**Together for Ordinary Times**

**(Column 45, November 16, 2020)**

By Lucia A. Silecchia

It was a tiny, home sewn apron, made for a child of 3 or 4 that I unpacked from a box of miscellaneous memorabilia in my family home. Judging from the small size, the autumnal pattern, the familiar tiny stitches, and some vague but happy memories, I am guessing that my grandmother handmade this apron for either my sister or me so that we would be dressed appropriately for the joyous fanfare that involved making Thanksgiving dinner at my grandmother’s house. As I recall, this was a multi-day event that involved a crowded small kitchen, homemade pasta, Neapolitan desserts, fruit canned back in the summer and, I suppose, a turkey less enthusiastically included to add an all-American touch to our otherwise Italian feast.

I was six years old when my grandmother died and a pared down version of these preparations then moved to my parents’ home, the new headquarters for all my holiday memories. My grandmother’s death was the first great loss of my life, and the discovery of the tiny apron she so lovingly made had me missing her all over again – just as Thanksgiving does every year. There is something about the desire to gather together in celebration that makes the missing more acutely missed.

Since I was six, the list of those I miss and yearn for has grown. This is a natural unfolding of events, but one still painful as family ties beckon so strongly during the season of holidays and holy days that is now upon us. Losses of three more grandparents, then parents and the aunts and uncles in their generation are keenly felt this season. To be sure, I am richly blessed with so many who have been added to my circle of loved ones as marriages, births and friendships have expanded the cast of characters that my heart holds dear.

And yet …

It takes only an old apron to remind me of what is lost. This year, there are many who are experiencing the loss of loved ones for the first time. Deaths from Covid struck many families very hard, while the other diseases and tragedies that snatch our loved ones from us did not take a break this year. Because of the strange times we have lived through, so many have been unable to bid their loved ones farewell in the comforting rituals of faith, hope and love that I took for granted at the death of my own loved ones.

For many, this will also be a Thanksgiving and Christmas season when, out of love and concern for the safety of friends and family, they will also miss the living who will not gather together as they usually do. A phone call, a Zoom chat and a virtual embrace may be the best that far-flung families can do in a time of travel restrictions and safety warnings. Time and distance so easily keep us apart when seeing, hearing, and embracing those we love is such a deep desire of the heart.

And yet …

Every time I go to Mass, I proclaim that I believe in “the communion of saints.” This has crossed my mind more than once in recent days as I yearn for those who no longer walk through life with me and those who must remain far away this year. I *do* believe in the communion of saints. I *do* believe that the good and holy people I have loved still love me, and pray for me as I do for them. I *do* believe that I can see them again, in time, and at a banquet that far exceeds even the happy memories of my grandmother’s table. I *do* believe that the circumstances that keep me from seeing my loved ones this year will not keep me from loving them – or them from loving me – in whatever ways we can until the time we can embrace again.

The capacity to love each other is, beyond any doubt of mine, one of the greatest gifts God placed in our hearts. It could not have been meant to be a gift temporary or fleeting. Rather, it endures both on this side of eternity and the next – even when that is beyond my comprehension.

It takes only an old apron to remind me of all the blessings I have in the people who I have loved, do love, and will love, whether or not they are at my table this year. I hold them close in my heart, knowing that we are still together both for these special celebrations and for all our ordinary times.

*May God bless you and your loved ones in the days to come.*

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