

## DAY FOUR - THE DINING AREA



Figure 1. *The Dining Table*, Henri Matisse, 1896-7



Figure 4. *A Beggar*, Leonard Von Brixen, c.1476



Figure 2. *Our Dining Table*, Marc Chagall 1911



Figure4. *Woman and Two Children*, William Scott, 1946.

***Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*** (Hebrews 13:2)

We give thanks for the gift that is home,  
We bless the one who gave us life that we  
might experience love  
We bless the ones with whom we live and  
share that love.  
We bless this day and watch for the  
blessings it holds in wait.  
We bless those we know and love now in  
their own homes.  
May we always be truly grateful and ever-  
loving good Lord. Amen.



Figure 5. *The Supper at Emmaus*, Caravaggio, 1601

A strange one this, because there has been something of a move away from dining rooms in recent times. The recognition of the kitchen as the hub for family togetherness has to some extent superseded the living room. And there is another phenomenon called grazing or snacking. For a variety of reasons there seem fewer occasions when a household will gather at the same time around the family table to partake of one menu. But, come Christmas and perhaps Easter and other “special occasions” we “make the effort.”

Has something been lost? I only ask the question. The answer can only be discovered within the context of each family or household. Many external factors prevent family meals, not least of which is the move away from a 9-5 working day. A shared meal has become even more a gesture of determined togetherness. This is something positive. Making a conscious effort to spend time over the sharing of a meal is one of our primal bonding rituals. For this reason, different cultures, religions and tribes adopted formal gestures, prayers, table settings and “manners” (now there’s a word I haven’t heard used in a long time). Such things enhance any meal, turning it into a piece of performance art in which everyone has a role to play.

The experience of a genuinely shared meal, engaging in meaningful conversation, storytelling and banter with loved ones, is a blessing in itself; a grace within meals as it were. Such meals become the stuff of memory and strengthen our bonds of affection.

Where such meals take place is of only secondary importance. A dedicated dining room allows for one kind of meal with greater formalities perhaps, or, sitting around a ‘kitchen island’ (where did that come from?) for a Saturday brunch. Personally, many of my happiest meals have been picnics, so much so that we even had an indoor picnic for my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

As Christians we follow one who revealed a great deal about God’s priorities in the context of meals. One who fully endorsed the practice of welcoming the stranger; especially one who has not the means to reciprocate: Jesus said to his host, “*When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.*” (Luke 14: 12-14)

No wonder, then, that a meal became heart of Christian worship, a bonding of God’s people in Christ here on earth and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Our hymn verse:

*No gifts have we to offer for all thy love imparts  
But that which thou desirest, our humble thankful hearts!  
All good gifts around us  
Are sent from Heaven above..  
So thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord for all his love..*

### **Prayer for the Day**

Here we acknowledge the celebration of love  
That blesses each, and every day  
The love that nourishes both body and soul.  
Here we serve each other, share our stories,  
Deepen our bonds, and fashion memories.  
So, thank you God, for this home,  
Bless too those without the security of  
Knowing how their next meal will come.  
May we never receive from this table,  
Without expressing gratitude for your gifts. Amen  
**Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen**

## Notes on Artworks

A young Henri Matisse starting out in his illustrious career painted *The Dinner Table*, 1896-7 (Figure 1.) Note the pride and precision of the maid adding the finishing touches to this formal table setting. She has a natural inner self respect matched perhaps with real affection for those who will enjoy the pleasure in eating at her meticulously prepared table. Looking at the table itself invites us to think of the times someone in our family has prepared a meal for us with great care and attention to detail. Perhaps we have discovered for ourselves the delight to be gained from presenting a well prepared feast for others.

Marc Chagall spills the beans with his portrayal of his real-life household, where **Our Dining Room**, (Figure 2), rather than being a sanctuary reserved for special occasions, is shown to be commandeered by all sorts of activities. All well and good, for a home is a home after all, not a palace, thank goodness. No need for affectation or pretence. Yes, we can transform somewhere into a banquet hall for special occasions, but families need space to be themselves and to interact freely.

None of which means we cannot use it for more sedate and restful moments such as having a cup of tea while playing a game, **Woman and Two Children**, William Scott (Figure 4).

Those of us fortunate to have a roof over our heads, a place to relax, and interact with those we love, can never become entirely complacent. Misfortune can befall anyone, as demonstrated by the shameful presence of so many homeless people on our streets, and the inadequate accommodation endured by families. It is wise therefore to always remember this, and rather than criticising the **Beggar**, to sympathise as best we can, and support agencies dedicated to resolving the real-life issues that land people in such terrible circumstances. (Figure 3, a 14th Century carved statue of a beggar. Part of a set telling of Saint Martin of Tours care for the poor).

Sometimes it's the simplest, most familiar acts that capture our attention and cause us to wonder at the gift of life. Being in company with those we love while sharing a leisurely meal provides opportunities to observe each other without any acrimony, and simply appreciate what we have in one another. No wonder Jesus chose the context of meals as the optimal manner for his followers to discover the depth underlying the events of their lives, lived constantly under the gratuitous love of God. This surely struck the disciples as Jesus addressed them on their mournful walk to **Emmaus** and uplifted their hearts with the mere act of breaking bread. (Figure 5, Carravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*)



**Crafty Kids:** Jesus said: *Where two or three of my followers are together I am with them.* So, when we share a meal with our family it is always good to remind ourselves that Jesus is with us. Not spying on us but gently reminding us that it is good to be alive, it is good to be loved and it is good to be cared for by each other. One way we do this is by praying a prayer before we eat. We call this prayer **Grace Before Meals**.



Sometimes we pray the words together, but it is also a good thing sometimes for one person to lead. choosing which prayer to pray can be tricky. So how about we make a **Blessing Our Meals Dice**. There is a template for this on the **FAMILY CHURCH** page of the parish website. Another idea would be to make our own prayer card with a choice of six prayers we would like to use at our meals. Then we can throw an ordinary dice to pick the one to use before our meal

begins.

