

New Beginnings in Ordinary Time

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Unbeknownst to me, when I changed my calendar to August, I entered “*National Back to School Month*.” As fond as I am of new school supplies and the scent of new books, not even I knew that this is celebrated for an entire month.

Yet it is.

According to the National Retail Federation, Americans are expected to spend \$39.4 billion on back-to-school expenditures for students in grades K-12. This is dwarfed by the \$88.8 billion in anticipated back-to-school expenditures for those returning to colleges and universities in the coming weeks.

Those who, a few short months ago, eagerly lay aside the trappings of the school year and embraced their time away, are now engaged in the quest for the perfect new supplies, clothing, electronics, shoes, books and dormitory accoutrements to begin a new year and celebrate a new start.

Having spent all but five years of my life in school as a student or a teacher, I understand this excitement very well. Indeed, some of those staggering national expenditures on back-to-school can certainly be traced back to me.

When I was a child, I remember shopping with my mother for the perfect new school supplies and waiting eagerly for the delivery of a new school uniform when I had outgrown the old. By definition, the new uniform was exactly the same as the old. Yet, the mere fact that it was new made it special. I remember the smell of the paint that was used every summer to repaint the stairwells in my elementary school. After all these years, to me that scent is still synonymous with the new beginnings of autumn.

As an adult, I still enjoy new textbooks, new students, new calendars, and, yes, new shoes.

There is simply something exciting about new beginnings. Even for those whose lives do not center on the school year, there is often still something about September that brings fresh starts. Activities that were suspended during the summer months start up again. Parish activities on hiatus return, and routines that were suspended resume once more.

There seems to be something in us that craves the chance to make new starts and to do old familiar things in new ways. There seems to be an excitement that comes when we know that a new phase in our lives is about to get underway. The start of a school year is one of those times. There are many others. At weddings, we celebrate a couple’s new life together. At ordinations and religious professions, we celebrate the newness of lives given in service of God and His people. At births and Baptisms, we celebrate the start of

new journeys through this life. When there are graduations, promotions, new jobs and moves to new homes, we also celebrate the excitement of new beginnings.

All of this is a beautiful reflection of the ways in which our lives are great adventures, ever changing and ever new.

Yet, there are also other moments in life, less public, that can also be filled with the excitement of new beginnings. It may not take a nationally observed month or a public celebration to mark some of the most profound and sacred new beginnings in our lives.

It is a beautiful new beginning when we mend a broken friendship, leave an old temptation aside, or return to a faith laid aside for a while.

It is a beautiful new beginning when we start a friendship, commit to a new challenge, or adjust our attitude to an old problem.

It is a beautiful new beginning when we give ourselves the chance to see the goodness in another, commit to supporting a worthy effort, or decide that an old fear will no longer cast a shadow on our future.

It is a beautiful new beginning when we join a new parish, volunteer for the first time, or reconcile ourselves with God and with each other.

It is a beautiful new beginning when we admit we were wrong, forgive ourselves for a path wrongly taken, or decide to revive an old dream once cast aside.

In the weeks to come, there will be much excitement about the tangible new starts that autumn brings. But I hope we can also save some excitement for those hidden, beautiful beginnings that we all hold in our hearts. We may not celebrate them with others or spend billions planning for them. They may even be new beginnings known only to God. Yet, often these seemingly small things are the greatest blessings. May God bless you when new beginnings come to your ordinary times.

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