

Parish Mission Talk (Diana Cosgrove)
“Doing small things for God amidst excessive busyness”

Good evening everyone. My name is Diana Cosgrove and my family and I have been parishioners at Our Mother of Consolation since we moved here from Washington, D.C. eight years ago. My husband Jim and I have three young children aged 8, 6 and 3 years old, the older two attend OMC School and the youngest will be joining them in the fall. We love OMC, the community and the Oblates and Sisters that dedicate themselves to our faith formation, and I am happy to be here tonight speaking with you, my stage fright notwithstanding.

My topic for tonight is “doing small things for God amidst excessive business.” I can look around tonight at you all and know that everyone here understands what that is like, to feel excessively busy. I’m sure for many it was tricky just to make the time to come to our Parish Mission tonight. It sounds so cliché but I think it’s true, we live in a time when, regardless of our different backgrounds or roles we may play during the day, we feel called in a million different directions. These days, few people can escape or unplug.

Is anyone familiar with the expression “I can’t adult today?” It’s a thing, I assure you. It is what my younger self would say if she woke up one day and without warning got a glimpse of what my life is like now. It wouldn’t be lost on her that my time doesn’t seem to be my own. One of the biggest differences she would see, after probably laughing about how insane my three year old seems to be, would be how different we practice our faith today.

When I look back at how I practiced my faith in my youth or basically the entire pre-adult-responsibilities era of my life, it really appears to have been a luxury. That’s a strange word to partner with this topic of spirituality but truly, that’s the way I treated it then. With responsibilities at a minimum and no one to look out for but myself I was able to seek my spiritual fuel, my time with God in contemplation and prayer, however I saw fit. Usually that meant long leisurely walks in the outdoors, interesting, compelling spiritual reading, even wandering in awe-inspiring cathedrals. If I was feeling particularly spiritually hungry - no problem. Reciting a rosary on a springtime walk taking in the emerging flowers and singing birds or time gazing up at the high ceilings of an old cathedral would leave me feeling refreshed and revived. How could it not? Back then, I had the flexibility to take as much time as I needed, and I did.

But time went on and life changed. My old job became more time-consuming. I got married, had a child, then another, then another. Uninterrupted sleep became a thing of the past. There were the nighttime feedings, sleep training, bad dreams, early wake ups. Potty-training, homework, birthday parties, bills, piano lessons, volunteer positions, tantrums, basketball teams, selling houses, buying houses, and moving to new cities. My time no longer felt like it was my

own. I looked at all these changes that had sprung up in my life as obstacles - vines seemingly blocking my path to connection with God. How could I take in the beauty of spring or the solace of a peaceful, quiet church with demanding infants or toddlers and tow, not to mention with a million other things on my mind. I mentioned the rosary earlier - my favorite manner of prayer - well, any rosaries I recited back then ended in one thing. . . .Snoring.

Consequently I experienced long bouts of spiritual dryness because with my new life, I didn't know where I could "fit it in." So for what felt like a long time I just lived without actively practicing my faith, without seeking and finding God in the day to day. Because, I thought to myself, who has the time? I'm sure many of you here have had similar experiences, and so you know that eventually something's got to give. You go through huge life moments and you feel the absence of that anchor to center you through it all. You find yourself reaching out for something but no longer knowing how to get there.

I'm not sure when, but at some point during that time I came across a prayer from Thomas Merton, perhaps you are familiar with it. Sometimes it is called the "prayer that anyone can pray", and the part of it that sticks with me goes like this:

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing."

"But I believe the *desire* to please you does in fact please you." That line has meant a lot to me throughout the years. It is so hopeful. For me it strips away the pretenses of what *I think* I should be doing, and what *I think* a spiritual life ought to look like. The implication seems to be that the person reciting the prayer thinks they are doing a bad job at life, but they don't know how to move forward. That line reminds me that God meets me where I am. Circumstances don't have to be perfect to spend time with God. They don't have to look how they looked in the past for you. Keep moving forward. Coming across this prayer helped me to understand that all the things that had entered my life and made me so busy didn't necessarily have to be obstacles. They could actually be looked at as invitations - and I can look for and find God within them.

Another moment recently helped drive this fact home for me. I had been having a recurring argument with my daughter. We weren't seeing eye to eye on responsibilities and expectations in the house and the combination of that with being overtired (both of us), overstimulated (both of us), growth spurts (that one was just her), and who knows what else had us sparring pretty often. One night in particular my patience was beyond thin and I just couldn't

see her point of view. Of course I believed myself to be right because I'm the parent. But also because - I was *busy*. There were a million other things I felt I should be doing and *I didn't have time for this*. Not only were there kids' lunches to make, laundry to fold, school forms to go through, phone calls to make but really - this was time I had tried to squeeze out and set aside to say my darn rosary for crying out loud!

I was stewing in the living room by myself, defiantly and probably sanctimoniously going through my Hail Mary's and suddenly she comes in to the living room where I was, lips pouting, face crumpled and tears streaming down her face. I opened up my arms and she fell into them. And I felt her just relax and let go. And I did too. We sat there for a really long time, the other kids came in to watch a movie. And I truly felt something say, quietly inside, 'This is your rosary today'. Just being there for my daughter, giving her what she needed, that was what I had been invited to give. That was where I had been invited to meet God.

As small and quiet as that moment was - seemingly insignificant, it was after all just me and my family gathered around the television of all things, it was a big one for me. I felt like I had been let in on a secret. Between the kids, the commitments, the responsibilities and not to mention the distractions of life - my challenge is not making space for my faith. My challenge is to *recognize* that I am constantly being invited to practice my faith in every moment. To notice that God's voice is already there, regardless of how busy I am. It's in the faces and needs of my kids, in all the things being asked of me. All I have to do is say yes.

My experience of doing small things for God, in the midst of excessive business, has been about accepting where my life is now, letting go of the idea that conditions need to be perfect to practice my faith and embracing that I am where God wants me to be.