

Snapshots of Ordinary Time (Column 2: January 21, 2019)

By Lucia A. Silecchia

In recent days, a quirky fad has gone viral: The “Ten Year Challenge.” Thousands of people, from celebrities to those unknown, are posting current photographs of themselves on social media next to their photos from a decade past. In part, this is entertainment and a chance to see – with pleasure or dismay – the ways in which a decade of life has wrought changes reflected in the faces looking back from the screen. It is an invitation to smirk at questionable fashion choices from 2009 or silently gloat if a recent picture looks better than the old one.

Beyond mere entertainment, though, the sudden burst of interest in the “Ten Year Challenge” says something fascinating about human nature. Looking at old photographs connects us to our past: who we were, who we are, and all that lies between. Juxtaposing an old photo with a new one says a lot about the face in the picture. The look on a face, aged by ten years, can speak to the ways in which a decade has been kind or how time’s trials can make that same face seem wearier than the calendar says it should.

The “Ten Year Challenge” craze is likely to disappear as quickly as it roared into social media. But our fascination with images captured in photographs is here to stay. Indeed, when asked to name their most treasured possessions, so many answer that it is the family photographs that capture their most special moments – the sonogram announcing to the world that the miracle of life is renewed again; wedding photographs that record the joy of love promised; anniversary photographs that show the joy of love lived; and photographs of baptisms, First Communion and confirmations that harken back to those special moments that cleanse, nourish and strengthen the soul.

But, then, there are all the other pictures held only in the heart. These are the snapshots of ordinary time. I can see my family’s portrait at Christmas dinner, but my heart treasures the routine family supper on nondescript Thursday nights, and coffees I shared with my mom on Sunday mornings. I can see the photograph of my First Holy Communion day, but my heart treasures the 937th and the 3,846th ones just as much – if I remember not to take them for granted. I can see my parents’ wedding portrait, but my heart treasures the image of them walking to that same church together on Sundays, hand in hand, half a century later. I can see

overly serious photographs with my siblings taken on our first day of school each September, but my heart treasures all the Friday afternoons we walked home from school together into the waiting weekend.

The “Ten Year Challenge” captures two moments in time, inviting viewers to fill in the gaps and think about all that transpired in someone’s life between those two pictures. For most people, those years likely include great highs and great lows. But linking all of these together are days of ordinary times.

Now that cameras are ubiquitous, more of life’s ordinary moments are captured – for better or worse. Maybe this is a beautiful way of expressing appreciation for preserving ordinary moments with the same care once used only for life’s landmarks. Yet, what is captured will still always be only a small part of what is treasured in life. What often remains unrecorded anywhere but in the heart are those moments that are the most sacred – those moments that remain the sacred snapshots of ordinary times.

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