

In the Blur of Ordinary Time

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

My cell phone is betraying me.

More specifically, the camera on my cell phone has let me down. When I use it for regular photos of people, places and things, it seems to work just fine. It is only when I flip the lens around to take selfies that my photos come out blurred. I have tried cleaning the screen, holding the camera at different angles and testing various settings. Indeed, I have tried *everything* short of reading the directions!

I have not yet had any success ... or, maybe, technology is trying to teach me something.

It seems to me that there are two ways to approach life. One is to spend it looking outward, beyond ourselves toward God, to the joys and sorrows of others, and to the beauty of creation's miracles large and small.

I have been blessed to know those who live their lives this way, and they have taught me so much. They are the people who do the simplest things in their lives with great love because they have hearts open to all that lies beyond themselves.

They are the parents who do not think twice when their children need help and the strangers who just seem to know when another needs a smile, a kind word, or a seat on a crowded train. They are the harried co-workers who help each other get through the day, and those who in so many ways devote their lives to the glorious labors of caring for the weakest and most vulnerable among us. They are those who live their lives in cloisters with hearts fixed on God alone, and those who spend their days in urban rectories and convents bringing God and the people of God closer to each other in so many unsung ways. They are the busy teenagers who defend the bullied and young athletes who put their team before themselves. They are those who stop to admire a sunset, a snowscape and a tree bursting with blooms and say a prayer of gratitude to the God who made it all.

They are those who take to heart the tasks of comforting the sorrowing, nourishing the hungry and thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. They are all those who convert sinners, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs with patience, forgive freely and pray with love and trust.

Those who look beyond themselves see the world with clarity – and with the humility that comes from knowing that there is much that lies beyond self. In our best moments and on our best days, these are the people we are. On the days that are not so good, these are the people we are called to be.

The alternative is a life led with the lenses of our hearts turned inward on ourselves. Like my camera does when I try to turn the lens my way for a selfie, this is when life starts to look blurry.

Introspection and kindness to oneself are both good things. They can be the necessary source of strength and energy to face the world. But, there are times when it is too easy to keep the lens of life turned on ourselves longer than we should.

Complaints about our own lives can blind us to the burdens carried by others. Concerns about what others might think of us or the number of Twitter followers we amass can be all too consuming. The inconvenience to ourselves that may arise from extending a helping hand can stifle kind instincts. The fear that we cannot do something perfectly may hold us back from doing something just well enough to change another's life. The desire to get credit for doing something may keep us from thanking others or recognizing the efforts of a team. The wish to be thought well of can hold us back from defending someone unpopular who is being cruelly mocked. The unrelenting urge to accomplish everything on our own "to do" list can blind us to a child who wants to play, a sunrise that should be savored, and a God who beckons us to quiet contemplation of His love.

It is on these days and in these moments that, perhaps, our view of life gets a bit blurry. What is important can get hidden, and the picture we see is not as clear as it is on our better days.

I like a good selfie, and hope I will figure out how to take better ones. Turning the camera on ourselves now and then is a good way to capture lasting images of ourselves with our friends and families and at beautiful places.

But maybe it is a good thing, for now, that the pictures I take of myself are not quite as good as the ones I take of others. It is a subtle reminder to keep them in focus through the blur of ordinary times.

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