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It's Not the Daily Office that Gets You into Heaven

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One Friday, I was up at 5 a.m., as I am every morning. I like to get up early, while the house and my neighborhood are quiet. Early morning is my time with God. I sit at the kitchen counter to work through the morning prayer as prescribed by the Daily Office. I find that doing the Daily Office, particularly in the morning, centers and grounds me for the day. I follow this meditative time by writing in my journal, making lunch, and feeding and walking our dog.

That morning, my commute to work was uneventful, until I caught the red light at the intersection of Glebe and Old Dominion roads in Arlington.

An elderly Black man was sitting on his walker in the intersection, begging for money. He was clean shaven, and neatly and weather-appropriately dressed. None of that mattered to me because I had already made up my mind not to give him anything. I wasn't going to look at or engage him in any

way. After all, the Bible says, “. . .you will always have the poor with you . . .” (Matthew 26:11). No big deal, or so I thought.

I consider myself to be a good Christian. I tithe; I'm in the Legacy Circle at St. Mary's Episcopal Church; I'm a Stephen Minister; I'm a seminarian at VTS; I give my time and other resources to charitable causes; I love my neighbors; I'm good to my family and friends; I honored my mother and father; I do the Daily Office at least three mornings a week, for goodness sake.

I'm trying to get to my job and, thankfully, this isn't a long light. As I sat in my car trying not to look at the man on his walker, all of these things were going through my mind.

The man motioned for me to roll down my window. I did, and he began to tell me his story. As he spoke, I felt something shift within me. I felt my heart crumble into a thousand tiny pieces, and my façade start to melt away.

He said, “Ma'am, I'm not here because I'm homeless. I'm here because I just got out of the hospital. I have cancer and they have removed most of my stomach and intestines. If you could please just pray for me. Pray that I make it through the next few weeks. Pray that I can get enough money together to get the medicine the doctor says I need.”

As I sat there listening to this stranger, I heard a woman's voice ask me, “Who are you? Who are you that you cannot acknowledge this man? Are you in such a hurry that you can't even make eye contact?” It was as though I was no longer in the car alone. The presence said, “There but for the grace of God, go you, Janettarose. You are blessed beyond measure. It is not the Daily Office that gets you into heaven.”

The light was still red, so I said to him, “Let's pray together, right now.” I prayed for him and he, bless his heart, prayed for me. As the light started to change, I reached into my wallet and gave him everything.

I drive through that intersection often. I have not seen the man before or since.

The change I've noticed in myself following that experience is that I'm open – open to acknowledging and following the direction of the Holy Spirit. I'm listening to that inward voice and letting it be my guide.

I'm kinder, more thoughtful, slower to draw conclusions. I'm learning, with the heart and mind of a child. I don't know what I don't know. Therefore, like a child, I am trusting my Father in Heaven to love, train, and guide me. I feel like I'm a blank page, and that God can write on me whatever He wishes.

I've learned that the person in the intersection is my responsibility. Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). I now understand that scripture to mean that if I have more I should give more, and give cheerfully, with a grateful and open heart.