

The Veronicas of Ordinary Time

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Like so many during Lent, I found myself last Friday night at a small parish church for the Stations of the Cross. In the evening quiet, the last light of day still glimmered through the windows, reminding us that spring, like Easter, is both near and not yet.

This particular devotion is one I have come to cherish because, paradoxically, it is a prayer both deeply communal and profoundly personal at the same time. In a very real sense, praying the Stations with others is a joint pilgrimage as we all hear the same reflections, recite the same responses, and kneel, genuflect and stand in unison. Like any pilgrimage, there is strength in the company of the fellow travelers who surround me.

Yet at the same time, the very familiarity of it all still allows my companions and me the opportunity to be alone in our thoughts and, for a brief time, be caught up in the account of Christ's passion and death. It is what brings us together for a time. Still, it is also the mystery that quietly touches each of our hearts in many different ways.

I have also found that, for reasons I cannot explain, there have been different Stations that catch my attention in different seasons of life. Certainly, Christ's whole journey to Calvary, in all of its stages, reveals something of the great sacrifice from which springs our Easter hope. But each of the Stations, in its specific way, speaks something unique that our hearts hear.

This year, it has been the Sixth Station – Veronica wiping the face of Christ – that has caught my attention. St. Veronica is not mentioned in sacred scripture, and so much about her is unknown. I wonder if she was a woman who carefully planned to be at the roadside to give comfort to Christ, knowing he would pass by – or did she simply find herself moved by a sudden impulse to do that act of kindness that would be celebrated millennia later. I wonder if she ever feared what Christ's persecutors might do to her and whether she was cheered or jeered by the crowds that surrounded her.

In the events of that day, her act may have seemed so small and, even, insignificant. There was nothing that she could do to halt an unjust trial, to lighten the load Christ carried, or to stop the soldiers from doing that which they set out to do on that Friday we call Good. All she could do was to wipe away blood, sweat and tears in a small act of compassion in the midst of great evil.

So often, today and always, it is often easy to be overwhelmed by injustice, evil or profound human suffering. So often, we know that we cannot cure an ill loved one, heal a friend's broken heart, or bring justice in an overwhelmingly complex problem. Too often, when we look at what we can do it seems so insignificant in light of the great needs that can surround us.

It is then that St. Veronica has much to teach. When I look at life's challenging times, it has always been the simple acts of kindness that meant the world to me. The friends, family and neighbors who see us through life's hard times may not know the indescribable worth of the simple acts of kindness they do – the gentle words, the promise of prayers, and the unprompted favors. They may not have been able to take away the sorrow, but their love and willingness to show that love is what mattered most.

St. Veronica knew that. Christ, of course, knew it too. The Sixth Station invites us to reflect on the way Christ rewarded her kindness by leaving her with His image – the “*vera icon*” linked to her name. It was through her act of kindness that she so tangibly saw the face of God.

Maybe, then, this Sixth Station is an invitation to be grateful for all those many people who have, in many different ways, been Veronicas to us in our journeys through life. To all of you, thank you!

More importantly, it may also be a reminder to seek those opportunities, both well-planned and spontaneous, to be a Veronica to others who walk past us in ordinary times.

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.