Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Martin Jernberg)



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My siblings and I were setting up flowers and pictures for our mother's funeral an hour before family and friends would arrive. The church was empty except for an elderly gentleman hunched over in prayer in a pew near the back. None of us knew him, so we approached to let him know what would be happening. He said, "Yes, I know. I'm here to support your dad." We were all surprised, as none of us had ever met him.

He continued, "Your dad and I were buddies back in the '40s, when our family came upon hard times. My father got sick and couldn't support us. So I asked your dad, who worked at the local drug store, to see if his manager would hire me. And sure enough, I landed the job and our family survived. I will never, as long as I live, forget your father's kindness."

"*Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.*"

St. Thérèse of Lisieux is pictured in an undated photo. (OSV News files)

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This saying is attributed to Leo Buscaglia, and he was correct. Our small acts of caring can turn a life around, and we may never even know it. My dad, a lifelong Catholic, would say he was simply responding to a friend as anyone else would. And I'm sure his face would turn as red as his beloved St. Louis Cardinals jersey if we claimed that he was a vessel of God's kindness. Yet that is precisely what he revealed through this compassionate gesture, one among countless others he performed throughout his long life.

Every day brings moments when each of us can extend a compassionate word, an attentive ear or a warm smile. With practice, these gestures become increasingly natural. According to Harvard Health Publishing, studies indicate kindness can improve happiness.

My childhood favorite saint, Thérèse of Lisieux, said that "a word, a kindly smile, will often suffice to gladden a wounded and sorrowful heart." She also said, "Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love."

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When we explained to my dad how much he had impacted this gentleman's life, he shrugged off his long-ago act of kindness, saying, "I don't even remember doing that." But to his recipient, dad's action was so life-changing that the gratitude spanned over 80 years. The moral of the story is clear: What we do makes a difference. We are the hands, the feet and the eyes of God.

Here are a few suggestions for showing kindness and love in our everyday lives:

- Invite another shopper to go ahead of you at the grocery store;
- Bring a small bouquet of flowers to an elderly friend;
- Share homemade cookies with your mail carrier or garbage worker;
- Send a card to someone who is struggling or could use a bit of affirmation;
- Give a sincere compliment to a stranger;
- Wave another driver into your lane during rush hour;
- Ask the checkout clerk – using their name – how their day is going;
- Call an old friend or family member just to catch up;
- Offer to babysit a neighbor's child while they take a break for an hour.