

# Food for Thought

Idolatry can be a problem for both the thick and the thin  
Andrée Seu

I found myself thinking, “Life is empty; I’m going to eat something.” (My life is far from empty, but there are those moments, especially in mid-afternoon ... )

I caught it in time and refrained. It was a little death, that rare kind we die when we deny temptation rather than succumb-and-repent, the more usual course. I let myself be beat up by the emptiness. I went to God instead of the fridge. Sure enough, by evening the feeling had passed.

There are two kinds of food idolatry, and I have been guilty of both. The aforementioned is the drive to get from food what God wants us to get from Him: meaning, comfort, satisfaction. The outward manifestation is an obesity epidemic.

The opposite idolatry is enshrined in the health craze industry. (I find it funny that it takes 1.5 million barrels of oil to make one year’s worth of plastic bottles for our Dasani and Deer Park passion, and that “more than 40 percent is filtered or treated tap water” — The Philadelphia Inquirer, Nov. 4, 2007.) It poses as the solution, but it is life revolving around food and drink every bit as much as gluttony. Both are all-consuming, and I dare say Satan feasts as well on our fitness-club obsession as our Big Mac obsession. He is ravenous for the souls of men, whether fricasseed or famished.

My friend David, whose besetting sin was drug rather than food opiate, informed me of the same surprising problem with “solutions” to addiction. Of his new sobriety gained in a recovery program, he wrote, “In time, my focus on ‘recovery’ took precedence over my Christ-centeredness.... Sadly, there are scores of AA-involved Christians more interested in the Big Book than the Good Book.”

You can mentally substitute Hershey bars for heroin, as David goes on to recount: “Even when I was physically ‘sober’ my emotional being and thought life was still in bondage.... And therein lies the ironic problem with AA-type sobriety: Unlike the Truth that shall make us free indeed, we are still controlled by our former problem to the extent that we are dependent on 12 Step meetings to keep us sober.”

“For freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). It’s not a size 6 or a size 16 dress that matters but finding our place of freedom. Speaking personally, I am too self-absorbed a woman to think about your needs if I’m even 10 pounds overweight, so I maintain a “sweet spot” of 120 (I say this to my shame, not my glory). But I know people who carry more girth than the doctor’s chart recommends but are happy and free of self-centeredness. Here is the attitude: “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Jesus is the model. I’ll bet He ate whatever was put on His plate in every town He visited. If Mary and Martha’s Bethany kitchen was a greasy spoon, chances are Joanna’s or Susanna’s (Luke 8:3) served up leaner fare for the itinerant preacher who “had nowhere to lay His head.” The meals of leg of lamb with all the fixings were balanced out with meals of veggies and herbs “where love is” (Proverbs 15:17), and lots of walking in between: Nutrition and aerobic exercise in stride, and neither the focus of His life.

I try to eat right because I expect that in about a decade when national obesity hits the fan big time, I’ll want to be healthy so I can help out. But I am moderating my scorched earth nutritional views somewhat, recognizing a tendency to idolatry in even a good thing — we keep falling off one side or the other of old Martin Luther’s mule, don’t we?

If something gets in the way of my thinking about my neighbor’s needs, it’s a problem, whether it’s a food obsession or a fitness obsession. “He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

“Is not life more than food?” (Matthew 6:25).

