

Eat Your Words

'Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.'-Je 15:16

On our trip to Armenia this past month, we gave and received many gifts from family and friends, however none were better given and received than books. We got a couple of great children's books about Armenian language and culture. We gave away dozens of our kids gently used books. That's one great thing about the gift of books. Unlike a box of chocolates, before gifting it you can actually sample it first, or even try the whole thing. Books can be consumed again and again.

Jeremiah, the prophet whose feast we commemorate this week in the Armenian Church and whose words I began with, recommends we consume the books of the Bible again and again. 'Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart,' exclaims Jeremiah, 'for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts.' Now of course Jeremiah is not being literal here. Although both my children have literally chewed off pages from their books on occasion, Jeremiah is pointing to a greater truth. He is saying that God's word is to be taken in slowly, digested fully, and done repeatedly just as when we physically eat. English philosopher Francis Bacon said it well: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." The words of God, more than any other words, are meant to be enjoyed over and over, fully digested and enjoyed.

Now when we say words of God, what exactly are we talking about? Well primarily God's word in the Bible, but also the words of our worship and prayers like the *Hayr Mer*, which come entirely from the Bible. So we have made a good start on tasting God's word by coming together today mulling over the sermon, the hymns and prayers of Badarak. But today my one point is; let's not just stop with a little taste. Jeremiah doesn't say taste the word of God, he says eat it-savor it, sit with it and digest it. Just as you can't eat food once a week and expect to survive, you can't taste spiritual food for an hour on Sunday and expect to survive. We have to eat three meals a day, right? And some of us also have to eat three meals a night too!

Turning this one hour a week holy time, into an every hour of the day holy time is perhaps our main challenge to mature as Christians; and the consequences are quite significant. Because maybe one hour of church words can sustain us when we are young and problem free, but when the times of great trials come-a work transition, marriage and child-rearing, a set-back or a sickness, we need more spiritual sustenance than one hour can possibly provide. We need the words of God to not just be something out there we taste, but something in here that sustains.

All the great artists know this in their own way. If you want to be a good actor, you don't ponder your character from time to time, you take the character into you, you inhabit that role. If you want to be a great writer, you don't write when you can and read good books by the pool. You inhabit and digest good writing. The American author Hunter Thompson so craved good writing that he typed out, word for word entire books; Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Hemmingway's *Farewell to Arms*. He did not taste good words, he digested them and they became a part of him. Because of his artist life-style, many are surprised that Thompson loved the Bible and is rumored to have digested it word for word. On some level perhaps, he knew that the words of God were never for tasting, but for sustenance; to live in and through every day.

That's how the words of God were for the founders of our faith. Our fifth century historian Yeghishe described the zeal of newly Christian Armenians in this way; '*The Psalms were their whispering songs and the reading of the Holy Scriptures their absolute joy. Every man was a church in himself and a priest as well.*' That is, we aren't dependent on visits to holy ground, when our whole life is holy ground. We are dependent on spiritual leaders, when we have taken the lead in our God-gifted lives. We aren't grasping for God's word in a crisis, when God's word is within us.

So yes, by all means come often to St. Hagop to take in a good taste of the word of God; just don't stop there! Sunday is not the end of reflecting on God's word for the week, it is just the beginning. Immerse yourself in daily scripture. Listen to faith-based podcasts. Watch a St. Hagop sermon if you missed it, and join Diocesan Vemkar livestreams. There has

never been a time in history with more easily available spiritual food for our souls. And if we partake of God's word every day, it no longer stays outside of us, but like food, it literally becomes part of us. As Jeremiah of old ate God's word and was transformed, let us daily consume God's Spirit-filled word until it becomes part of us, and we become part of it; now and always; amen.