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When walking into a room, sometimes you may find yourself first noticing its smell. It could be an odor that makes you want to leave, or it could be a pleasant fragrance, something sweet. I remember looking for a home years ago, and the bathroom had a candle burning that created a captivating smell that made me want to move into that house.

Have you ever walked into a room with the aroma of bread filling your nose? Soon your saliva glands begin to water, and your stomach growls with hunger even though you may have recently eaten. There's something about the smell of fresh bread baking that captures our attention.

It's no wonder that Jesus used the imagery of bread to describe himself: "I am the bread of life." If you think about all the ways we use bread in our day, from sandwiches to toast to turkey stuffing, we realize it's a basic component of life. Something essential. Necessary.

Before Jesus called himself the bread of life, crowds of people had been searching for him while he and his disciples tried to find a place to rest. When they discovered him, Jesus suggested, "You've

come looking for me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you, filled your stomachs—and for free" (John 6:26, *The Message*) He had just fed a large crowd from a small portion of bread and fish that a young boy had shared, and the people wanted to know how they could get in on such amazing acts of multiplying food. Wouldn't you?

In other words, they followed their guts. They liked having their stomachs filled, which I think, most of us can understand. We all like to eat, right?

Some people argue that the stomach is like a second brain because it can so often drive our decision-making. But Diego Bohórquez, an assistant professor of medicine at the Duke School of Medicine, argues that the gut is not secondary. It actually comes first.

"Very simple organisms do not have a brain," he points out. "But they have a gut." Over the course of the history of the world, creatures have had to eat in order to live. In fact, organisms were eating for around a billion years before they were even breathing. First, they ate, then they breathed, then they began to think.<sup>1</sup>

Listening to our gut may be a clue about how to solve a problem, such as a big decision. Listening to

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one's body—what it's telling you in a stressful situation—can serve as a good spiritual practice as we strive to discern what God invites us to do. Sometimes we ignore the pains in our bodies, but when we listen to our guts, we might find direction for a big decision in our lives.

When the crowd asked how they could follow God's ways, Jesus told them to do something that really takes guts: "This is what God requires, that you believe in him whom God sent." This suggestion is more than just saying, "I believe in Jesus," for it's not a head thing, a recitation of doctrine, or quoting passages from the Bible. The word often translated as "believe" is from the Greek word πιστεύω [pist·yoo·o/], which is closer to the English word "trust." It's not a cognitive belief, but an active, living trust, deep within ourselves. It's a trust that knows all will be ok even when things get difficult. That kind of faith takes guts, and sometimes we may need help, as was the case with a family

that could only be described as "a real mess." The husband and wife were barely getting along. The kids were squabbling. The level of noise alone caused the

neighbors to suspect there were serious problems under that roof.

Finally, they decided to try a family therapist. Even in the therapist's office, they kept up with their old habits. They interrupted each other continuously and competed for the attention of the therapist. The mother complained that everyone dumped their concerns on her. The father complained that no one paid him any respect. The 10-year-old daughter complained about all the yelling and screaming. The teenage son just sat off to the side, slouching down in his chair without saying a word. It was clear to the therapist that no one in this family was communicating with anyone else.

As the hour was ending, the therapist realized she had to come up with something, or this family would become unglued completely.

"I have some homework for you," she said. "It's very simple, and it's something you all can do. I want you all to sit down at the dinner table every night and eat together. And I want you to start the meal by holding hands around the table and saying grace."

The objections began to come thick and fast. "We're too busy," objected the mother. "We'd have to change all our schedules."

"I hate cooking dinner," said the father.

"We're not even religious," objected the son.

"I'm afraid we'll just keep fighting," said the daughter.

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But the therapist held her ground. She insisted the family share a common meal every day.

"You mean to say that's the only advice you're giving us?" the father asked. "All the money we're paying you, and that's all you've got to say?"

"That's right," she said. "That's it. Trust me."

So they tried it. And when the time came for their return visit, the sullen teenage son said, "This is the best thing we've ever done. Now at least I know I can see my dad once a day." Everyone else told a similar tale.

They discovered over time that, while they were not perfect by any means, at least they were able to become a real family again. And it all happened because of food.<sup>2</sup>

It's when we break bread together, whether in our homes or in our church, that we discovered the main message Jesus was trying to get across to his listeners and to us: that God loves us. No matter how messed up we get our lives, no matter how many mistakes we make, God continues to offer us another chance. Eating the bread of life takes guts, for that means we not only accept God's love for ourselves, but we offer it to one another as well.

One writer noted how much work it takes to love another person:

When you love someone, you put in the time and effort to keep your relationship healthy and strong. When you make me mad, I could throw you away. I could talk to you and work it out. I could hold my true feelings inside and nothing can change. I could choose to love you, despite my feelings of the moment.

Love is like bread. It rises, falls, can sometimes grow stale, can be so sweet and delectable, and it can nourish and energize you. It all depends on how and when you use it. Love needs time to grow to rise, so does bread. Love takes patience to develop into something sweet, much like bread.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is the bread of life, the essential ingredient of love for a world searching for hope and meaning. I pray that you may be one of the ingredients of love as well. As you find your life rising and falling, like a loaf of bread, may you trust that God remains with you, offering you and the world the bread of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Homileticonline.com, August 1, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>3</sup> Whitney Virginia Morgan, "Love Is Like Bread," May 20, 2018,  
<https://whitneyvmorgan.medium.com/love-is-like-bread-26c85f7ba898>