

The Opportunities of Ordinary Time

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Recently, I got the ominous “heads up” that my work computer is scheduled to be replaced this summer.

For most, this should be the most welcome of news. A new computer is faster, unclogged with old files, updated with the latest and greatest software and, in most objective ways, an improvement over the technology that it replaces.

But, my first reaction was something slightly shy of dread. Over the years, I have grown familiar with the computer I use. I know exactly where my files are. I know what I will see when I log in. I know the quirks of the programs I use most often. My fingers know their way around my well-worn keyboard. Yes, it runs slowly, the versions of my software may not be the newest and there are features that my increasingly “vintage” machine does not have. Yet ... it is familiar.

In the weeks ahead, I will be figuring out how to transfer my files, fight with the new versions of my software and get acquainted with all that is different. For a spell, the gratitude I should have for this upgrade will be mixed with trepidation about the work this will involve, the challenges of getting used to something new and the break from the comfort of the familiar.

Sometimes life, too, can seem like this. It is easy to get used to what is familiar, routine and comfortable. Then, along comes a summons to do something new. It could be a kind suggestion from a loved one. It might be a challenge from a colleague. It can be a well-meaning dare from a friend who knows you all too well. Or, it may be a gentle invitation from God that comes, unbeckoned, in quiet prayer.

There is much that is comforting about the known and the predictable. Yet, how often it is that we look back at the best times of our lives or the decisions that are the best we have made and realize that they were the times and the decisions that sprung out of invitations to leave behind our usual routines.

This post-Easter season is a time of such summonses, challenges, dares, invitations, and fresh beginning for many who are called to do new things that are wonderful and frightening, exciting and unsettling at the same time. Those who entered or returned to the Church at Easter are now living a new life in Christ that constantly calls us all to rebirth. Those who are marrying, making religious vows or being ordained are making those lifelong commitments that will change everything for them and all those whose lives they touch. Those who are graduating are leaving behind the places and people they know so well and starting over as a new chapter of life begins. Those whose circumstances drive them to move to an unknown place or begin a new job are, likewise, going where they do not know what awaits. Those who are retiring are also leaving

behind the security of the lives they have known, perhaps since youth. Those preparing to welcome a new child also know that life as they now live it will never again be the same. Those celebrating Confirmations and First Communions are sharing in mysteries whose true impact lies beyond human comprehension in this life.

In all of these things, there is a call to embrace what is new, knowing that this is not easy for those who – like me! – appreciate what is well known and cling to it when we can. It can be even harder when that which is new is something profoundly difficult and unwanted, such as facing life with a serious illness or facing death – one’s own or another’s -- sooner than expected.

But in this season filled with many invitations to try that which is new, the Church offers great encouragement in two extraordinary celebrations that lie just ahead. On Ascension Thursday, we are encouraged by the great promise, *“I am with you always, until the end of the age.”* (Mt. 28:20). Ten days later, on Pentecost Sunday, we are comforted by that most beautiful of greetings, *“Peace be with you.”* (John 20:19, 21).

God’s presence and peace are the perfect gifts for a season in which leaving the familiar might be an experience many of us share -- in ways far more challenging and significant than my farewell to an aging computer. They are the perfect gifts for all the opportunities of ordinary times.

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