

SUFFICIENCY: The Gift of Knowing What is Sufficient
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This is A Reflection on Meal Time at the Abbey during the Pilgrimage to New Mexico in October, 2010

There is a comfort in the rhythm of coming to a meal, taking our napkin, and entering the large two-story dining room in silence. The food, prepared and served by the monks, is always nutritious and more than sufficient. It is served buffet style, the main course and sides in rectangular white dishes, the green salad in a large yellow bowl.

I find an empty chair, sit, close my eyes and sit for a few moments in the silence. I offer a short non-verbal "Thank-you-for-this-food." Classical music plays softly; that and the clink of silverware against plates are the only sounds in the room.

I eat slowly and mindfully--not intentionally but automatically. I pause frequently between forkfuls. Surprisingly, even though I come to meals "nearly famished," I only eat a small portion before feeling satisfied. I seem unable to eat the rest of what is on my plate even though I have taken what is a usual amount for me.

I debate whether it is better to return my place with the obvious evidence that I have wasted food or to try to eat more. My body seems to be telling me that what I have eaten is sufficient for its needs. I feel uncomfortable returning a half-eaten meal and hope that no one will notice.

That evening I take smaller portions. I find again that less is sufficient and again return my plate with the "wasted" food evident for all to see. The next day at noon I take even less and eat most, but not all, of it. This new awareness of my body's needs is a GIFT, an internal knowing. It is a peaceful and satisfied knowing. I have no sense of wanting more.

I realize I have been eating with mindfulness. Eating slowing, appreciating the taste, aware of the quality of the food. Thankful that what I have eaten meets the needs of my body.

Sufficiency is a better way than "limiting" and/or feeling deprived. What I experienced at the monastery, I believe, came from deep within. I believe that God had His hand in it.