



THE MARK

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The Church of Conscious Harmony
A Contemplative Christian Community

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Eternal Food

by Tim Cook

Among the most blessed experiences of the spiritual journey are those eye-opening moments of revelation when we see something we never saw before and never even suspected was there, or suddenly know something we hadn't known before. In the same moment, perhaps we realize that we hadn't even known that we hadn't known it, even though it had always been available to be known and had, of course, been known to others before us. There is always more and more to learn about God's astounding Creation and our place in it. These grace-given moments of deep seeing help us remain open-minded and expectant, aware of our limited understanding and willing to have our minds opened ever further.

One of those mind-stretching moments that I remember clearly came to me in relation to food. Until that moment, food had simply been food. Farmers grew it, you cooked it, you had plenty of it or you didn't, you liked it or you didn't; but you needed it, you ate it, and that's all there was to food. But in becoming aware of the transforming ideas of the Work, I was introduced one day to a whole new dimension of awareness in

regard to food. The Work teaches that in addition to the physical food we must eat to survive, there are two additional types of food required for our continued existence. Just as the quality of this first food affects our physical health, so do the quality and nutritive aspects of these other two foods affect the quality of our lives and our overall well-being.

These two additionally required foods are the air that we breathe and the impressions we take in through our five senses. Perceiving air as food seems pretty obvious when you stop to think about it, but seeing impressions as food was a brand new and amazing idea for me to ponder. The food of impressions includes all of our sensory input from the external world around us as well as the automatically generated impressions of our interior world, including imagination, emotions and internal sensations. We can't live without all three of these foods and the capacity to digest them well. Neither good digestion and bad groceries nor bad digestion and good groceries will permit us to thrive. Neither good lungs and polluted air nor sick lungs and good air will prosper our lives. It

is just so with impressions too. We need good quality impressions and the right psychological digestive capacity to organize and make them meaningful in order to live psychologically and spiritually healthy and balanced lives. Even good news can seem terrible to an unbalanced or depressed psyche. Likewise, a personal consciousness grounded in prayer, awake to Christ and centered in His Mind is able to see the good in even the most seemingly disastrous circumstances.

The digestive apparatus for transforming our meals and the air we breathe are the stomach and lungs and their associated systems. They are handled by life automatically and, in most cases, most of the time they do their jobs well and without any effort or even awareness on our part. To digest incoming impressions, though, requires something conscious and intentional from us if we want to experience spiritual and psychological vitality. If we simply judge by appearances and take incoming news and experiences as we are automatically inclined to by our

education, enculturation and family conditioning, then we are not digesting them at all.

The dictionary tells us that the word, digest, in this context, is a verb that means that we “*understand or assimilate (new information or the significance of something) by a period of reflection.*” If we want to digest incoming impressions and transform them into different and more useful forms, as we do with groceries and air, then we will have to take them in a new way. Automatic, mechanical and unaware intake of the world around us can leave us with a bad case of the blues unless we learn to understand and assimilate all our experiences through the Mind of Christ. That digestive process is instituted by building our entire lives on daily practice of Centering Prayer, times of quiet reflection, Lectio Divina and the study and practice in everyday life of the great transforming ideas of the Work.

Another of those mystical moments of wonder and amazement, in which I saw what I had never seen before and knew what I had never known before, also happened in regard to food as impressions. It came to me as a complete and staggering surprise about ten years ago at the moment of reception of Holy Communion. I’ll try to share it in words, though I know they are far too inadequate to communicate the true enormity of the experience as

it struck me in the moment. Perhaps, though, if you digest the words through your own personal reflection on them, they will become spiritual food for you, too – more than just words as you read them in this newsletter.

I have been participating in serving and receiving Communion for over 50 years and as might be expected, the experience of sharing in it has deepened over time as I have grown in understanding and spiritual maturity, pondering it and reflecting on it. It grew for me from a simple observance in ritual form to an ever-deepening participation in the very life of Christ in his continuing historical Presence with us. It was a growth that truly fed my soul and increasingly enriched my awareness of Christ in my life and mine in his. But I was totally unprepared for the unexpected spiritual nutrition that God’s grace fed to me on one otherwise ordinary Sunday.

