

Lent

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story; and Jesus' story must help us make sense of our own.

What makes the Gospel stories so good is that there is always room in them for us. They either tell the stories of people like ourselves or they are open-ended, allowing us to step directly on the scene.

Examples of this second kind are found

Gift shop

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those will be the ones that sell."

Current hot sellers include a bracelet of brightly colored plastic hearts strung on elastic and \$1 neck chains with cross pendants.

"(Patients) seem to enjoy buying things they can use to brighten themselves up," Horihan concluded.

Buying trends have changed as RPC's population shifts. Since 1982, the number of resident patients has dropped by more than half, from 1,100 to 600, according to Van Holden. "This is part of a state-wide effort to maximize the number of individuals who can grow and live in the community," he explained. "Our goal is to try and provide everyone with the opportunity to participate in the community."

Thus, many of the more able patients who earned extra money by working for programs within the hospital have moved out. "The patients we have left tend not to have as much money ... because they can't work," Horihan explained. "They also tend to buy things for their own needs, like

in this year's cycle of readings for the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent. So let me propose a little Lenten meditation procedure: first, pull your Bible off the shelf and slowly read through the Gospel story; second, place yourself in the story as a disciple of Jesus or as one of the characters in the story; third, let your imagination fill out the details of the story and draw you into conversation with what is going on and with Jesus; and fourth, give voice in prayer to what you have discovered in the story

penny candy, rather than novelty items to use as gifts. Their social skills are less developed."

Helping patients exercise those skills requires no special expertise of volunteers — only patience. Yet adequate volunteer staffing is one aspect of the gift shop project that disappoints organizers. Horihan frequently must fill in gaps that the shop's current corps of 10 volunteers — although dedicated — cannot cover.

Meanwhile, gift-shop volunteers have recently begun — via cart — taking the shop to patients confined in particular areas of the hospital.

"We would like to be open more hours — not so we could make more money, but so we could better serve the patients," Saperstone concluded.

Anyone interested in volunteering at the RPC's LILAC Friends Gift Shop should contact Lucy Dechaine at Catholic Family Center, 716/546-7220.

and how the story will continue in your life. Let's see where this might lead.

The Gospel for the third Sunday of Lent is Luke 13:1-9. People, including ourselves, are coming to Jesus with an age-old question. Some of them have been reading the newspaper about earthquakes in Armenia, acts of terrorism over Scotland, and dreadful debilitating diseases; others find disasters in their personal lives — a crumbling marriage, a pregnant teenage daughter, bills stacked to the roof, a sudden illness. All want to know whether Jesus thinks God is punishing them for their sins with such misfortunes.

Jesus clearly answers "no," that God is not punishing them with these natural and human tragedies. He strongly urges, however, that we take them as a warning against a far greater disaster: separation from the saving grace of God. We are warned to reform our lives and cooperate with God's nourishing presence in the world. Jesus is the farmer who tends the barren fig

tree — ourselves — pruning away what is useless and nourishing our growth with God's love and grace.

This story opens us onto the future; it is unfinished. Will the fig tree bear fruit this year? Will we reform our lives? The story continues to be told in our lives.

Another unfinished story is that of the fourth Sunday of Lent, the prodigal son (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32). We easily put ourselves in this story, watching with the father while his son departs, hits bottom, and returns to the forgiving arms of faithful love. But our part in the script is neither the prodigal son nor the forgiving father. We are the second child who has available to us everything a gracious God has to give. Can we forgive those who have trespassed against us? Can we welcome as brothers and sisters those who have wronged us? We do not know whether the second son overcame his stubbornness and went in to the party with his brother. And the same story is still being written about ourselves.

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Thursday, March 2, 1989