

The Fears of Ordinary Time

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

These past weeks, along with millions of others, my days have been lived in the grip of a cold and icy northeast with no sign of warmth coming soon.

At the cold spell began and the icy snow first fell, I found myself in my hometown in New York, enjoying the beauty of snow, complaining about the shoveling of that same snow, relishing the time outdoors when snow draws neighbors together, and cherishing the time indoors with hot coffee and the blessings of a hard-working furnace.

Yet, as the days passed by, I knew it was time to take the train back down to Washington to resume life at Catholic University. I make that trip so often that it is routine and usually uneventful. Nevertheless, as I anticipated this particular trip, read reports about travel delays, got texts about trains being cancelled, and wondered how ice could possibly melt off train tracks, I expected the worst.

I braced myself for having my train cancelled, getting rebooked on a later, overly crowded train, watching that train get stuck on the track for hours -- and in those hours losing electricity and plumbing. I contemplated an exhausted crew, cold and cranky co-passengers, and a very, very late arrival to the cold tunnels of Washington's Union Station.

Nevertheless, my train left New York on time, and arrived in Washington early. I had not only one, but two, seats to myself. The crew and passengers were all in good spirits. The coffee in the café car was hot and fresh, and the warmth of the train lulled me into a long and peaceful nap through most of New Jersey.

Perhaps this was just a happy confluence of events that made a dreaded trip an easy one. Yet, it also reminded me of how much time and energy I can easily spend worrying about those things that never actually happen.

Yes, there are times when there are real problems that need real discernment, caution and concern. But, if I am honest about the things that I most often worry about, many of them are anticipatory fears about what *might* happen rather than legitimate concerns about what *is* happening. It is worry about the what ifs, the maybes, the mights, the coulds. *What if* that presentation does not go well? *Maybe* those test results will not be what I want. *I might* not meet my deadline. The train trip *could* be an unpleasant misadventure.

In this, I do not think I am alone. Christ Himself knew that there must be a lot of overeager worriers like me when He warned, "*Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself.*" (Matt. 6:34). In minor things, such as train travel, and in major things as well, borrowing trouble from the future is easy to do – and a hard habit to

surrender. Disguised as prudence, this crafty thief of present joy can make expecting the worst much easier than hoping for the best.

Yet, in a paradox I still do not understand, so much of what I worry about never comes to pass – and some of life’s biggest challenges have come in unexpected things that I had not planned to worry about. This seems to be an inefficient use of worry!

It is now a month into the new year. But, if I were to make a newish-year resolution, it might be to remember this train trip when fears about what might happen come prematurely. And, I hope that when I remember that train trip, it may also call to mind those other words of great comfort: *“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”* (Phil. 4:6-7).

Wishing you that great peace that conquers the fears of ordinary time.

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