

## Encourage Someone for Lent

Instead of focusing on giving something up for Lent, why not take something on, like encouraging people you meet?

In this Lenten season of spiritual growth, people often give up things like chocolate or sweets. But you can do just the opposite and take on things. How about encouragement for one?

Let me tell you about an encourager in my life. Freddie. I see him on weekdays when I do my morning run. He sweeps the sidewalk in front of Starbucks.

My morning run. I wish I could tell you that I put on my sneakers and dash out of the front door without a moment's hesitation. I wish I could say that I savour every footstep. Truth to tell, that first slight incline up the driveway gets me winded, and I'm already wondering how I'm going to get through the next three miles.

By prayer, of course, by a bit of self-encouragement, that little engine-that-could voice God gives us that says Yes, I can, yes, I can, yes, I can. Right, God, I can. I would never win any poetry-in-motion contest. I seem to get slower by the month. Huffing and puffing my way around the park and back down the street that will lead me home.

"Why have you picked a run with so many hills?" I ask myself (huff, puff, huff, puff). Why, in particular, do I follow a route that ends with the biggest hill of all, up to Starbucks and around the corner?

Wouldn't it nice to be able to coast downhill to home? But no, not a chance. This is just the moment when I could use an encourager, someone cheering me on, urging me forward.

This is when Freddie appears. Somehow his work schedule and my running route coincide. There he is with his broom and dustpan. He sees me and bursts out with a big grin. By the time I get within an arm's length, he gives me a hug and a pat on the back. "The winner of the race!" Then as I turn the corner and go up the hill he calls after me: "Go, go, go, go, go, go."

I don't know his last name; he doesn't know my name. It doesn't stop him. He's an encourager. And hearing his voice urging me on not only makes me smile but keeps me headed in the right direction. Up and home.

Be an encourager. There's always someone who could use a good word. A friend, a family member, a colleague or a complete stranger huffing and puffing up one of life's hills.