

Friends in Ordinary Times

(Column 106, November 6, 2023)

By Lucia A. Silecchia

“Hello friend.”

I saw these two simple words etched in the most unlikely of places. They were carved into a gravestone in a rural cemetery on a peaceful hill surrounded by other more conventional, less sociable memorials.

“Hello friend.”

In one sense, it was a bit jarring to be silently greeted in such a gregarious way by one I had never known and would never know in this life. Yet, it was also a beautiful reminder that the veil between this side of eternity and the next is not as impenetrable as it so often seems. Particularly in the month of November, when the Church points our thoughts to all the saints and all the souls who have left this life behind, it helps to be reminded that they, and we, remain intimately connected to each other.

So often, we proclaim that we believe in “the communion of saints,” the “resurrection of the body,” and “life everlasting.” All of these declarations express the joyful hope that, in death, life has not ended for the faithful – it has only changed. Yet, when death comes to those I love and when I visit the graves of those I long to see again, that joyful hope can sometimes seem hard to hold.

“Hello friend.”

It was just two words that reminded me, in the gentlest way, that we are all still connected to those who came before us and have left this life ahead of us. When we pray for the intercession of our favorite saints, it is so good to be reminded that they also pray for us and may even call us “friend.”

When we pray for the souls of our loved ones, we are still so close to those who called us dear friends – or beloved spouses, daughters, sons, moms, dads, sisters, brothers, or grandparents. That will always be a mystery to me. Yet I would like to think they hear those prayers offered for them—and offer their own back for us.

Hello, friend.

Maybe in that greeting is also a reminder – and a subtle plea as well -- to remember those who have died and offer them our prayers. In this life, the greeting of a friend invites us to extend to that friend the help, kindness, and companionship that they need. Those whose souls we hold close this month also need the helpful, kind companionship we offer them through our prayers. Those who were not blessed with the gift of friendship in this life may be in even greater need of our prayers. Praying for those who have died is a spiritual work of mercy. But, perhaps, it is also an act of deep spiritual friendship.

Hello, friend.

Although the one whose body lies buried at this sociable grave is a stranger to me in this life, I hope that on the other side of eternity I may know him. The only way to greet him would be to say “*hello, friend,*” and thank you for the insights you gave me in ordinary time.

Lucia A. Silecchia is Professor of Law and Associate Dean for Faculty Research at the Catholic University of America’s Columbus School of Law. “On Ordinary Times” is a biweekly column reflecting on the ways to find the sacred in the simple. Email her at silecchia@cua.edu.