

When less - or different - is more

During my first year of college, my roommate and I lived in a dorm room with no screens in the windows. Many evenings when I called home, a fly happened to be buzzing around the room.

“What you need,” my mother told me one night, “is a flyswatter.”

My younger brothers at home overheard her. We had a lively, unspoken family competition to try to give the cheapest gifts possible for Christmas - and a flyswatter sounded inexpensive. They scoured the dollar stores without any luck. Finding flyswatters in December is tricky.

When spring came, however, flyswatters were everywhere. When my parents and siblings saw them, they thought of me and started buying every swatter they saw. Soon enough so did everyone else. My collection grew and grew and grew, with friends bringing them home from trips around the world and tracking them down on eBay. My younger sister even craftily designed and created some special swatters out of yarn. Today I own hundreds of flyswatters, each with its own origin and story.

All most people need, of course, is a single flyswatter. Owning several extraneous flyswatters makes for some fun conversations and entertaining household decorations. The collection is loads of fun, but it doesn't make it easier to swat a fly. More than once we have had a fly buzzing around the house, and I am scrambling to find a flyswatter I can actually use.

The shoemaker's children often go barefoot, as they say.

Sometimes having more of something isn't better. That's true of doing more, too. That can be hard to remember in a fast-paced world that urges us to crave more,

acquire more and become more. It is often harder to say no to an option than it is to say yes, yes, yes, and fill your day with too many commitments to do well.

There are times when less can, in fact, be more.

We were attending Mass not long ago when a visiting Jesuit priest spoke about the Jesuit ideal of striving for the “magis” - Latin for greater or better or more. Magis, he told us, doesn’t necessarily mean more of the same. Being or achieving more might mean being open to doing something completely different.

What a beautiful idea, the thought that the more God is asking of us might not be another pile of work on top of the work before us, but, in fact, setting down that work and embracing a different opportunity.

That idea is also a little bit daunting. We may need to listen and wonder and discern what that new calling might be. We might even need to consider what to let go of to make room for this new path or opportunity. But there is something exciting, and perhaps even comforting, believing that God might have something else in mind for us that is not just a larger load of laundry or a bigger workload.

Maybe we can be “more” simply by being open to a new calling or purpose in life. Maybe we can even be more by setting down part or all of our load and picking up another.

Sometimes that happens naturally in life as new opportunities arise. Doors close. Windows open. Paths twist and turn. As a mother, I see how my role changes as our children grow. I am no less of a mother, but my role changes as our sons mature and grow out of some needs and into new ones.

“I think that God chooses fruits from every season,” St. Thérèse said. “Isn’t it the diversity of the fruits and flowers in a garden that makes it so pleasant?”

As the first blossoms of spring transition into the vibrant greens of early summer, may we be open to the opportunities that lie ahead, recognizing that each of us can contribute to our family, our community, and our world in different ways at different moments. May we lean on the Holy Spirit and listen to discern what additional or new vocation God has in mind for us.

And, when the windows are open to catch a breeze and a fly comes buzzing in, may you be ready with your flyswatter. Everyone needs at least one.