

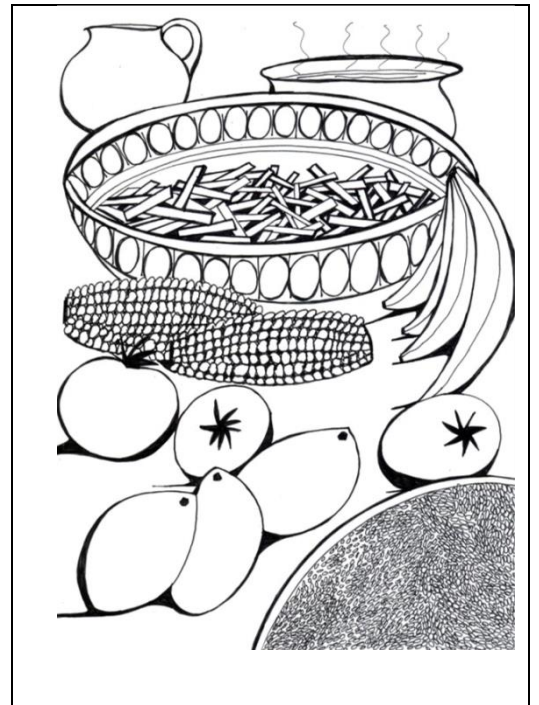
Ceres: Goddess of Harvests



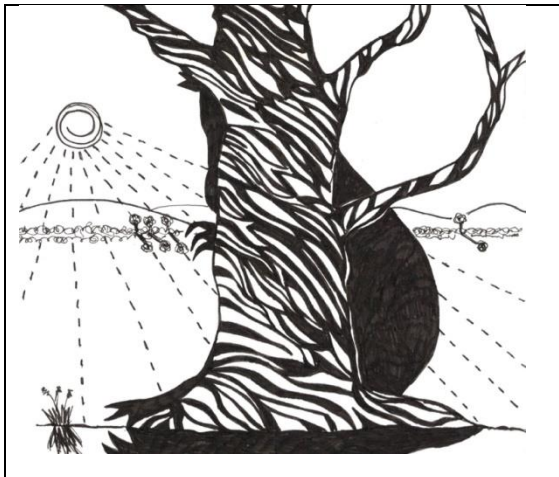
In the time of the Roman Empire, people in the country had a special way to celebrate the harvest. The wheat harvest gave the villagers flour to make...

- ✚ cereal for breakfast,
- ✚ bread for lunch and
- ✚ spaghetti for supper.

So they were very grateful and, in autumn, they all gathered together to thank the Roman Goddess of the Harvest, Ceres, whose sacred oak tree stood tall and broad in the middle of the wheat field. The people loved that tree, and they knew that Ceres loved it too. The beautiful leaves grew on a tangle of twigs that were home to many birds and even more insects. The twigs sprang from grand branches loved by children who could climb deep into the tree.



The canopy of branches and leaves created a huge pool of shade giving people relief from the hot sun. In that shady space, villagers held hands to circle the tree. They danced around and sang thanks to Ceres for their successful harvest.



After one especially plentiful harvest, the people gathered, as usual, to thank Ceres. Everyone was filled with joy; everyone, that is, but the woodsman, Eric. Eric felt no thanks for the harvest, because he did not like food made from wheat, like cereal, bread or spaghetti. He was a grumpy man who hated dancing and singing, so he did not like Ceres' sacred tree at all.

What Eric did like, was money. He was not just grumpy but greedy, and money was more important to him than all the trees in the world, especially the harvest celebration tree. After the party ended, Eric hid behind the oak tree with his axe in his hand. He had decided to cut Ceres' sacred oak into pieces and sell them.

As he raised his axe high into the air to make the first cut, his daughter Melinda called out. "Stop," she cried. "Father, this tree is sacred to Ceres and much loved by the people. Please find a different tree to chop."

But Eric didn't stop. Before long, the sacred oak fell to the ground with a huge crash. The birds and insects all flew away, and Melinda sat and stroked the tree sorrowfully.

When she saw what Eric had done, Ceres was very cross indeed. She ranted. She raved. She shouted at the top of her voice, "Your greed will come back to haunt you!"

And so it came to pass. Eric grew hungry. He ate all the food in his woodsman's pack. Still he was hungry. He tried to sell the wood from the sacred tree to buy more food, but no one would buy it from him. They were full of sadness over the loss of the sacred oak.



Although he didn't like cereal, Eric was so hungry that he grabbed Melinda's breakfast cereal and ate it all. But he was still hungry.

Although he didn't like bread, he took all the bread from the local shop and gobbled it down. But he was still hungry. Although he didn't like spaghetti, he ate all the spaghetti from the village. But Eric was still hungry.

He ran out into the fields to search for food there, but he found nothing. Melinda loved her father, so she brought him more food. But no matter how much he ate, Eric was still hungry.

Eric started licking and biting his arms. They were tasty. He started licking and biting his legs. They were tasty too. He sucked his toes! Eric was so hungry, that even his toes seemed to be tasty.

Melinda didn't like to see her father so desperate, so she ran to get help. Although she was gone for only a few minutes, by the time she returned, Eric was nowhere to be seen. She looked everywhere and called out repeatedly. But all Melinda could find was his woodsman's axe buried under a pile of wheat right on the spot where the sacred oak tree of Ceres used to stand.