

32,850 MEALS

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts.” Jer 15:16

Lately, as Dn. Albert and I have met to discuss what makes for a good sermon, I have had occasion to look back on twelve years of sermon material. As I did, I couldn't help but ask myself, has the thousands of hours I've spent preparing and presenting these sermons been time well spent? Does anyone remember anything that I have said? Have I or anyone else grown in the spirit because of them?

Well several years ago, a church-goer actually asked this same question in a letter to the editor to “The British Weekly:” Dear Sirs; It seems that ministers feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. Yet I have been attending church for thirty years, hearing 3,000 sermons, but can't remember a single one. I wonder if the minister's time might better be spent on something else? For weeks responses poured in, but then with this one letter it came to a stop: Dear Sir; I have been married for thirty years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals—mostly prepared by my wife—but couldn't tell you the menu of a single meal. And yet, I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago.

It is so easy to take for granted things that are most essential to us, the air we breathe and the food we eat, because they are so necessary and so close. The same holds true for our spiritual sustenance, as the words I read from Jeremiah, whose feast day was on Thursday, remind us. God's word in Badarak, including the sermon, is food that sustain us, and by savoring them, can bring us great joy. Jeremiah famously cries to God “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts.” Clearly, Jeremiah did not actually eat God's Word. It was his way of saying that he read and savored them in his innermost being. And that's exactly where God's word, from Bible and Badarak, is intended to go. God's Word is heart food, soul food!

In church we take the first step of feasting on God's words together. We order up the food. Karen and Albert read from the Gospel, us altar servers, the choir and all of you pray God's words in our beautiful hymns and prayers. But this is just the first step, ordering the food. The next step is to digest these words and to share them with others, today and throughout the week. Taking this step is the difference between just tasting God's word on Sunday morning, instead of digesting it and letting it nourish us for the whole week, the whole year; your whole life.

This digesting God's life giving word, be it in church, in your Bible, or on your smartphone, is not a passive thing. It necessitates taking God's word into you, by mulling it over with questions and prayer. What is this Bible passage trying to say generally, but crucially, what is it trying to say to you, right here and right now. Aseh Asdvaz, “God is speaking” we affirm each week; not in the past, not to someone else, but to me and you, here and now. God what are you trying to say to me? Is there a shortcoming in me you've revealed, a truth for me to understand, an example for me to follow?”

After we mull over and digest God's word throughout the week, the final step is to do God's word, to share it. “But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves,” (Ja 1:22) says James in his epistle. When we regularly listen to and digest God's word, we will start to notice repeated themes that resonate for us: “Like the Apostles in the storm, I really should find a way to trust God more with my anxieties.” But don't just stop with these recurring thoughts, do something! Add “I will trust God and not be anxious” on your device home screen. Commit to saying a short prayer before going into situations that make you most anxious. Tell your spouse or friend what inspiration you found in God's word and how you are working to apply it. Because when we do share what God is saying and doing with us, when we put our lesson into words to others, we reteach our lesson to ourselves.

So let us remember that our weekly partaking of God's word during Divine Liturgy and throughout the week is extremely important. It is so important, like the air we breathe and the food we eat, that it is easy to forget that we can't live well without it. For God's word is indeed food for the soul! And all who partake of it are formed and transformed in our work, our families, at the center of our lives, now and always; amen.