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William Joliff

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# The Generous Aroma of Prayer

by William Joliff

“One of the most surprising, and perhaps confounding, facts of charity in America is that the people who can least afford to give are the ones who donate the greatest percentage of their income.” – *The Atlantic*, March 20, 2013

What is it about church basements, that smell?  
One whiff and I start in coloring Jesus.  
And if it's a place where the poor come to pray,  
you can sniff out a history of food:

the Sunday stench of coffee, weak and stale,  
the macaroni remains of casseroles,  
spaghetti from teen fund-raising dinners,  
sheet cake from weddings, hastily arranged.

Add to that the Goodwill cloud of old clothes,  
cheap detergent, slightly pious sweat.  
These are acquired tastes, but they may be  
the odor of the Gospel: the poorest fifth

of Americans give twice as much—that's  
twice, twice as much—of their money away  
as the richest. Go figure. Maybe mildew  
and crayons really are the aroma of prayer.

