**Growing Up in Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Recently, I was in the happy company of a seven-year-old. She asked me the delightfully shocking, and shockingly delightful question, *“What do you want to be when you grow up?”*

The question was shocking to me because it has been decades since someone asked me this question with the earnest sincerity of my young interlocutor. Perhaps she has been asked this question so often that she thought it was a standard part of social etiquette. Perhaps she dislikes this question and thought she could avoid it by going on the offensive by asking it of me before I could ask it of her. Regardless of the “why,” the question certainly surprised me.

Yet, it surprised me in a delightful way.

When we ask young children *“what do you want to be when you grow up?”* we are usually asking them a superficial question about the role they hope to have in life. Most often, they will reply by telling us the occupation of their dreams, the trade they hope to learn and, perhaps, as they get older, the state of life they anticipate will lie ahead.

But, when this inquisitive young child asked me that same question decades into my adulthood, I had to think about it for a while. That was a delightful excuse for reflection.

Too often, when the date on the calendar tells us we are adults, it can seem as though we have already answered the big questions about what our lives will be. Indeed, we have likely made some of the sacred commitments that will define the rest of our lives. Yet sometimes it takes a small question from an earnest young child to remind us that, even then, we never stop growing up.

It takes a small question to remind us that even if we think we know “what” we hope to be when we grow up, we have a lifetime to become “who” we want to be. There are times – blessedly frequent times -- when I meet someone I admire for who they are, not what they do. When I meet such good people, I sometimes say to myself, or in jest to a friend, *“That’s who I want to be when I grow up.”*  It is never too late to be inspired by the good and holy people in our lives and to hope we will “grow up” to be like them.

It takes a small question to remind us that there is great value in asking ourselves throughout our lives whether we are doing what we should be doing or whether there is something more or something else to which we could and should devote our time and energy. It is easy to get used to a routine, ignore an unrealized dream, fear a new invitation, and avoid a new beginning. Prayerfully seeking guidance about new ventures such as these is yet another way to learn what life may look like as we continue to “grow up.” If somehow, we can do that with the fearless optimism of a child, we are truly blessed.

It takes a small question to remind us that no matter how old we think we have become, we remain, in the eyes of God, still His children. Each day He gives us is still another day not to tell Him *“what I want to be”* but to prayerfully ask Him “*who I* *should* *be*” when I grow up.

It takes a small question to remind us that we should not only ask the children in our lives what they anticipate it will be like to “grow up.” Perhaps it is also a question to pose, with love, to the adults in our lives who need to know that there is newness of life unfolding in all the days of their ordinary times.

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