

SALT *and* LIGHT

Lent: A Time to Live Mercy

by Joan Rosenhauer

The Sixth Station of the Cross speaks in a special way to how we live out mercy during Lent. In this station, we see Veronica not just wiping the face of Christ but reaching out—at some danger to herself—to touch Jesus, to be present to a man who was suffering. Why would she do this? What difference was she really making? After all, Jesus was on his way to die—a simple cloth wasn't going to change that.

So often, we are tempted to feel this way as we look out at our world so full of tragedy. We think, our little gesture won't amount to anything—a few dollars here, some time spent there. What difference will that make? At those moments, we should remind ourselves of Veronica. Veronica was quite literally present to the suffering Christ. She reached out to him, and he reached back. That's what we're called to do. We should never underestimate the value of simply being present, of reaching out in mercy and love to another human being, someone made in the image and likeness of God. And we must allow those whom we serve to reach back, to touch our hearts and our lives. As we are the hands of Christ, so too are those whom we serve.

This is what the Holy Father has called us to reflect on during this Year of Mercy. This is what we do each Lent. We call it the CRS Rice Bowl Effect.

How can a cardboard box help you touch the face of Christ during Lent?

Meet Mayra. She's a young student from Honduras whose life has been changed thanks to the prayers, fasting, and almsgiving of Catholics in the United States. She's also one of the people featured in CRS Rice Bowl this year.

You saw how CRS Rice Bowl has given her the tools and confidence she needs to succeed in

school—even in a country beset by poverty, violence, and hardship. Mayra has received her diploma and is now looking to tutor her peers. And she's made a new friend in Fabricio.

In Mayra, we see Christ—and we reach out across culture and countries to be present. That's the CRS Rice Bowl Effect.

How does Christ reach back? What effect does Mayra have on us?

Let's take a moment to reflect on the image below.



Photo Credit: Catholic Relief Services

When I first saw this image, it made me pause. It's a beautiful photograph, artistically done, with good lighting and excellent composition. But more importantly, what really touches the viewer is that it quite clearly shows love, the love shared between grandmother and granddaughter. I saw this photograph before I had heard Mayra's story, before I'd met her or her grandmother. But what is evident in this image comes through clearly in her story: we see the love of a grandmother for her granddaughter. We see a grandmother who will sacrifice to help improve the life

of someone she loves. Perhaps, we even glimpse the merciful love of God, a God who loves and sacrifices no matter the cost.

That, too, is the CRS Rice Bowl Effect—and it's powerful. It's inspiring to me to see the hard work of this elderly woman. She challenges me in my own life—to love, to sacrifice. And, she challenges me in my own relationship with God.

This Lent, I hope you will share the CRS Rice Bowl Effect with your families and the communities you

serve. Encourage them not just to reach out to those in need through their Lenten almsgiving but through prayerful reflection to allow the stories of these women and men to touch their own lives.

Then we, too, can truly be like Veronica, encountering the suffering Christ. And we, too, can live Pope Francis's call to mercy.

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