

REFLECTION

By **Bridget Higginbotham**, Franciscan Mission Service

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

(John 12:24)

LENT 2021

Fifth Sunday

It is easy, unfortunately, to fall into the mindset that mission and faith-filled service is “bringing” God to other people. For certain, we rightly pray to be the hands and feet of Christ. But there is nowhere we could go where God is not already present. There is no one we could meet who is not lovingly made in the image of God. We go to the places of physical poverty and suffering because we follow God there as God’s servants. And if we’re lucky, while we’re there, God will bear fruit not because of us but in spite of us.

This fruit is not just what we do for others, but what we ourselves become through the process. When we go outside of our comfort zone, when we open our hearts, when we die to our preconceived notions or selfishness or ego, we walk away changed. During my volunteer year, I spent many hours with an elderly nursing home resident who wanted help tidying her room. Some might describe her as difficult, but really she was lonely and anxious in many ways. It took so much patience and strength for me to return willingly to her each week, to work slowly through the room with her instead of just zipping through it as I would have liked. Rather than respond to her out of my frustration, I had to stop and remind myself why she reacted the way she did; I had to remind both of us that the cleaning wasn’t as important as her knowing that she was loved, seen, and valued. In the end, she got a clean room and hopefully, some comfort; I left softer and more compassionate.

FOCUS: COMMUNITY

Living with other people is a beautiful opportunity to die to self in order to produce fruit. While family, roommates, community members, or even neighbors may give us joy and support, they are just as likely to exhaust or annoy us. Clashes of personalities or preferences can be frustrating, but they are also invitations to self-reflection and sacrificial giving. In those moments, what do you need to let go of, and how are you being invited to grow? How is God asking you to show and sow love?

PRAYER

Loving God, in our desire to see Jesus, keep open our eyes and hearts. Help us follow you to the peripheries and find the face of your Son in both the unlikely stranger and those closest to us. May we always strive to decrease so that you might increase.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other... If we truly want peace in the world, let us begin by loving one another in our own families.” Sometimes we are more inclined to serve strangers in a soup kitchen rather than those closest to us. Take time to find a way to serve and show love intentionally to a family member or two, especially those for whom you find it challenging to do so.