

A small and simple gesture of sympathy

I'm baking cookies.

I don't usually bake during Lent. So my husband and my sons want to know why I'm baking.

They're not for us, I tell them. They're for a friend who lost her grandmother last week. I know she likes pumpkin cookies. So I'm making cookies.

That seems to make sense to them, and they leave me in the kitchen to finish my work.

The truth is that I don't need to bake cookies.

I've told her how sorry I am. I've given her a card. I've written to a priest friend to ask him to say a Mass—and I know he will.

But her family has been on my mind. And I know how much it means to be wrapped in love and comfort and prayer when you lose someone you love.

A batch of cookies. There's nothing extraordinary about it. But sometimes when you feel you can do nothing, you look for one small thing you can do.

And, of course, there are many things you can do when someone you care about loses someone so loved.

You can send a note.

You can have a Mass celebrated for the repose of the soul of the person who has died—or for the loved ones left behind.

You can go to the viewing or the funeral—or both.

You can send flowers or food.

You can forget to do anything at all and remember months later.

In my experience, you can't do too much, but you can definitely do too little.

Even as I bake, I find myself thinking of other friends who still need a note or a Mass card from me. I'll have to remember to carve out time to take care of those, too.

"Funerals mandatory; weddings optional," a friend told me recently—and that rang true for me. I don't know much about etiquette. I just know how much every gesture matters.

I know I can't stop the grieving. There's so much I cannot do. But I can bake cookies. So tonight, that's what I'm doing.