

Feed the Hungry, Fold the Laundry

By M. Regina Cram

A stomach bug had invaded their household, and no one was happy.

It began with a call from daycare to my daughter, Meredith. Her 13-month-old daughter Kiara had come down with a stomach bug, and could Meredith please pick her up? Poor Kiara had no idea what was happening.

Three-year-old Gabe was the next victim, quickly followed by Meredith. The next day, my son-in-law came crashing down with it as well. They were in way over their heads.

I live a few towns away, so I headed over to help. Even when you're an adult, there's something comforting about Mom's presence, especially if she brings homemade chicken soup.

The days were long, filled with misery and sleeplessness and mountains of laundry.

Slowly, very slowly, the family began to emerge from the fog. They were still too weak to do much, however, so one morning Meredith asked if I would go to the market for Gatorade and bananas. I headed out immediately.

Once inside the store, I grabbed the required items and went to the check out. After placing my items on the conveyor belt, I fished around for my wallet.

It wasn't there. In fact, my purse contained nothing remotely associated with any form of payment.

Then it occurred to me. "My husband and I switched cars this morning," I mumbled miserably. "My wallet is in Hartford with him."

I began to set aside my order - an order that was desperately needed by a young family. Before I could do so, however, the woman in front of me said quietly, "I'll pay for them."

"What did you say?" I asked rather stupidly.

"I'll pay for them. You're lucky you caught me on a day when I have cash."

I was speechless. I thanked her profusely and tried to get her name, but all she would provide was Laura. Back in the car, I quietly wept at the kindness of a stranger.

My daughter and son-in-law were deeply appreciative for my help that week, but think about it. I was helping my family. The lady at the grocery store was helping a stranger.

I often think about that woman. It's easy to insulate myself within the four walls of my home or the anonymity of my car. I can keep to myself at Mass, avoid eye contact when I encounter homeless people, stay under the radar, keep my head down. I don't have to connect with the world if I don't want to. Yet it is in this very connecting that we become Christ's hands and feet to serve the world.

To finish my story, I completed my stint as Florence Nightingale just as the stomach bug hit me. Meredith felt awful about passing it along, but honestly, if I had it to do over, I'd do the same thing.

Well, except I would bring my wallet.