

“Ash Wednesday”

February 25, 2009

By Rebecca Enney

This is Margaret. She is a Security Bear at the Camp Hill Mall. Several weeks ago she got a phone call from Mrs. Mawakasunga inviting her to help at the homeless shelter in Harrisburg. Margaret nervously agreed to go.

The coffee was ready to serve, the 40 sleeping mats were on the floor of Fellowship Hall, the pile of blankets had already been sprayed with disinfectant to kill the germs and the homeless people were crowded around the back door in the alley behind the church. At 8:30pm, the doors opened.

Margaret poured cups of coffee from the pot as each homeless guest got their turn in line. And she gave each one a little granola bar snack. As she gained confidence, she soon gave each homeless person a smile, too!

Mrs. Mawakasunga came into the kitchen and asked Margaret if she might want to take a turn out in Fellowship Hall to sit at a table and have a conversation with one of the homeless people.

“I don’t think so! What would I say?” thought Margaret, the nervous bear. But, reluctantly, she went out into the room and sat at a table where a homeless woman sat alone.

“Hi.” said Margaret. She looked at the woman’s dirty face, but said nothing about it. “I guess it must be cold out on the streets all day.”

“I’m okay.” the homeless woman answered. Then she looked at Margaret’s face and saw a dirt on Margaret’s forehead and decided not to say anything about it.

“Where did you eat supper?” Margaret asked. “I ate at Our Daily Bread.” she answered. “Then I went to a church service. It was nice and warm in the church.”

“I went to church tonight just before we came here.” said Margaret. “Today is Ash Wednesday.” she added, in case the homeless woman did not know.

Margaret thought about the service at her church. She liked how the pastors marked everyone’s forehead with an ashen cross. When Margaret stood there receiving the mark of the cross, she had a flood of thoughts going through her mind all at once. Does that ever happen to you? These were her thoughts:

I bet this cross will look funny on my face when I look in the mirror.

I’m sad that my mother died but I am glad my mother is now safe in heaven with Jesus.

I’m sorry I don’t always behave the way a Christian should.

I must hurry as soon as church is finished to find Mrs. Mawakasunga to ride over to the Shelter together.

I must remember to wash my face before we go over there.

Thank you God for all good things.

Margaret and the homeless woman looked into each other’s dirty faces again. And at the same time, they both realized that the dirt on each other’s faces was not dirt at all. It was the mark of an ashen cross of Christ that they had each received at worship.

They had a good laugh together. Ash Wednesday, it seemed to Margaret, is like the perfect night to be at the shelter. Without Christ, we are all dirty and homeless, but with Christ, we all have a great treasure.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

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