

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
August 30, 2009

Have you ever been so caught up in the details that you forgot all about the bigger picture?

I know I do it sometimes myself.

I get so wrapped up in all the small, minute details...things that I know, in the end, won't matter one way or another.

Knowing this though, there are still times that I can't seem to move forward until I know exactly who, what, when, where, and how.

And it's these times that I must be aware of and remind myself that what really matters is the bigger picture.

One Sunday morning, a tired, worn-out woman enters a church just before Mass begins.

Just for the record, this story is not about St. Mary's Church.

The woman's cloths were holey, dirty, and in desperate need of a good, thorough cleaning.

Her hair was straggly and looked like it hadn't been combed in weeks.

She carried in one arm, her old, army coat that kept her warm during cool nights.

In her other arm, she held a worn-out bible that had obviously seen better days.

The church she entered was in a very upscale and exclusive part of the city.

It had great, big, oak doors, large decorative pillars that lined the entire length of the church, a massive ceiling, elaborate statues and wood carvings all over, flowers surrounding the altar, and much, much more.

In fact, this was the largest and most beautiful church the woman had ever seen in her 53 years of living.

In addition, the people in the pews all seemed to wear expensive clothing – pressed suits and elegant dresses was all the woman could see as she tirelessly walked down the aisle to find a seat near the front.

And as the woman took her seat just 2 rows from the front, she discovered that as soon as she sat down, people around her moved away from her.

Some people even got up and moved to different pew.

Needless to say, no one greeted this woman, spoke to her or welcomed her in any way to that parish church that day.

It was pretty obvious by their actions that these people were appalled at this woman and didn't want anything to do with her.

After Mass was complete, the woman got up to leave.

As she was walking out, one of the ushers finally, and courageously approached the woman and asked her to do a favor for him and the rest of the parish community.

The usher asked the woman, "Before you come back here again, have a talk with God and ask him what He thinks would be an appropriate attire and appearance for worship."

The woman, surprised obviously, humbly said she would and then proceeded to make her way out of church.

The next Sunday, to everyone's surprise, this same tired and worn-out woman showed up for Mass again wearing the same clothes, with the same messed-up hair, and carrying the same old coat and bible.

And once again, like the previous week, she was completely shunned and ignored by the community.

After Mass, the same usher approached the woman again and said to her, "I thought I asked you to speak with God about your appearance before you came back to this church."

The woman politely responded, "Oh, I did."

"Oh yea," said the usher. "If you spoke to God, what did He tell you the proper attire and appearance should be for worshipping in this church?"

"Well, sir," said the woman, "God told me that He didn't have a clue what I should wear or how I should look because He said He's never been in this church before."

How often do we get caught up in all the small details and forget to look at the bigger picture?

Obviously, the small details here are the cloths and the appearance of the woman.

The bigger picture that the usher and rest of the parish community completely missed is the fact that God welcomes us no matter how we look and what we wear or don't wear for that matter.

Now, this isn't a free ticket to come to Mass next week wearing whatever you want. There are boundaries after all.

Besides, we should always remember to present ourselves as best as we can whenever we come before the Lord, especially at Mass.

In doing so though, we're not to overlook the bigger picture, namely, that what's of most significance and helps us deepen our relationship with God are matters of the heart.

Because it is from the heart that come "evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, and folly."

Let's not forget though that at the same time, loving thoughts, chastity, honesty, truth, righteousness, faithfulness, compassion, equality, justice, a respect for life, and trust also come from the heart.

And so, if our hearts contain more of the latter list of qualities rather than the former list, we have a good start in recognizing and keeping before us the bigger picture that God intends us to see.

In other words, if we practice loving one another as Jesus loved us, this will become our primary focus and naturally, we won't always get distracted by insignificant details.

Rather, we will have before us, the love of God – a selfless, self-giving, emptying love that has as its goal to bring the other to know and love God more authentically.

And things like this are the bigger picture that God wants us to center on...not small details about how to live; but rather, how to love as God has loved us.

This being said, if we truly wish to grow and deepen our relationship with God, are we willing to focus on the bigger picture and direct our hearts to things that really matter such as hearing God's word, understanding it, and living it out in our lives?

Or, are we too easily distracted by the small details that tend to more often than not, cloud our vision?