

Preface to the Twentieth-Anniversary Edition

The yeast for *Fresh Bread*, my first book, started fermenting many years ago. The influential message of a wise woman caught me off guard in my mid-twenties when I was hesitantly becoming aware of my journey with God. As Sister Jose Hobday spoke to us on a weekend retreat, she asked us to write down how much time we spent eating. “What a weird request,” I thought, but followed her directions. When we completed the task she gave us an encouraging smile and explained, “Isn’t it strange how easily we feed the hunger of our body but ignore the hunger of our spirit? I challenge you to spend as much time everyday nourishing your inner self and your relationship with God as you spend feeding your body.”

That graced encounter has continually blessed my life. I doubt I would ever have written *Fresh Bread* had it not been for that special moment of insight. Her remark encouraged me to be faithful to my spiritual nourishment just as this book encourages you to be faithful to your own. My lived experience has taught me that I cannot be in touch with the deeper part of my journey unless my spirit receives daily sustenance. Through the years, the consistent practice of daily meditation has sustained my hope and brought me peace no matter how much turmoil or busyness my life contains. On mornings when the day is especially full and I am tempted to bypass time for reflection, those words about feeding my soul nudge me into prayer. Gradually, caring for my inner self has become a natural part of the day.

When I wrote *Fresh Bread* I did so with the hope that it would offer prayerful support to others who also wanted to care for their inner self. This intention has grown more relevant with time. So much has changed since this book was first published. Life is busier, noisier, and more demanding of our time and energy. A fast-paced culture tries to convince us that silence and solitude are obsolete. The planet is increasingly fragile, fraught with terrorism and endless wars. Along with these difficult changes, there are positive ones too, particularly an enlarged capacity for world

unity due to amazing technological options for human communication.

In the midst of the transitions and changes that the passage of twenty years has brought, I see an ongoing need to care for our deepest selves. No matter how high-speed our pace or how gluttonous our calendars, it is essential to tend to our hunger for God. This yearning may feel faint or seem forgotten, but it lies always beneath the other longings of our heart. Those I meet, teach, and pray with at conferences and retreats continually remind me of this by their life stories. In these personal encounters I hear the cry for deeper meaning and a desire for serenity.

Another reality that remains constant is that we can never separate our spiritual energy from the rest of our life. *The spiritual life* is the totality of who we are. The divine presence moves and communicates with us through everyone and everything. We will not discover the deeper meaning of our existence and the loving resonance of divinity unless we stop and listen to what is hidden within these daily encounters. *Fresh Bread* is meant to be a catalyst for this connection, like yeast rising in bread. The ordinary images of life contained in this book offer a way of connecting with our deeper selves. By pausing and reflecting on these images in relation to what we daily experience, we grow in awareness and become more attentive to the One who dwells within us.

As I have aged along with *Fresh Bread*, I have come to believe that union with God is everything. Nothing is so vital as being attuned to this Loving Goodness permeating our days and nights. I am more convinced than ever that nothing can separate us from this Beloved One, that each part of our life offers opportunities for increased depth and authenticity. Each person we meet, every part of nature, all our experiences—they shape this enduring connection with God. When we are conscious and alert, we will be amazed at how near the Holy One is to us.

Spiritual nourishment is a must but how it happens is an individual matter. Each of us is given the yeast we need for our inner growth. There is no need to envy others' spirituality. Our own journey with God cannot be the same as another person's. We need to be confident about the worth

and value of our own lived experience. Life will not always give us what we want, but we can be assured that our divine companion is there to sustain us in times of trouble and to rejoice with us in times of contentment. God is with us and for us, whether our life holds excruciating sorrow or marvelous joy. Consequently, prayer is not about good feelings but about being true to this intimate relationship no matter what the condition of our body, mind, and spirit.

Silence and solitude, slowing down, being less harried and hurried—these are essential in order to recognize the Beloved’s presence amid life’s busyness and noise. Every day is an invitation to be nourished, to be receptive to this yeast-like Goodness waiting to encourage our inner growth. Every day is an opportunity to turn to the pages of *Fresh Bread* and find refreshment and solace for our spirit.

As we continue on our spiritual journey, our unrelenting discipline will give way to enduring faithfulness. Control will turn toward relinquishment. Struggle will dissolve into trust. Search will be replaced by an acceptance of mystery. All of this will unfold gradually. Most of the time we may be unable to detect this spiritual development. Perceiving our growth is not what counts. What matters is our faithfulness in nourishing our inner self and our trust in the enduring yeast of God’s abundant love.

☞ Joyce Rupp (2005)