

New Beginnings in Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Happy New Year!

Anyone whose life, like mine, revolves around the school year will understand that it is the approach of September, not January, that is the year's great new beginning. New classes, schedules, and routines all unfold at this time of the year with more practical "newness" than any other season. As this happens, new people also enter our lives and become an important part of its fabric, for a year or for a lifetime.

In the most tangible sign that a new year is starting (and that I like new office supplies with unusual enthusiasm), my first preparation for the new academic year is to buy a new calendar that starts with August rather than January. In the pages of that calendar I have already written down many things. I have my classes marked on the dates and times they will meet. I recorded the days when I have standing committee meetings and routine obligations. I noted a few special events I want to remember, and a few appointments are already in the books for the new year. As I did when I was a student myself, I have already marked off every school vacation and holiday!

Yet, most of the pages in this calendar are still blank because the future held in those days is still hidden from me. The days of ordinary time that lie ahead are in the hands of God. They will stay safely there as they unfold and new entries are written through the pages of my calendar.

Right now, I do not know which days will bring unexpected joys. I cannot predict what days will record meetings with students who have painful struggles or dinners with friends to share exciting news or newfound fears. I see blank pages now where meetings to plan new ventures will take place and days that will be times of travel and vacation with those I love. I know that many days will have meetings added to the schedule, but with uncertainty I wonder whether I will have the wisdom or insight to make the most of them. I cannot tell now if there will be medical appointments on any of those days when I or someone I love receives bad news. I cannot tell which days my classes will go well, when I will want the chance to re-do something I did or said, and when I will have no classes because they were preempted by much-beloved snow days.

I do not yet know if I will use the days of this new year wisely and keep enough time for prayer and contemplation. (Somehow, for me, that which is most important never gets scheduled at all.) I cannot tell if there are days ahead when my schedule includes commitments I should have declined – or fails to include commitments I should have made. I do not know which days I will have an opportunity to say or do something that helps another along life's path, or whether I will take or waste that opportunity. I am still uncertain which weekends might hold special events in the lives of my friends and

family and which weeknights will be spent emailing students who need help or support. I do not know what days I will write an article or give a speech, and whether those will go well or poorly. I do not know which days might hold first meetings with those who may become lifelong friends, and which days I will regret something I did or failed to do.

Most profoundly, I do not know if, on any of those pages, I will ever mark a small cross -- something my mother always did on her calendar when someone she loved passed from this life. I do not know if there will be a day on which my own entries themselves will stop because I cannot presume that I will have any day beyond today.

At this time next year, if I am so blessed, I will take this year's calendar, put it on my shelf with a few dozen of its predecessors, and start a new one. I hope that when I do that, the pages of this calendar will hold only what is good and holy. I hope that it will show that I was, or tried to be, a good and faithful steward of the time I was given. I hope that it will show that I gave more than I received and that the ordinary days were traveled with reverence for how extraordinary the gift of days is. With these hopes is a prayer that God will strengthen, help, guide and bless all of us embarking on our new beginnings in ordinary times.

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