

# The thin green line

Walking the Mount Vernon neighborhood of downtown Baltimore, I come across all sorts of people, pulling rolling suitcases.

Some arrive by train at Penn Station, or hop out of a taxi or Uber in front of a boutique hotel – one of which lists for \$575 a night.

Then there are those, predominantly women, who, in addition to a suitcase in tow, are weighed down by other bags, which likely hold all of their possessions that they can carry. Whether they have come to the end of a relationship or a job, or had neither to begin with, they are at the end of their rope.

They are not alone.

Millions of Americans will never recover from the economic downturn of 2008, as an estimated one in four adults have no emergency savings, and more than half have less than \$10,000 saved for retirement.

The future can also be precarious for some who should be secure, as a recent CareerBuilder survey found that almost 10 percent of those who make \$100,000 a year live paycheck to paycheck.

Household income grows, but not as fast as increases in the cost of living. More than a century after economist Thorstein Veblen described “conspicuous consumption,” people find themselves awash in debt.

Some live beyond their means and some are done in by vice, but many innocents are a downsizing, student loan payment or medical emergency away from catastrophe.

I joke about my favorite writers being Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – and William and Bob, as in Shakespeare and Dylan. Lately, I’ve been going back to a few lines from the Nobel Prize winner’s “God Knows.”

*God knows it's fragile,*

*God knows everything,*

*God knows it could snap apart right now*

*Just like putting scissors to a string.*

The song was released in 1990. It includes a guitar solo from Stevie Ray Vaughan, who died that same year in a helicopter crash. Snap apart, indeed.

Vaughan perished through an act of man, something we can correct or decrease the likelihood of happening again. We are powerless, conversely, to stop acts of nature – God. We are, however, in position to help with the cleanup caused by both the divine and humanity.

We are part of a universal church that, for all its shortcomings, real and perceived, provides food, clothing, shelter and good will for untold millions. Some of that compassion has been sampled in the Review, in “The Least of These,” a yearlong series that concludes with a look at three families who have provided **homes for neglected children**.

When the series launched in January, I wrote in this space, “If one of the features the Review publishes in the coming year moves you or your neighbor to give even more, it will fulfill its purpose.”

Readers have connected with subjects in the series, to learn how to do more about homelessness, human trafficking, prayer ministry, prison ministry, etc. Many of the people who do great things in the Archdiocese of Baltimore challenged my Christianity, and made me question why I don’t do more for my fellow man and woman.

Every work morning I walk past My Sister’s Place, a Catholic Charities of Baltimore resource center for homeless and impoverished women. On most days, a regular guest is waiting for its doors to open. We make eye contact. She always smiles. We exchange greetings. One of these days, I will slow down, introduce myself and ask her name.

What am I waiting for?