

## **Guides Through Ordinary Times**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

In this life, if we are fortunate, we may meet a few people who, for want of a better word, become our mentors. Usually, but not always, they are our elders – a bit further down the path of life and possessed of wisdom to share with us as we try to navigate life. Over time, they become guides and friends as we try to discern what God may be calling us to do.

I have been blessed to have people such as this woven into the fabric of my life. They encouraged me, told me that the things I wanted to do were possible, and gave me sound advice in ways that inclined me to follow it. Two of those people, so important to me, passed from this life this spring. Because of current limits on gatherings, I did not have a chance to pay my respects to them in person. My letters to their families share a bit of what made them special to me and express my gratitude for the ways they helped set the course of my life.

But, their passing got me thinking more seriously about what a sacred thing it is to take the time to encourage, inspire, and guide others as they make their way through this world. Now, by both my (rapidly advancing!) age and occupation, I find myself in the position where I can give to others the kind encouragement that was -- and still is -- given to me.

Each of us have received a unique set of gifts and talents. With them comes the responsibility to use them to give glory to God and to help our neighbors as best we can. It is often so overwhelming to discern how we might use our own abilities and talents in a responsible way that we may overlook the way in which others, too, are blessed with these things. They may need our encouragement to ensure that those gifts and talents do not remain hidden under the all-too-ubiquitous bushel baskets that so often get in the way.

So... Do you know someone with a kind heart and sharp mind who we might need as a doctor or a nurse to guide us through medical emergencies, present and future? Do you know someone with enthusiasm and compassion who might be a teacher who can open

the eyes of a needy child to the wonder of the world? Do you know a couple capable of that sort of love that can make their marriage an inspiration to all who will know them? Do you know someone with a selfless heart who might say an eager “yes” to adopting a child? Do you see in a neighbor the zeal for justice that may make him or her a political leader who could build bridges in our world of division and angst? Do you know anyone whose skill at music or art or whose love of the written word may give the world the things of beauty that we all crave? Do you know someone quiet and thoughtful who should think deeply about things philosophical? Do you know a child wise beyond his or her years who is ready to launch an adventure in neighborhood service that will inspire others to join in? Do you know men and women whose faith and hope and love suit them to lead others to God through the gift of themselves through the priesthood or in religious life?

For so many, myself included, it takes the invitation of another who says simply, “*Have you thought about ...*” or “*You would be good at ...*” or “*Are you interested in ...*” to start thinking about something that might be possible. This may be especially true of those who are shy, or who have no one in their family in a particular vocation, or who have failed at an early attempt and are on the verge of giving up. But, perhaps, a simple invitation, followed up by steady encouragement, practical advice, and genuine concern can make all of the difference in the world. It is not false hopes, insincere compliments, or blithe platitudes that matter. Rather, it is the caring confidence of another who sees in us that which we may not see in ourselves that can make all the difference in the world.

I wonder if the first disciples, when called from their boats and businesses, would have known what they were capable of if Christ had not invited them, personally, with a simple “*follow me.*” I doubt that any of them would have thought themselves suited by temperament, education or social standing to be the ones entrusted with the care of the Church. Yet, Christ’s invitation and His three years of loving guidance changed them – and changed the world.

In the ordinary times of our lives, we may come to know those who have been given great gifts that they may not recognize that they have, that they may be afraid to use, or that they may be discouraged from developing. As I think about those who have helped me along life’s way, my gratitude to them is mixed with a renewed sense of obligation to

others. All good gifts come from God. It is also a great gift to help each other unwrap those treasures when we encourage and guide each other through ordinary times.

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