



What hasn't shrunk is the size of the human stomach. At lunchtime at Holy Apostles, Ernest is hungry, his hand bandaged because he got in a fight, even though he is sober now and has his own place in the Bronx. Janice is hungry, too, she of the beautiful manners and carefully knotted headscarf, who sleeps on the train on winter nights and walks with a cane since being hit by a car. There are the two veterans, both Marines, with the raddled faces and slightly unfocused eyes of those who sleep outdoors, which means mostly always being half-awake, and that group of Chinese women who don't speak English, and the Muslim couple who sit alone. Mostly it's single men at Holy Apostles. Some are mentally ill, and some are addicts, and to repair their lives would take a lot of help. But at the moment they have an immediate problem with an immediate answer: pasta, collard greens, bread, cling peaches.

This place is a blessing, and an outrage. "We call these people our guests," says the rector. "They are the children of God." That's real God talk. The political arena has been lousy with the talk-show variety in recent years: worrying about whether children could pray in school instead of whether they'd eaten before they got there, obsessing about the beginning of life instead of the end of poverty, concerned with private behavior instead of public generosity.

There's a miracle in which an enormous crowd comes to hear Jesus and he feeds them all by turning a bit of bread and fish into enough to serve the multitudes. The truth is that America is so rich that political leaders could actually produce some variant of that miracle if they had the will. And, I suppose, if they thought there were votes in it. Enough with the pious sanctimony about gay marriage and abortion. If elected officials want to bring God talk into public life, let it be the bedrock stuff, about charity and mercy and the least of our brethren. Instead of the performance art of the presidential debate, the candidates should come to Holy Apostles and do what good people, people of faith, do there every day—feed the hungry, comfort the weary, soothe the afflicted. And wipe down the tables after each seating. Here's a prayer for every politician: pasta, collard greens, bread, cling peaches. Amen.

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