

Gratitude in Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Welcome to the season of celebrations!

Calendars and parish bulletins now burst with joyful announcements that spring Baptisms, First Communions, and Confirmations are being celebrated on grace-filled days in churches near and far. June weddings (and the June anniversaries they beget) lie just around the corner. Dioceses will be blessed with the springtime ordinations of their new shepherds, and many who have lived their vocations for decades will celebrate their special jubilees.

The waning days of the school year bring final recitals, sports championships, honors convocations, and awards ceremonies. After decades of university life, I am no stranger to these happy events! Now, and in the weeks ahead, “Pomp and Circumstance” will ring out on campuses everywhere, and newly minted graduates will embark on new jobs, settle in new homes and start new adventures.

Countless times in the weeks ahead, many of us will have the chance to wish each other well on these joyful days of celebration. The word that will cross our lips so naturally, be written in our cards so effortlessly, and caption photographs in our social media so frequently is the jubilant greeting, “Congratulations.”

To my mind, this is one of the most beautiful words we share. Congratulations is a word formed from the Latin roots “con”, meaning “with,” and “gratus,” the same root as our word “gratitude.” This is not an obscure accident of etymology. Instead, there is something deeply beautiful about the fact that at the most joyous moments of our lives we choose to greet each other with an expression of thankfulness.

We wish each other well, we praise those who have accomplished great things, and we tell our loved ones how proud we are of them as they mark the milestones of their lives. However, first and foremost, we do this – consciously or not – by expressing our gratitude. Words matter, and the way in which gratitude is embedded in our celebrations is worth remembering in the days ahead any time we are blessed to speak a word of exuberant congratulations to our loved ones, or to hear it back from them.

That gratitude goes first toward God who begins all good works. The celebration of good works brought to completion is also the chance to ask God’s blessings on the many new works about to begin. It is gratitude toward friends and family, without whose love and encouragement so many celebrations may never come to fruition. It is gratitude for

obstacles overcome, second chances given, fears conquered, opportunities seized, friendships nurtured, memories shared, good examples seen, and prayers answered.

Perhaps, however, “congratulations,” and the gratitude embedded in it, is a word that should not just be kept for those special moments of celebration. Maybe, instead, it should be part of our everyday lives. Perhaps it is a word that can remind us that every day can be lived with a heart that is full of gratitude. Maybe these ordinary days hold no momentous milestones, but they are so often filled with quiet victories, temptations overcome, kind words exchanged, and needy neighbors nurtured.

If this season, you or your loved ones are celebrating a special event, I hope that gratitude fills your hearts and that you greet each other with that joyful word of thankfulness, “Congratulations!”

However, when those celebrations have passed, and life returns to the more mundane, I hope that you will still live with this beautiful spirit of gratitude for smaller joys. To you I also say “Congratulations,” with gratitude for any day lived well in ordinary times.

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