As my hand held the Host and raised it toward my mouth, I suddenly saw that my hand could have been anyone’s hand. It was as if I could see young hands, old hands, black hands, yellow hands, red hands, white hands, large hands, small hands, arthritic hands ... all at once! At the very same moment I was given to see not just the Host that I was holding in my hand right then, but all the Hosts, of all the forms and shapes and substances

and sizes, that all those countless human hands had brought slowly toward all the mouths, at all the altars and tables of all shapes and sizes, of all the Christian denominations, for all of Christian history and for all time to come. It wasn’t “my” hand at that moment. It was simply and profoundly the hand of a human man, the hand of Man carrying the Body of Christ toward a human mouth, the mouth of Man, noticed by the eyes of a human yet the eyes of Man. I became utterly aware that everyone who has ever received or will receive Communion saw or will see exactly the same simple scene that I was seeing; a hand, a Host and Christ feeding his church with his Body. They were obviously one hand, one host, one Christ and one Church.

It was the same when I held the Cup and brought it toward “my” face. I “saw” that whether the cup was large, small, fancy, simple, ceramic, silver, gold or brass, it was utterly obvious that it had always been and would always be one chalice, bearing the one Holy Blood, cleansing the one humanity of all sin for all time, person by person.

That day, I was fed Eternal Food by a graceful gift of the Holy Spirit, and the impression it fed me has transformed the experience of the Eucharist for me to this very day. Perhaps it will feed you in that way, too.

Food for the Heart

by Barbara Cook

In regard to food, Jesus said, “So do not worry, do not say, ‘What are we to eat? What are we to drink? How are we to be clothed?’ It is the pagans who set their hearts on these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first and on his righteousness and all these things will be given you as well;” (Matt 6: 31-33) and, “Listen and understand, what goes into the mouth does not make a man unclean; it is what comes out of the mouth that makes him unclean” (Matt 15:10-11). He goes on to say, “... the things that come out from the mouth come from the heart and it is these that make a man unclean. For from the heart come evil intentions; murder, adultery, fornication, theft, perjury, and slander. These make a man unclean” (Matt. 19:20).

When I first thought of food as it relates to Christ, these wisdom sayings of Jesus stood out for me. I realized that they sound almost like heresy in our time when we pretty nearly worship in the many “temples of food” found everywhere in our communities. Some people’s whole attitude toward life seems based on the idea that what and how we eat is

what makes us happy. I know that I don’t have my food act completely together, although one of my life aims is to try to eat in a healthy, balanced way. I am always certain, though, to thank God before each meal for his goodness and graciousness and to bless those who have labored to bring our food to us, but also to bless all those who aren’t eating as well or at all, that they may know God’s love for them, too.

But I am very aware and careful about the food that can clean my heart. When God found me, although my outer life was in pretty good shape, my heart was unexamined and definitely tuned into the things of this world. But then God started to feed me. One of the first foods he offered me, and one which I gratefully accepted, was silence – 20 minutes, twice a day. The next was a cosmic view of the universe. The next was the Scriptures, and although I had heard them all my life, I had never received them as food. Now they were spiritual food for my healing, growth and transformation.

After that, I read and searched far and wide in this new grocery store of the Spirit, until the ongoing nourishment of silence and the mysterious work of Grace

brought me to the table of Centering Prayer; here some discernment set in and stabilized me. The food I found in Centering Prayer and the knowledge of its conceptual background opened me up to the contemplative level of the Gospel. There, I found the meat that fed and cleansed my heart and gave me the fuel to continue and deepen my inner journey. The Work that we study added the psychological tools that aided the interior work that God was doing as I just kept on consenting. I could see myself learning that what comes out of our mouths can uplift, heal and bless.

