

Video: Merciful meals at Baltimore landmark


By Father Leo Patalinghug

This month I take on hospital food at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore. Lenten themes of healing, faith and food can come together perfectly in a hospital cafeteria, especially if it's named after God's mercy.

Caregivers need a good meal to keep them strong and motivated in their compassion. It's good pastoral advice that they stay healthy by proper resting and good eating.

If done well, even a hospital cafeteria can be a place of God's mercy and grace. Such eateries give visitors a place for "communion" with each other. A needed cry over a cup of coffee or a slice of pie to celebrate a newborn means that God can minister even there.

Since 1874, the Sisters of Mercy have provided compassionate, healing care at their downtown hospital. They enjoy an award-winning reputation for scientific and medical service as well as honors for a recently built hospital tower.

Mercy's main entrance is breathtakingly beautiful - light, airy, with spotless hard surfaces reminiscent of an upscale hotel lobby. Around the corner, people have access to the ecumenical "Chapel of Light" - bright, modern, but somewhat plain and empty. To be fed spiritually, Catholics can make their way to the McCauley Chapel and find the Divine Physician's food - the Eucharist. 

I arrived too late to sample the 6th floor Bistro, the Coffee Kiosk, and the Baggott Street Café. It was only 6:30 p.m., so I was disappointed. These eateries obviously cater to lunch crowds.

Corcoran Café, however, stays open until 8:00pm giving 9-5 workers a chance for dinner before making a hospital visit.

The café, Mercy's main eatery, is easy to find. The sleek look with burgundy, gold and light green fabric for booth cushions offered a touch of class. Well-placed tables give diners the right amount of privacy, but, be careful - some wobble a lot. The spacious layout and exposed-fire pizza oven add comfort and warmth to the feng shui design.

The food station worker and cashier were pleasant and helpful. But the sandwich station worker was ready for home. Before I could say "hello," she declared "CLOSED!" looking inconvenienced. She would deflate an already-worried caregiver or patient. Employees can't forget the part they play in Mercy's mission.

The food had the typical cafeteria downs, but also surprising ups. Mushy Brussels sprouts and carrots would be better if heated a la minute. The "carbonara" was really alfredo sauce needing salt and no peas. But the beans retained crunch, the pizza was tasty, the au gratin potatoes were cheesy and the chicken marsala remained juicy and flavorful. Packaged gourmet sandwiches and sushi options were kept chilled, while the soups stayed warm. Generous entrée portions for under \$6 will comfort frugal folks.

Despite some flaws in service and food preparation, it's good to know that Mercy Medical Center offers a place where God can deliver consolation to people hungering for healing - body, mind and spirit.

Remember, food and mercy heal the soul. Just consider the food and mercy given to

the Prodigal Son.

Father Patalinghug is founder of [Grace Before Meals](#).

In reviewing restaurants and dining venues, Father Patalinghug gives up to 10 Hail Marys as penance for any “sins” he discovers during his visit. If everything was great, he’ll give a Glory Be in thanksgiving. Categories rated are: food, menu satisfaction, meal presentation, pricing, beverage selection, ambiance, décor, service, accessibility and family friendliness.