

Visiting hours

by [Paul Willis](#) in the [August 26, 2008](#) issue

A friend of theirs had been festering
like an old sandwich, rotting
a little before disposal. They had to come,
but it got to where they held their breath
before they stepped inside the room.
The wife remembered how anything
with mayonnaise had to be refrigerated.

Even a sack lunch in an office was suspect
if stored under the desk for a morning:
egg salad was the worst.

The husband recalled a tiny door
in the stone wall of an English church,
stage right from the modest altar—a place
for lepers to take communion. Only part

of a soul could pass, and precious
little of the smell. The wife and husband
talked with their old friend like this, backing
off from his suppurations, unwilling to think,
This is our body, unwilling to think,
Dust to dust, slipping their elements of decay
into the outer cold and darkness.