The foods that I have found most necessary for Life in the Spirit are my daily opening to God in silent prayer, devotion to Scripture, worship in community, reading that inspires and instructs, times of silent immersion on retreat and service to others. What we are feeding is God, who dwells within us, and what we are putting off is the “old man or woman” that doesn’t serve the heart. God has given us both the recipe and the food that seems to bear fruit.



Follow Heart; Follow Home

Food... in Christ

by Mimi Conroy

Love is my chosen food, my cup, holding me in its power.
Wherever I have come from, wherever I shall go;
Love is my birthright, my true estate . . .
You are my beloved; in You will I live!

from Psalm 16

I stood silent in the middle of our kitchen, looking at closed cupboards. One more caretaker had walked off the job mid-week while our father was out of town. It was up to me to put something on the table for us to eat. Since our mother's death the kitchen remained the least changed room in the house. Still filled with her touches, I could feel and smell her presence.

Months after the funeral Dad found a kind grandmother to stay with us. Each day we would come in from school to the smell of banana bread just out of the oven. I can smell it today and feel my heart open to the warm comfort she provided by this simple act. She knew what we needed and tried to fill the void. We were just too much for her; she fell down one day and was gone the next.

Strangers had taken our mother's place, used her pots and pans, and done their best to comfort and corral four lost

children. We were a handful; most of the people our father hired started strong and gave up one day, just walking out of our lives while we were in school.

Standing in the kitchen that day, I reached for my mother's collection of recipes, many in her handwriting. I read her notes on recipes: for Sunday dinner, possibly for kid's lunch, great party dip, Christmas morning, etc. What I know now looking back is that the mother is the heart of the family; each child is connected to her heart, then drawn out into the world, then coming back to center for love and care. I couldn't articulate what was born in me that day, but I recognized the kitchen as my new center. I knew that day that my family would come to the kitchen for food and I was the cook. The initiative for this familial communion came from deep within me. At fourteen I stepped blindly into my mother's kitchen, the enormity of the weight of this ambition far beyond my skills and

stamina.

Moving through my memories, I discovered that my recollections are associated with the senses, linked forever with smells, tastes and sounds. I soon realized I could create a feeling of well-being by cooking, not only for myself but for my family. With the smell of toasting cinnamon raisin bread, memories of Aunt D come flooding back into my heart. The taste of oatmeal cookies stirs images of visiting kind and loving Aunt Charlotte. The smell of cabbage rolls transports me to northern Ontario where we would visit Grandpa and Grandma each summer. I began to explore the mystery of food as more than just mere nourishment.

I first reached for the food that reminded me of our Mother. My initial interpretations of this food were funny and naïve; I remember a lot of laughter as I

put my creations on the table. I kept cooking until I began to understand the process of caring for my family. God's grace often appeared, and by listening to my intuition I began to fill the empty center in our home.

One of my greatest cooking teachers was right in my own family. My father, it turned out, was a wonderful cook. Each weekend he was the chef, with each child taking a turn as sous chef. We traveled to far countries each Saturday as he prepared many different ethnic cuisines. With this culinary education, I explored the artistic dimension of cooking as I devoured the food my father lovingly prepared for us.

Wisdom from my mother and father was being passed down to all of us through our appetites for love and understanding. We yearned for our mother and were touched in unexpected ways each moment we gathered in her kitchen. With our father we learned food is not only a basic human need but also a road to new smells and tastes. Food touches us on all levels; it feeds our bodies, minds and souls.

Every meal, whether we recognize it or not, is a form of communion, filled with sacred potential to nurture, heal, and transform us in unexpected ways. The women of my neighborhood began to instruct me in cooking gatherings in their kitchens. Five or six women and I would spend warm hours in fellowship cooking

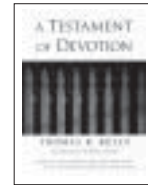
or canning in large quantities. I learned what kind of magic healing could occur in the presence of skilled women gathering to prepare food with loving hands. This love was one of God and family as these kind women were often cooking for a religious celebration or holiday. Each meal had within it the unrealized potential of fellowship and celebration.

