

Vision in Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

I miss shopping for clothes with my mom.

Some of that stems from that too-familiar ache known to all those who have loved and lost. The desire to run an ordinary errand, exchange a quick phone call or share a cup of coffee together *just one* more time is a deep longing with a permanent home in my heart – and the hearts of so many I know.

But there was something unique about shopping for clothes with my mom. She was an accomplished seamstress. When we shopped together, she had an eye for salvaging clothes that I, in my quick judgement, was so often inclined to reject.

I could look at a dress and, after a passing glance, reject it because the sleeves were too long, the buttons were the wrong color, the collar was awkward, or an otherwise tailored skirt had an inexplicable, oversized bow at the waist. I could look at a jacket and move along quickly because it had bulky shoulders, an awkward pleat or a flimsy zipper.

But, my mom did not see the forlorn inhabitants of the clearance racks the same way I did. In her mind's eye, she could see what they would look like if she tailored the sleeves, found better new buttons, replaced a collar, turned a bow to a belt, streamlined shoulders, sewed up a pleat and switched a flimsy zipper for a classier closure. More often than I can recall, I would come home with something new to wear – and my mother would come home with a sewing project.

I miss that.

I miss the example of someone who could, in something as trivial as clothing, see not merely what was, but what could be. Someone who could see not merely what was wrong, but what could be right. Someone who could see that a quick judgement may mean missing out on something very good.

I wonder if there is something in those ordinary shopping trips to teach about life and the way in which it can be all too easy to see in others – and in ourselves – only what is and not what could be.

Yes, there is a real danger in relationships and friendships when we see others merely as works-in-progress, not accepted for who they are but only for who they might be if they could only change to our liking. But, I learned on those long-ago shopping trips that it is also dangerous to see only that which is before us without also seeing potential and optimism about all that could lie ahead if we seek out the good that is so often hidden away.

Maybe I also learned something about God. I like to think that the God who loves us as we are is also a God who sees our best selves -- not just the flaws and failures that makes those who love less perfectly turn away. I like to think that the God who made us is also a God who sees not only the way we are today, but all we can be tomorrow. I like to think, too, that with God's help we might also be able to see ourselves and others with eyes a bit more like His.

There are still days when I wear a favorite outfit and see my mother's small stitches tucked away. When I see these relics of repairs and remodels of yesteryear, I am grateful.

Yes, I am grateful that awkward bows and tacky buttons have been replaced with something better. But I am more grateful for that subtle example of one who could say "yes" when a quick "no" may have been the easier, first reaction. This is the blessed, better vision that can brighten our ordinary times.

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