

GRACE IN THE LITTLE THINGS AND THE SIMPLE THINGS  
(The Ways of God are not as complex as we sometimes make them.  
In the simplest dimensions of life God is at work.)

A number of years back there was a lot going on with the parish and my own family life. My mom was living with me. We were running a Capital Campaign, testing out our new Church and Education Center. On that summer Sunday I received a phone call from a parishioner. I had seen him and his wife at Mass and spoken to them briefly afterwards. I was hurried and I was not able to give my normal attention. After Mass he and his wife had a conversation about their Pastor and discussed between themselves some concerns they had. And that was the reason for the call. The parishioner simply communicated their conversation and concern he and his wife had for me what running of the parish and caring for my mom and the debt and new facilities and increasing responsibilities. They asked if there was anything they could do for me. Could they help to lighten my load a little bit.

That phone call meant a lot to me. When I was a younger priest I would have received that call, thanked them for their concern, and then moved on to whatever was next on my plate. But now that I am older I stayed with the call and I allowed its message to breakthrough and touch me. I let the meaning and the care and the offer of concern and the sensitivity and the appreciation and the consolation all enter into my heart. And these things brought me comfort. They eased my burden just a little bit. They lightened my load.

The lesson. An ordinary couple went home after Mass and discussed what they had noticed and heard at church. They had a discussion about me and as a result of that discussion they decided to make a phone call. They probably just thought that it was the right thing to do. And it was. But it was more. I did not take their words and their concern just as their words and concern. I took them as coming right from Our Lord—through them. It was Christ speaking, caring, easing, consoling. It was Christ telling me that He knew my situation and cared about what happened to me. I wonder if they realized that it was the very Spirit of God that was putting them up to this. They sensed the cross in my life and saw its shadow fall upon me and they offered to help me with it.

But there's more. I know that they too have had their own share of the cross in their recent lives and struggles. But instead they were reaching out to me. Both of them. The two of them. And Jesus sent out his disciples in twos, pairs, couples. There is something unleashed in the dynamic between one person and another that is not present with just one person alone. I wonder if they thought of themselves as "sent?" But they were. Like Paul, they bear the brand marks of the cross on their bodies. We often think that St. Paul is speaking of the stigmata, the wounds of Christ, that some of the great mystics also receive, people such as Francis of Assisi and Padre Pio in our own time. But I see it in another way. In ever baptism the priest asks the parents and the godparents to trace the sign of the cross on the forehead of the little one being baptized. He himself will anoint them with oil over their heart before the waters are poured and on the crown of their head with chrism after the baptism has taken place. Each time it is in the form of the cross. Their bodies are so marked. And this anointing is for the giving of the Holy Spirit.

We have learned since childhood that there are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and given enough time we could probably name them. But often enough we don't think of these gifts. Rarely do we realize they are active and present in our lives on a daily basis. But consider for a moment this little story. Understanding—they have a sense of what I must be going through. They "get it." Knowledge—they know the toll that these stresses take on human beings. Counsel and wisdom—they discussed what they noticed and asked what they might do to be of help. Fortitude—they had the courage to pick up the phone and risk my thinking that they

had lost their minds because nothing was the matter. Piety and reverence for the Lord—they have a deep appreciation of the gift of the priesthood and how it serves to nourish and sustain them in their need.

My friends, there is so much more going on in our lives at any given time than we ever realize. But I have come to know that my words are not just my words. They are the Lord's. Yours too. I have come to know that my care is not just my care. It is the Lord's. Yours too. I am sent. You are sent. Our words, our deeds, our simple phone calls are acts of grace, moments of grace if we only take the time to see. Faith enables us to recognize, to see truly. Faith opens us to the very promptings of the Holy Spirit even when we think it is just us. Faith leads us to spread the Good News of God's love and not even Satan can resist the simple power of this word of grace. You are sent--by Christ—into your homes, to your jobs, to the parish, to the Giant or Whole Foods or the mall or to your neighbor or your friends. You belong to Christ. Dare to believe his Spirit is at work in you—even when you are on the phone.