I don't expect those women ever knew how much they did for us. In their ordinary reaching out to some lost kids, we came through a long tunnel of mourning into the light. The holy, intimate moments around the tables in those kitchens enriched my life to this day. It began my exploration of food and spirit, eating and worship, and the sacramental dimension of our ordinary moments.

We all yearn to break bread in the company of good friends and family. My memories of family meals and gatherings are some of my richest and most vivid ones. Each day we make memories with the people around us. Our children and grandchildren will live into times without us. These times will be filled with smells, tastes and sounds that will make recollections of their own, but coupled with those are the memories we make with them in our most ordinary daily moments. These moments only require a willing spirit to be in the moment with another soul; what this looks like is up to us.

CCH Bookstore

Community Reading



Testament of Devotion

Thomas R. Kelly

Begins Monday October 30th

In harmony with food

Blessings of the Table

Br. Victor-Antoine d'Avila-Latourette

The Women in God's Kitchen

Cristina Mazzoni

Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone

Deborah Madison

Simple Pleasures of the Kitchen

Susannah Seton

In Celebration of the Seasons

Br. Victor-Antoine d'Avila-Latourette

For your holiday shopping

Bookstore Hours

Monday-Friday 8:30-3:30

Sunday 9:00-after service

Seeds

by Judith Strassman

On a recent retreat at Honey Creek Camp, I spent some time on the bank contemplating that lovely creek. On the side of the dam opposite the swimming hole and water slide, you can find the perfect paradigm for The Church of Conscious Harmony.

In a pond created by jumbled rocks, a shaft of grasses grows right out of the water. To have shown up there, a seed must have washed down the stream and lodged in a very fortuitous part of the rocks. Then, doing its inexorable seed thing, it broke open and sent its little roots down to the mud and its head up through the water into the light. Amazing, and it's just grass; nothing special. But of course it had come from a long line of ancient grasses that had learned through the millennia how to hold on in tougher and tougher circumstances.

It established a beachhead that allowed other seeds to be caught, until a full clump of grass was growing in the center of the pond. In the center, mind you, not taking a chance on being right beside the water, but set up shop dead center, just steps away from where the water bubbled up at its source. Having to contend with the constant current only kept it strong. In the beginning, the tender roots were nurtured by the matrix below, but now, the great shaft of grasses serves to hold the matrix in place.

Many gracious thanks and blessings to our first seeds!

November 4, 2006 9am-5pm

Bernadette Roberts

will present, "A Passage Through Self,"
an overview of the spiritual journey
in terms of self or consciousness.

This is a rare opportunity...

Contact the Church office to pre-register. \$30



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The Communion of Saints

The Communion of Saints is not a club to which virtuous people belong after having paid their dues by way of asceticism, suffering, or austere penances. Still less is it something we access only by physical death. It is, rather, a participation in the divine life that is eternal and that has no past or future because it is entirely present . . . When you pray alone think of inviting relatives and friends who have passed on to come and join you . . .

The Communion of Saints includes not only those who are canonized, but also your old friends, parents and ancestors. They are all together now in the love of God. Through contemplative prayer, we are moving into a realm of reality that influences the past and the future perhaps more than anything else we could do.

Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God*

NOVEMBER Calendar

Visit conscioussharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

Special Events

Bernadette Roberts

Nov 4 9am-5pm
see details on page 7

Monthly

Community Workday

Nov 18 9am-12noon

Weekly

Centering Prayer Group

Mondays 7:30-9pm
Wednesday 7:30-9pm

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30-8:30pm

Sacred Chanting Nov 7
Gurdjieff Music Nov 21

Prayer Circle

Wednesdays 9:15am

Contemplative Lunch

Wednesdays 12noon-1pm

Mid-Week Communion Service

Wednesdays 6-7pm

Yoga

Thursdays 6-7pm

Intro to The Work Class

Thursdays 7:30-9pm

Daily

Daily Centering Prayer Service

M-F 7-7:35am