



St. Francis Soup Kitchen

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“THY WILL BE DONE”

There is a well known admonishment: “be careful what you pray for.” Come to think of it, prayers are always answered, albeit not with the answer originally sought. For example: “Lord, please provide me the opportunity to serve and minister to the least of your people, the poorest and the neediest. So, we moved to Jacksonville and engaged with the Soup Kitchen. During various stages of our involvement we went through periods of gratitude for the opportunity to serve; then periods of frustration a la bondage, this is all we seem to have time for; periods of personal growth recognizing the blessings we have been given; and, a circle of volunteers who lift us up each week providing support and strength for all that needs to be done.

The Lord has been my strength
He has set me free;
He has saved me because He loves me
And I thank Him. (Psalm 18: 19, 20)

There have always been prayers of thanksgiving and petitions for the strength to continue. These have been heard, accepted and fulfilled. In recent years there have been petitions for successors to assume the heavy lifting and the key responsibilities for the operations in all their details.

We came close last winter and came to believe our petitions were being answered. And, they were just not in the context we sought. After a good deal of

study, the potential successors reluctantly withdrew; too much at that time, the timing was simply off.

So we went back and continued to pray for the strength, and we continued to express our appreciation all the while marveling at all the wonderful things the Kitchen does and how it impacts both sides of the tables. Recently, we polled some volunteers on why they volunteer at the Kitchen. We share with you some of the responses which are common to all who answered:

“To show the face of God”

“Give back to people dealt a lousy hand”

“To care for the poor, make somebody’s life better”

“Because of the friendly atmosphere around here”

“Because Christ set the example for us to follow”

“If you serve the least of Jesus’ brothers and sisters, you serve Him”

One young man wrote that he started coming to the Kitchen for volunteer hours at school but he “loved the environment” and continues to come every week. It’s like family, we smile a lot and we work hard.

Now, it would be misleading to represent all is good and all experiences are positive. A small number are not. Many in the constituency we serve are very angry, even rageful with some burdened by self-defeating emotions, worsened by drugs and alcohol. Understandable! Many of us strive in a nurturing community, at home, at school, at work, in our social circle. Not so, if you are hopeless, powerless, lonely, angry, exhausted, impoverished. The pent up anger can burst out, it’s incendiary and intimidating.

A couple of months ago at the end of the day, Jim was confronted by a man who must have been loaded on street drugs. This guy used words and vitriol that shocked even Jim after all these years. His fury and rage were directed not only at Jim but at the Catholic faith, the Catholic Church, Catholic Charities. All this took place in the parking lot after the Kitchen was closed and after Jim had given the man a takeout meal. “My vehemence almost exploded.” Almost, but it didn’t. St. Paul’s *CONSTANCY* came to mind. After the situation was defused and

over, it felt like a religious persecution. “The next day when my head cleared, I prayed for the guy, with a degree (slight) of gratitude that I may have been persecuted for my faith.” Think the Eighth Beatitude.

“Amazing Grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now I’m found”

Lyrics: Poet, John Newton

Melody: African American spiritual

The following week, a young couple came in with a baby in a cheap dilapidated stroller. They had just been evacuated from a local shelter and needed guidance on where to go. They also needed a new stroller. We gave them helpful information about shelters and told them to come back the following week and we’d have a new stroller. The Kitchen purchased a good stroller and the couple came back. After that, the father got a job at a local Waffle House but he needed a white shirt, black pants and black shoes to start the job. The Kitchen got them and he is now at work! Every member of the Kitchen family should feel good about this regardless of your role. This is just one example.

Small but significant life impacting situations occur all the time, be it reading glasses so a person can read, work boots so a person can take the job, minor wound care, diapers, a blanket, a good meal, the first in a while, or just plain decent hospitality.

Here’s a recent experience Diane had: “Toward the end of the serving day, a middle aged man came in for lunch. He was out of breath and asked if the Kitchen was still opened. He said his name was Gerry Lee. As he sat down he said he had just finished saying a prayer that he could get something to eat. He said that in less than five minutes God had answered his prayer. Diane encouraged him to get a box of sweets before he left after his meal and he was amazed at all he was receiving. “Really?!” he said. Then he asked if we ever gave out clothes and said he needed a pair of jeans as he had on the ones he was wearing for the last two weeks. Diane got him a pair in his size and he was so grateful. He shook

his head and said “WOW, thank you!” Afterward, Diane was heard to say that there are so many “God Bless You’s” from guests that she’s not sure if it’s them or the volunteers who get the biggest blessing.

All of us take inventories of various aspects of our lives; maybe it’s the content of the home pantry, our health, the gas gauge and so on. Here’s a question to contemplate for a spiritual inventory: What would I have if, when I woke up today all I had is what I was grateful for yesterday?

Throughout the year we have had some losses which we had to manage. George Lewis relocated and we miss him. Gale Capley passed on and Dolly Fondry died after a full bountiful life which included many years of volunteer service. We miss them. Several customers who befriended us have “disappeared” and we always wonder. But more and more new faces keep coming in and they are always most welcomed. Our Kitchen family has grown. It is amazing how many people of good spirit live in the community looking for ways to reach out, to serve the poor, to give back.

The clothes closet is a key aspect of the assistance the Kitchen provides. The closet is opened on the first and third Saturdays of every month. On the other two or three Saturdays, we take care of numerous emergency requests. Our inventory doesn’t always match our current need, so please contact us about your clothing donations.

Cash and check donations are gratefully accepted, as well, to enable us to do the buying!

From all of us to all of us and to you, thank you. We will always have you and yours in our prayers!

PEACE