**May God Go with You into Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

As a teacher, I have mixed feelings about graduations. While commencements launch new beginnings for graduates, they are also bittersweet farewells.

Each year, the basic formula of our graduation ceremonies remains the same. The setting, order of events and cherished traditions remain remarkably unchanged, reflecting the enduring desire to mark important passages with predictable rituals. In spite of their comforting sameness, however, each graduation ceremony heralds a significant change in my own life, not just in the lives of my students.

Each year, I see my students’ joy and am happy for them. However, as a teacher left behind there is a certain sadness knowing that each year’s graduating class – as individuals and as a group – will no longer be part of my everyday life. Certainly, commencement day is about my students and not me. Yet, the day when this celebration no longer tugs at my heart may be the day I should start another path of work.

The years I spend with my students are brief -- only 3 or 4 years do we walk together. For that time, I am privileged to be part of their lives, and to have them as part of mine. I am deeply grateful to my students for all they share with me during the time we travel together along the path of life. The class of 2022, in a particular way, crossed my path in a unique set of pandemic-provoked disruptions. Thus, in a special way, I am grateful for their good will through some challenging days.

I am grateful for all the ways they shared their joys with me. Some of them knew great joy in the years we spent together as they welcomed children, became aunts or uncles, achieved academic success, or wore new rings on their fingers. Some overcame great obstacles, were surprised at wonderful job offers, and learned that they had talents they did not know that they had. Some made life-long friends and I have celebrated at the weddings of those who sat together in my class.

I am grateful for all the ways they also shared their sorrows with me. Some of them had loved ones who started the journey with them but are no longer at their sides to share the joy of graduation. Some had struggles with finances or health, watched plans disrupted and mourned dreams denied. Like life itself, the journey through school has its highs and lows.

I am grateful for all the ways they shared their families with me. Those who teach young children rather than adults see far more of their students’ families than I do. Yet, my students tell me of their loved ones – their parents, children, spouses, and siblings. Many tell me much about beloved grandparents because, often, it is in the years of young adulthood that their grandparents pass away.

In particularly entertaining ways, my students share their families with me at graduation. I still feel a vague dread when someone’s proud dad says, “*I’ve heard all about you*!” because that is not necessarily a good thing. I sense that my students feel similar dread when a proud mom says, “*How did he do in your class?”* Fear not, students! I have a well-practiced repertoire of non-responsive answers to that question.

I am grateful for the ways my students thank their loved ones, my colleagues and their classmates as we share our pride and common joy with them. As they receive their diplomas while wearing the strangest of hats and smiling the biggest of smiles at their cheering families they remind me that few accomplishments are achieved alone.

I am grateful for the ways in which many students have shared their faith with me. Although much is said by many – myself included -- criticizing Gen Z’s and Millennials, I have been inspired by them. In an age of shallow soundbites, some have asked me the big questions. In an age of secularism, some have prayed with me. In a time when faith is thought to be private, some have prayed for me. In a time when the world can seem thoughtless, they reach out with commitments to service, good-hearted kindnesses, and traces of that idealism a cynical world so desperately needs.

My students – soon to be my former students -- were once strangers to me and to each other. Through many different paths, they and I came together for a time and shared a unique season of our lives. As May and June unfold, teachers like me will be saying our good-byes.

“Good-bye,” however, is a comforting word of farewell -- an ancient abbreviation of the phrase, *“God go with you.”* So, to all those whose diplomas say “2022,” I pray that God does, indeed, go with you as you embark into our fragile world. Bring that world your courage, your hope and your love. And, if you think of it, say a prayer for me – I’ll miss you. Thanks for sharing with me some of your ordinary times.

*Congratulations! May God go with you, Class of 2022.*

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