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Little Things

Every day we have the possibility of finding God's will materialized in things that are accessible and small, but good and pleasing in the eyes of God and other men and women.

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The ordinary daily life that we Christians want to sanctify is interwoven with seemingly unremarkable events and situations, habitual relationships and repeated events that could easily lead to a routine and superficial existence.

However, faith in Christ gives great dignity to people and their actions as well as to created things, rescuing human existence from possible monotony and irrelevance.

In this daily setting, the eyes of faith find constant opportunities to love God and serve our neighbor, making life more human and endowing what seems small and unimportant, when done out of love, with great human and supernatural value. “Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it . . . I assure you, my sons and daughters, that when a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God” (*Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, nos. 114 and 116).

Thus what seemed unimportant proves to have a great transforming force, when united to God's grace: "To change the world with the little things of every day, with generosity, with sharing, with listening to others and creating attitudes of brotherhood" (*Message of Francis to young people*, 2-VI-2017).

1. Jesus' example

Although the Incarnation of the Word came about miraculously, without human intervention and "by the power of the Holy Spirit" (*Mt* 1:18), his nine-month gestation in Mary's womb and his coming into the world in the bosom of a family were normal and unremarkable. The thirty years that preceded the three years of his public life and his Passion, Death and Resurrection were spent in the most normal way in the village of Nazareth, doing manual labor and interacting with

relatives, friends and neighbors. But it was also a redemptive period: each drop of Christ's sweat in the workshop of Nazareth saved us, just as each drop of his blood on the Cross of Calvary did.

At the beginning of his public life, when Jesus returned to Nazareth, his fellow townspeople were amazed: “Where did this man get this wisdom and these powers, is he not the son of the craftsman? The people said of him that “he has done all things well” (Mk 7:37). St. Josemaría pointed to how Jesus carried out “not only the great miracles, but also the little everyday things that didn't dazzle anyone, but which Christ performed with the accomplishment of one who is perfect God and perfect man” (*Friends of God*, no. 56).

Jesus greatly values small things if they are done with love and generosity, like the alms of the poor

widow (cf. Mk 12:41-43): “Didn’t you see the light in Jesus’ eyes when the poor widow left her alms in the temple? Give him what you can: the merit is not in whether it is big or small, but in the intention with which you give it” (*The Way*, no. 829). And he also notes the lack of due courtesies in the house of Simon the Pharisee, after a sinful woman approached Jesus, washed his feet with tears, dried them with her hair, anointed them with perfume and kissed them, while his host had neither offered water for his feet, nor kissed him with the kiss of welcome, nor anointed his head with oil (cf. Lk 7:38-46). St. Josemaría said that Jesus “drew attention to this example of bad manners to underline his teaching that love is shown in little details” (*Friends of God*, no. 122)

In his teachings, Jesus stresses the importance of being faithful in little things. In the parable of the talents,

he shows this appreciation with words that are like a welcome to Heaven: “Well done, good and faithful servant; since you have been faithful in a little, I will entrust to you much: enter into the joy of your Lord” (Mt 25:21). And St. Josemaría says: “The words are Christ’s. *In pauca fidelis!* ... Now will you disdain little things, if Heaven itself is promised to those who keep them?” (*The Way*, no. 819).

The parable of the foolish and wise virgins (cf. Mt 25:1-13) is also a wake-up call to be attentive to details, which are like oil, absent in the lamps of the foolish virgins: “Either they didn't know how to get ready properly or they didn't want to . . . They were not generous enough to carry out properly the little that had been entrusted to them. You might say these are trifling matters. You're right, they are, but these trifles are the oil, the fuel we need to keep our

flame alive and our light shining” (*Friends of God*, no. 41). Jesus has an eye for details when he says to his disciples, after the multiplication of the loaves: “Gather up the scraps that are left over so that nothing will be lost” (Jn 6:12). In short, Jesus holds little things in great esteem so that we never neglect them.

2. The setting for little things

Materially speaking, the setting in which we need to care for little things encompasses all our daily activities. Work, family life, social relations, rest, etc., are integral elements of the spiritual life of those who wish to be saints in the middle of the world, in close contact with the realities of daily life.

