

Special Lenten Opportunities

One Lent I taught a class of junior high school girls in a course in Creative Cooking because I was asked. Only God could have dreamed that up! Another Lent, when I lived in a spot too isolated to get out, I sewed wool patches together for scarves and lap robes for a local nursing home. And, since I am not a seamstress, using them might have been more of a penance for those receiving them. And yet another Lent, I helped deliver Meals on Wheels to the elderly, many of them living alone who needed the nourishment of seeing another human along with the good food.

I got to know them as persons, not just “old people,” the crochety and the good-humored ones, the mute and scowling, the closet alcoholics, the blind, the depressed. It gave me the chance to bring magazines and homemade soups and bread and first spring flowers. It was a chance of “doing our common business for the love of God.”

This Lent, I live next to a nursing home and hope that they may have need of me. If not, there is an ad in this morning’s paper which I feel urged to answer: “Urgently needed,” reads the appeal. “Cook for 40 men at frat house, long hours, low pay. Help!”

Is this my mission?! Surely you jest, Lord! Is it possible you see me there, dishing up chili and sympathy? Or am I simply a masochist, still unable to cook for one person? How many cookies would it take to fill 40 men?

It is possible to find God in a frat house, a prison or the Ladies’ Sewing Circle. But it would seem especially appropriate during Lent to serve the needs of the poor or work with the sick at a hospital or hospice. Father Daniel Berrigan, in his book *We Die Before We Live*, writes of his experiences in St. Rose’s Home in New York, a hospice for terminally ill cancer patients. Here, in payment for loving care, “no money crossed the palm. No guest paid, no one could pay. It was a rule of the order, strictly adhered to. It struck me: Here we had a stunning instance of the ethical cemented into natural law....No money, no insurance; no red, white or blue crosses; no bread money from city, state, feds....People are employed or volunteer, not to daub a presentable cosmetic on the hard face of death, or to whoop things up despite all. We are there to help make life bearable, to make some sense of it, make it attractive as long as it lasts—together. There is a respect for privacy, respect for moods and imbalances, a spoiling attention to diet, from kosher to Tipperary Irish....

“I appear at bedside to greet them, hold their hands. I am dressed in old clothes, ready for whatever service seems required... The dying drift off, the ship of fools sails majestically over the horizon. Next port of call! We bail, row, weep, swab the decks, change the beds, ferry in your newly arrived dead; and try to keep sane, which means...we steer by the stars....”