

## **Planning for Ordinary Times**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

I am a planner.

Every year, in the heart of the summer, I buy a new calendar because I mark the beginning of my new years not in January but at the start of each new academic year – the cyclical rhythm by which I mark my time. Planners like I am love the sense of control and certainty that comes from plotting out the course of our upcoming weeks and months. Usually, class times, committee meetings, family gatherings, travel, school holidays, seasonal celebrations, annual traditions and other commitments make their way into my low-tech, handwritten calendar. This creates, in a tangible way, my beloved organization and order.

Except when I can't plan.

As it turns out, when I look at the days, months and weeks ahead, I find myself saying “*I don't know*” to the most basic of questions. What will our fall semesters look like? When will we meet friends for dinner again inside our favorite restaurants? When will students come to my office again? When will the phrases “new normal” and “please mute yourselves” fade from our lexicons? (I'm hoping soon!) When will masks no longer hide the faces of friends and the smiles of strangers? When will we be able to see far-flung family members who live across the country and around the world? Who is hosting Thanksgiving dinner, and where? (Yes, I plan that far ahead!) When will “Zoom coffee hours” be replaced with the joy of the real thing? When can we safely revel in family reunions, crowded school events, concerts and conferences that are real, not sterilely virtual? When can we gather to discuss the pain that grabs our headlines in person, with each other, not through a screen or a soundbite? When will we be able to gather to memorialize those who have passed from this life and console each other in a warm embrace? When will the joy of parish life lived as a family return in its glorious fullness?

*I don't know.*

Admitting “*I don’t know*” is unsettling for me. I sense this is an experience shared by many – but most deeply shared with my fellow planners. To lose the control I thought I had has been an unwelcome part of these past months. Yet, perhaps it was not something lost as much as a realization that the ability to plan and control is something I never really had – even when I had the luxury of thinking I did.

I am not the first to look ahead and sigh, “*I don’t know*” when wondering about the details of what lies ahead. I imagine that “*I don’t know*” was the thought that went through the mind of Mary when she tried to anticipate what her life would be like as the Mother of God. It likely also went through the mind of Joseph when he contemplated how life would unfold in the unique role he was asked to play in the history of salvation. “*I don’t know*” must have raced through in the minds of the disciples who tried to understand what their new vocation would demand of them. “*I don’t know*” surely was in the hearts of the crowds who met Christ during His years among them as they contemplated how this encounter would change their lives.

Since then, “*I do not know*” has reverberated through the centuries as the saints I most admire saw their lives unfold in ways they did not plan, did not anticipate, did not understand, and, perhaps at times, did not desire. Yet, by saying yes when they did not know what lay ahead and giving their uncertain futures over to God, they lived the lives they did and left behind the example they did. The examples they gave living through the big unknowns of their lives is a welcome inspiration for navigating the far smaller unknowns of mine.

I am thinking of these ancestors in faith during this unsettling summer of “*I don’t know.*” I hope that they will share with me the serenity they knew when they looked ahead and did not know what would come. I hope they will share with me some of the patience they had when others, frustratingly and honestly, answer my planning questions with their own “*I don’t know.*”

Most importantly, I hope that they will share with me the faith that they had as I try to learn that “*I don’t know*” is, at its heart, an invitation to trust. It is an invitation to trust that all that lies ahead, for me and for us, is in the hands of God. More than that, it is in the hands of a God who lovingly *does* know and care about all that happen in the unfolding of our ordinary times.

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