

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Little Things mean a lot"



Mary D. Ford

Is bigger always better? Consider how Scripture answers this question: "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet, when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that all the birds of the air can perch in its shade." (Mark 4: 30-32)

"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few (small) things; I will put you in charge of many (great) things. Come, and share your master's happiness." (Matthew 25: 14 - 30)

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much; whoever is dishonest with very little also will be dishonest with much." (Luke 16: 10 - 12) It seems, as far as Jesus is concerned, that little things, in fact, mean a lot...in fact, a great deal more about the Kingdom of God than we might usually believe!

Consider Francis de Sales' observations on the importance of little things: "Great deeds may not always come our way, but at all times we can do little deeds with perfection, that is, with great love. Consider the saint, I beg you, who gives a glass of water in God's name to some poor, thirsty traveler. It seems only a little thing, but the intention, the compassion, the love with which he enlivens his deed is so perfect that it converts this plain water into the water of life, yes, of eternal life." (*Treatise*, 12: 6)

"The sacred Spouse implies that he is pleased to accept the great deeds of devout persons, but he also accepts their least and lowest deeds, for to serve him as we should we must have great care to serve him well both in great, lofty matters and in small, unimportant things. With love we can capture his heart by the one just as well as the other." (*Introduction to the Devout Life*: Part III, Chapter 35)

While the message should be clear, many of us nevertheless labor under the belief that in order to please God we must do great things: simply put, we believe that size matters; specifically, that bigger is better. The problem, suggests Fran Ferder, FSPA, is the (often unconscious) belief that holiness is only found or experienced in the big, the great or the extraordinary; that it somehow involves behaviors or circumstances that are superhuman.

Consider that often-overlooked parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25: 31-46). Both the sheep and the goats shared something in common: they failed to recognize the connection between performing simple, ordinary acts of goodness, care and concern to others! The sheep ask the question: "Lord, when did we see you...and give you something to drink...invite you in...give you clothing...visit you?" For their part, the goats likewise asked: "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?"

The casualty in failing to make

this connection, of course, is the notion that we can serve God and neighbor just as effectively (and far more frequently) in small, ordinary, everyday ways. Consider some dictionary definitions of the term "ordinary" itself: "commonly encountered"; "of no exceptional ability, degree or quality"; "of inferior quality; second-rate"; "the usual or normal..."

Is it any wonder, then, that when it comes to Living Jesus, the small or little things in life may appear to be so unimportant? All the more important that we heed St. Francis de Sales' advice: "Keep your eyes steadfastly fixed on that blissful day of eternity toward which the course of years bears us on; and these as they pass, themselves pass by us stage by stage until we reach the end of the road. But meanwhile in these passing moments there lies enclosed as in a tiny kernel the seed of all eternity; and in our humble little works of devotion there lies hidden the prize of everlasting glory, and the little pains we take to serve God lead to a bliss that can never end." (Stopp: *Selected Letters*)

Size does indeed matter, but not in the way that our culture would have us believe. In fact, spiritual greatness is more often experienced and expressed in making the best use of small, little, ordinary means of reaching out to others' needs. St. Jane de Chantal wrote: "We cannot always offer God great things, but at each moment we can offer little things with great love."