other sources, such as saints and statements made by popes.

You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, yet you do not recognise your brother ... You dishonour this table when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food someone judged worthy to take part in this meal ... God freed you from all your sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful. (*St John Chrysostom*)

It is not God's will for some to have everything and others to have nothing. (*Oscar Romero*)

Today Christ tells us it isn't enough to distribute bread to those who haven't got any. The essential thing is to work toward the creation of a more just world, in which there will no longer be a minority owning too much, among such multitudes of hungry people. (*Dom Helder Camara*)

The available data show that the non-fulfillment of the right to food is not only due to natural causes, but also and above all, to situations provoked by the conduct of men and women that lead to a general deterioration of social, economic and human standards. (*Benedict XVI, World Food Day 2007*)

Yet no less troubling are the threats arising from the neglect – if not downright misuse – of the earth and the natural goods that God has given us. For this reason, it is imperative that mankind renew and strengthen 'that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying'. (*Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace 2010*)

'The environment must be seen as God's gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations.' (*Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace 2010*)

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## Prayer

There are many prayers around the theme of food and bread.

Give us each day our daily bread.

(*Luke 11:3*)

### A place at the table

On this mountain, for all peoples, the Lord is preparing a banquet of rich food. (*Isaiah 25:6*)

# Symbolism

In the Church, bread is rich in symbolism. Here are some of the times bread is used, which your group might wish to explore, along with other references to food.

## 1st Sunday of Lent

### Exploring Symbolism

- How is bread used?
- Why is bread used?
- What does it symbolise?
- How could you reflect on that aspect of food in your everyday life?



- The Eucharist
- Receiving the Last Rites (the Viaticum) when ill or very elderly (also known as 'the Sacrament of healing of the sick')
- Fasting (abstaining from food) during Lent and at other times
- 'Fish Fridays': abstaining from meat on Fridays as a reminder of Jesus' death on Good Friday
- The Lord's Prayer: 'Give us this day our daily bread'
- Feast days, for example for different saints.

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