And the domain of small things is also the domain of all the virtues. A person who is capable of bearing great tribulations with fortitude and

at the same time is insensitive and ungrateful for a small service received, or who lives with a strong sense of justice but easily neglects small points of temperance, would not be virtuous. The virtues form a “fabric,” as it were, in which all the fibers grow in a homogeneous way, sometimes through heroic acts, but usually through small deeds that are directed to the good and to the truth. St. Josemaría warned about the danger of imagining great deeds in our Lord's service, referring to the fictional character Tartarin of Tarascon, who tried to hunt lions in the corridors of his house and, as was to be expected, didn't find them: “Rest assured that you will usually find few opportunities for dazzling deeds, one reason being that they seldom occur. On the other hand, you will not lack opportunities, in the small and ordinary things around you, of showing your love for Christ” (*Friends of God*, no. 8). Even

more graphic is the consideration from *The Way*, no. 204: “Many who would let themselves be nailed to a cross before the astonished gaze of thousands of spectators won’t bear the pinpricks of each day with a Christian spirit! But think, which is the more heroic?”

The domain of small things, therefore, is as vast as life itself, beginning with one's own duties: “Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment: do what you ought and put yourself into what you are doing” (*The Way*, no. 815)

For virtue to exist,” explains St. Thomas, “we must attend to two things: to what we do and to the way we do it” (*Quodl. IV*, a. 19). If we want to be saints, the most accessible path, trusting in God’s grace, is to try to do everything with the greatest possible perfection, paying attention

to small details day after day, throughout our entire lives. There are so many virtues that can be lived and strengthened through doing small things with love and care. For example, temperance (*The Way*, no. 681: “The day you leave the table without having made some small mortification, you will have eaten like a pagan”; detachment (*Friends of God*, no. 119: “Get into the habit, from now on, of facing up cheerfully to little shortcomings and discomforts, to cold and heat, to the lack of things you feel you can't do without, to being unable to rest as and when you would like to, to hunger, loneliness, ingratitude, lack of appreciation, disgrace...”); obedience (*The Way*, no. 618: “The enemy: will you obey... even in this ridiculous little detail? You, with God's grace: ‘I will obey, even in this heroic little detail’”); penance (*Friends of God*, no. 138: “Penance consists in putting up good-humoredly with the

thousand and one little pinpricks of each day”, etc. There are so many small areas in which we can put love and care into constant small details each day that unite us to God and make us better: “Have you seen how that imposing building was constructed? One brick after another. Thousands. But, one by one” (*The Way*, no. 823). This is how we collaborate with God’s great desire to build up the edifice of our personal sanctification.

3. The key to the value of small things

Only when we are motivated by love can we pay this careful attention to little things. The key to the value of small things, as we probably realized, lies in doing them out of love: “Do everything for Love. In that way there will be no little things: everything will be big. Perseverance in the little things for Love is

heroism” (*The Way*, no. 813) When we write “Love” with a capital letter, we want to indicate that it is God who is loved through these apparently tiny acts.

Indeed, love for God produces the prodigy of transfiguring the accumulation of small things, which on their own would hardly have any value and which form the fabric of daily life, into something divine, of infinite value: into holiness. We should not allow this daily treasure to slip through our fingers. The greatness that results from so many little things done out of Love is what St. Josemaría refers to when he writes: “Many great things depend—don’t forget it—on whether you and I live our lives as God wants” (*The Way*, no. 755) This also means knowing how to discover within the communion of saints the importance of the role that each of us plays in the divine enterprise of Redemption:

“Don’t be a fool! It’s true that at most you play the part of a small bolt in that great undertaking of Christ’s. But do you know what happens when a bolt is not tight enough or when it works itself out of place? Bigger parts also work loose or gears are damaged or broken. The whole work is slowed up. Perhaps the whole machine will be rendered useless. What a big thing it is to be a little bolt!” (*The Way*, no. 830) When each one fulfills their duty day after day, from their own place, carrying out their professional activity with competence, striving to give glory to God and to serve others, they are collaborating with Christ to renew the world.

It is love that is the key to not seeing the care for little things in terms of narcissistic perfectionism, or with an obsessive or rigid mindset.

These possible attitudes couldn't be further from love, since they arise from selfish interests and only serve to complicate people and make their relationships with others more difficult. Caring for little things each day doesn't mean that everything will go perfectly. God counts on the fact that we are human beings, each with our own limitations, through which his love can continue to act. Paraphrasing St. Paul, we Christians are called to renew our outlook so that we can "discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). Every day we have the possibility of finding God's will materialized in things that are accessible and small, but good and pleasing in the eyes of God and other men and women.

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