**Women of Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Throughout March, myriad celebrations of “Women’s History Month” unfold. I understand the sentiment behind this and see the great value in recognizing the contributions that so many of my sisters, past and present, have made to building our society. This is particularly true when it comes to celebrating those who have too often been overlooked.

Yet, I find myself wishing that the world would celebrate women year-round in ways more akin to the way in which I see women celebrated by the Church. Let me explain.

In Women’s History Month, I see honor paid to those women who – with the odds frequently stacked against them -- succeeded in the eyes of the world. Women who were pioneers, or public figures of influence, or daring “first” women to achieve great feats, or those beckoned by history to play extraordinary roles on the world stage are celebrated with great enthusiasm. Those who used their great scientific, literary, intellectual, entrepreneurial, artistic and musical gifts to advance culture as we know it are honored this month with often overdue praise and gratitude.

The Church also recognizes among our saints those women who did extraordinary things in the eyes of the world. We celebrate women who were great warriors like Joan of Arc; intellectuals like Hildegard, Edith Stein, and Teresa of Avila; royalty like Margaret of Scotland, Jadwiga of Poland, Elizabeth of Portugal, Elizabeth of Hungary, and Helena of Constantinople; foundresses like Elizabeth Seton, Scholastica, Frances Xavier Cabrini, Katherine Drexel, and Jane Francs de Chantal. We also celebrate women like Teresa of Calcutta and Catherine of Sienna, whose unique roles led them to challenge those who held great influence in the world at their times.

These women who did great things with great holiness are honored as examples for those called and gifted to do such things with fidelity to the will of God.

Yet, I am proud and grateful that the Church also holds out as examples those women who lived lives that were simple in the eyes of the world. That is, after all, the way in which most of us live our lives on this side of eternity.

Honored as saints are women like Ann, Gianna and Monica who lived the vocation to motherhood with extraordinary grace; Therese of Lisieux and Clare of Assisi who lived lives hidden from the world; Zelie of Lisieux who spun lace for a living and raised holy children; Josephine Bakhita and Felicity who, separated by centuries, both bore the abuse of slavery; Kateri Tekakwitha, an orphan scarred by smallpox; and girls like Bernadette, Dymphna, Maria Goretti, Jacinta, Agnes, and Lucy who died long before the fullness of years would have given them the chance to have worldly accomplishments to their names.

More than all others, the Church honors Mary of Nazareth who did the greatest of all things when, in an instant, she gave the “yes” on which salvation turned. She is honored by such great names as the Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Queen of Angels, and Queen of All Saints. Yet, the only title she gave herself was “handmaid of the Lord.”

I hope that this month we continue to celebrate those women whose great deeds have made our world better. Yet, if that was all we did, much would be missing.

I hope that, like the Church, we also take time to honor those women whose lives are not marked by the extraordinary deeds they did, but by the extraordinary love, grace and fidelity with which they did the simple things entrusted to their care. History is full of those women even if their names and stories are lost to time.

 If you are blessed to know such women in your life, this month may be a chance to say a simple thank you. If you were blessed to know such women who have left this life, this month may be a particular time to pray in gratitude for the goodness of their lives – a goodness perhaps hidden from the world but known to God. I have known and do know such as this whose lives have intertwined with my own. Truly this has been one of my life's greatest gifts.  May God bless the great and the good women of ordinary time.

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