

The Filters of Ordinary Time

(Column 143: July 21, 2025)

By Lucia A. Silecchia

It happened again.

An important email never made its way to me because, en route to my cluttered inbox, it took an unexpected detour to my spam folder. This likely happened because the sender was not someone with whom I am usually in contact, and my spam filters went into action to spare me from a message that, according to my filter settings, may have been unwanted. Alas, however, a message I really wanted to receive did not make it through.

I am grateful for the ways in which the filters usually work very well to keep me from the annoyances of emails pitching goods, services, political campaigns, sensational news stories and other things I would rather ignore. I am even more grateful that they keep me from the dangers of on-line scams and phishing attempts that could make my life a lot more complicated with a few misguided keystrokes.

Yet, the cost of this protection is, occasionally, the lost treasure.

I sometimes wonder if, in life, our filters can sometimes make us miss out on other treasures.

As with emails, filters can help us avoid dangers, and use our human reason to steer ourselves away from those things, situations, and temptations that can pose far greater dangers to us than those unwanted, sinister emails lurking in our spam folders seeking our banking information and social security numbers.

To develop wise filters and to have a good understanding of the filters we need to live good and holy lives, to avoid “near occasions” of sin, and to keep ourselves from useless distractions is a good and, yes, holy thing worthy of our prayerful attention.

To develop wise filters and to encourage those we love to do so can save us much heartache if they can help us avoid even the first tentative steps down destructive paths that can lead where we should not go.

It may, however, also be true that there will be times that call for prayerful attention to understanding when these good filters may also keep us from treasures.

Are there times when they may keep us from getting to know those who are not part of our usual circle of acquaintances?

Are there times when they may keep us from learning and considering ideas we have not previously considered or found appealing?

Are there times when they may keep us from learning a new prayer or hymn, or returning to a religious practice we abandoned because we conclude without trying that we will not benefit from them?

Are there times when they keep us from forgiving each other because the desire not to get hurt is deep and strong?

Are there times when they keep us from taking chances, pursuing new paths and facing new challenges because they caution us against the unknown?

Are there times when they may even keep us from being completely honest with God Himself, because we know that may demand of us what we may not be willing to give?

I do not know.

But I do know that I often fail to notice the filters that organize my life, nor do I often, if ever, take them to prayer. Perhaps that is a task for these quieter days of summer, when there is a little extra time to contemplate the filters of ordinary time.

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.