

Rejoicing in Ordinary Times

(Column 40, September 7, 2020)

By Lucia A. Silecchia

“I got the job,” she told me. It was news not shared with the exuberance I expected of someone who had worked hard and hoped hard for her new opportunity. Instead, the sharing of this happy news was almost whispered in a guilty, confessional tone usually reserved for sharing less-than-joyful news.

Soon, the reason seemed clear to me. She felt some misgivings about sharing her happiness in a time of great uncertainty, suffering, unrest and pain in the world. In a time when so many cling to employment by a thread, if at all, the joy over a new exciting opportunity seemed to her to be something best shared sheepishly.

I have seen this in others, too, whose kind souls are grieved by the suffering of others. They do not easily exult in the joys that came into their own lives. I am grateful for the way they have eyes open to the pain of others and hearts that make the burdens of others their own. They have been and are great examples to me.

And yet – please let me rejoice with you.

We are mourning the death of so many. Yet, let me rejoice when a new baby comes into your family.

We are mourning relationships broken and strained by stress and isolation. Yet, let me rejoice at your engagement or golden wedding anniversary.

We are mourning the illnesses and fragility of so many. Yet, let me rejoice when your surgery is a success, or your last round of chemo is finished, or you get the negative test results you longed for.

We are mourning rituals missed and celebrations deferred. Yet, let me rejoice when your granddaughter receives her long-delayed First Communion and your sister’s intimate wedding with a party of ten is a poignant celebration of love beyond her wildest hopes.

We are mourning the inhumanity we see out in our streets and behind our closed doors. Yet, let me rejoice when your neighbor leaves your porch full of groceries and the teenager around the corner mows your lawn unasked and unpaid.

We are mourning the sudden hunger that strikes so quickly when a paycheck is missed. Yet, let me rejoice when your parish or your school or your neighborhood rallies behind those in need with a generosity that strikes back even more quickly.

We are mourning the selfishness and carelessness of those who will recklessly risk the well-being of others in a time of cautious hope. Yet, let me rejoice when you are proud of the way your children put the interests of others before themselves and sacrifice big plans without complaint.

The ordinary times of our lives are filled with both shadows and sun, with seasons of mourning and seasons of rejoicing. So often, though, these seasons are melded together in a way that asks the human heart to both mourn and to rejoice at the same time. One of my favorite scripture passages begins with the command “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!*” (Phil. 4:4). I have read this at both the weddings and funerals of my nearest and dearest. Yet, another one of my favorites is the consoling counsel, “*Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.*” (Matt. 5:4). Embracing both of these at the same time is hard – and not something that can be navigated alone.

As autumn comes, it brings with it the last quarter of 2020. For those who mourn, this is a year that cannot end soon enough. If you are mourning, let others share your sorrow and your fears and bring to you any comfort that they can. But if you are rejoicing, let others share your joy too – in the sensitive, compassionate way that these times demand.

To the friends and family – and strangers, too – who share with me your joys and sorrows: thank you. You remind me that on our darkest days, there is still joy in the world and on our brightest days, there is still pain in the world. You remind me that my prayers always need to embrace both gratitude and petition. You remind me that both good times and bad are inextricably intertwined and woven into the fabric of our ordinary times.

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