

A Celebration in Ordinary Time

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Recently, I celebrated a birthday. It was not a milestone year, but a happily ordinary one that was a beautiful time to count blessings, celebrate friendships, and enjoy the company of loved ones.

But, coming up soon lies another landmark that I often let slip by without notice. In a very real way, however, that day – the anniversary of the day on which I was Baptized --- is far more important in the eternal scheme of things. So, this year, I resolve to pay a bit more attention to the events that unfolded on that day long ago, when I was merely 36 days old.

Do not fear, dear family and friends! No new party or additional cake is needed.

Nevertheless, this anniversary is one worth celebrating. So, as I look ahead to this special day in my own life's journey, I have a few plans...

I am hoping, that day, to visit the Church where I was Baptized. In his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis wrote "The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good." For me, the "history" of my "friendship with God" began and grew in the parish church of my childhood. Being home, in gratitude for the Baptism celebrated there, truly brings "much good" to me.

Years ago, when Saint John Paul II returned, as pontiff, to his Polish hometown of Wadowice, he, too, visited the church where he was Baptized. There, he reflected, "I ...embrace the threshold of the house of God, the parish church of Wadowice, and in it the Baptistry, in which I was joined to Christ." So, a pilgrimage to this "threshold" seems to be a good way to celebrate the anniversary of my Baptism. I am fortunate to be able to do so frequently.

I know, however, that time, distance, and the sad reality of church closings may make such pilgrimages impossible for many. Yet, there are still so many ways to celebrate this important day when it rolls around for you. So, I have some ideas for your festivities...

First, learn the date of your Baptism, as well as your First Communion, Confirmation and First Reconciliation. We remember, with very good reasons, the anniversaries of weddings and ordinations – the sacraments that set the course of lives given in service and love. But, these sacraments draw graces and strength from earlier sacraments whose anniversaries are often lost to time. For me, July 9, as well as April 25, May 25, and December 4 are all days that changed my life in profound ways that I will not fully understand on this side of eternity.

On your Baptismal date, remember in prayer the priest or deacon who Baptized you, however long ago that may have been. The priest who Baptized me also witnessed the marriage of my parents. I did not know him, but years after his death I am grateful for the gift of his priesthood and the graces my family received when he celebrated these sacraments with us.

Remember, too, your godparents who brought you to that important moment in your life – whether you remember that day or not. If they are still living, perhaps a phone call would be a happy recollection of that occasion. If they have left this life, maybe their children would welcome a call. As always, your godparents can be remembered in prayer.

Your parents, or other adults and loved ones who brought you to the waters of your Baptism would also welcome your greetings or your prayers on what was an important day for them, as well as for you.

If you have photographs of that day, try to find them and see the joy on the faces of those gathered to celebrate such a sacred event.

If you have godchildren of your own – particularly those who are young – consider calling or writing a note to them, sharing with them the importance of your Baptismal day. This just may launch their own tradition of celebrating their Baptismal days.

Think, with gratitude, about all of those who have helped you in the journey of your life since you were anointed priest, prophet and king on the day of your Baptism. Think, with humility, about whether or not you have ever helped lead another along the path of life toward their Baptism, or onward after it.

Reflect, for a while, on the name that you were given on the day of your Baptism. The patron saints to whom you were entrusted or the loved ones in whose honor you were named may be occasions for happy contemplation. I carry the names of two beloved maternal grandmothers: my own grandmother, Lucy (herself named for Italy's much-loved Santa Lucia), and the maternal grandmother of Christ, St. Ann (for whom my childhood parish was named.) In these ways, my name links me to the Communion of Saints.

Perhaps, also, bring to prayer all those who are preparing for Baptism; those who have strayed from their Baptismal promises; and all those searching to know God.

And, finally, find the words of the Baptismal vows – promises you made, or that were made for you on that special day. Take time, quietly and alone, to pray them once again with gratitude, with hope, and with joy. Ask for the strength to live them faithfully – and, with my best wishes, enjoy this important celebration in ordinary time.

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