



*A  
testament  
of life*

**I HEAR  
HIM  
NOW**

This was years ago. The food bank where I volunteered had closed a few minutes earlier that Friday afternoon, when one man wandered in asking for baby formula. This was a fairly unusual visit. But it was Friday afternoon, and I felt for him. I gave him what I could, which admittedly wasn't much, and thanked him for coming in. He looked at me in disgust, wondering aloud, how they were supposed to make it through the weekend as he stormed out.

I remember fuming over this encounter for the rest of the afternoon. How dare he make me feel guilty over his misfortune! I had given him what he asked for, hadn't I? And he was lucky that I let him in after we had closed, too, I added for good measure.

The bottom line was this: He was right, and it would take me a while to catch on.

He was right to be disgusted, and he was right to be worried. He was a father taking his responsibility to feed his children quite seriously and coming up short in the process. Is there anything more humiliating than the feeling of not being able to provide for one's family?

\*Ten years and two children later, I can more fully imagine the answer to be an emphatic, *no*.

Was I the person responsible for his misfortune? Of course not. But I had played a role in it, and for him there was no distinction.

*"It is not enough to give bread and soup. This the rest can do. You are a servant to the poor. You are always smiling. You are always good-humored. The poor are your masters. You will find them terribly exacting. So, the more unjust and insulting they are, the more unattractive they are, the more dirty they are, the more love you must give them.*

***It is for your love alone that the poor will forgive you the bread you give them."***

*~St. Vincent de Paul*

Few people can call me to attention in the ways I encounter those who live on the margins, better than St. Vincent de Paul. Am I honoring the dignity of the 'other' before me? Am I participating in their plight, or working to alleviate it? If we believe as Matthew 25 instructs us, that when we serve the least of these, we serve God incarnate, it informs our instincts. It brings with it, a tremendous call to humility.



This father was in crisis and crying out with righteous anger to anyone who would listen, that it can be so hard to be enough. I didn't hear him then. I hear him now.

For fathers everywhere, and for each of us striving to be enough, we pray.