The three-line ad in the newspaper announcing the upcoming garage sale fails to capture the behind-the-scenes work and stress that have gone into prepares for this event.

I've never officially held or participated in a garage sale. I often bring my boxes of clothes, housewares, and toys to a local charity—because I'm a do-gooder but because I'm too tired to haul out all my junk onto the street. Strangers come by and barter over my old belongings. Perhaps I also donate our boxes of stuff to local charities to absorb my guilt that many of the things we buy will eventually make their way to people in need. While we like the idea of a household and a neighborhood shelter, it's painfully clear that our family's trash is a needy family's treasure.

One of my friends was having a multi-family garage sale and it seemed like a good opportunity to clean house and to motivate my kids to go through their clothes and to sell things that we could get rid of. When my friend announced that we would be starting at 8 a.m. Saturday starting time, I made a case for a twilight garage sale on Saturday evening. I tried to convince her that there's a whole segment of the population who have never even been to a garage sale because they would rather shop on Saturday morning. But the Girls Scouts were meeting at my friend's house on Friday night so Saturday morning it was.

As I began rummaging through our bedrooms and basement to prepare for the sale, I quickly became agitated by the amount of stuff we've acquired, even after our countless promises to begin simplifying our lives. As I began to take stock of our stuff, I found myself muttering phrases repeatedly to my husband and children: "We have too much stuff! Does anyone know kids you kids? how there are children in the world who don't have any toys?" In the middle of this frenzy, I called another friend who was also preparing for the garage sale. "Oh, lady," she snapped uncharacteristically into the phone. Then she added, "Oh I'm sorry, I've just come from the bathroom and I can't believe how much stuff we have."

A few years ago when my kids were going through a stage of demanding a toy or a treat anytime we went to the store, I came across a book, The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmies. The two bear cubs had a real problem that my kids were experiencing—"give me this and give me that" each time they went to the store. After a few outings, Papa Bear told the cubs it was the worst case of the "galluping greedy gimmies" he had ever seen. The phrase "gimmies" really stuck in my head over the years and no one ever wants to be accused of having a case of the "gimmies." We find it difficult to be content with what we have. We are a society with a chronic case of the "gimmies." We have grocery stores with 18 brands of one product on the shelf. We have a cable TV channel just for shopping. We have catalogs that arrive in our mailboxes almost daily urging us to buy more stuff. No matter where we turn, we are trying to tell us something we really don't need.

As I prepared for the garage sale and sat among my boxes of stuff, I came across images of the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Dressed in her trademark white sari with a blue stripe, she was reaching out to the poorest of the poor. The only stuff Mother Teresa ever needed was her life's journey was a burning love for Christ and a joyful and generous heart to serve people in need. Mother Teresa offered the message of the great material wealth she saw when visiting the United States and how there is great concern with possessions that can easily lead to spiritual poverty. After one visit she seemed, "The spiritual poor that one finds in Europe and America is a difficult burden to carry. One day there springs the desire for money and for all that money can provide—the superficial, luxury in eating, luxury in dressing, titles, needs, achievements, because one thing calls for another. The result is uncontrollable dissatisfaction.

Mother Teresa reminded us that if we are too busy filling our lives with the best clothing, toys, food, furniture, God can not find his way into our hearts.

One week later I finished packing up the final boxes—some for the garage sale and some for homeless families who live less than a mile from our home. Through parish and scouting programs, my family has been involved in efforts to help these homeless families living in cramped studio rooms in "welfare motels," where the average age of a homeless person is 7.

As I loaded the boxes into our van, I thought again of the words that came from the small woman with the giant heart: "Those who have had many possessions, who have had many satisfactions, have no one thing at which they long. They think that the only thing that counts is possessing wealth. That is why it is so difficult for them to lose anything as they are dying. It is much easier for the poor, who are so free, for this freedom allows them to die content with joy... For my part I must say that the poor are very lovely people, who give us more, much more than we give them..."

Parents,

The Little Mermaid

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