

Romance in Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

They went down the aisles of the supermarket together on a sunny Saturday morning -- a morning in ordinary times. She was well dressed and beautifully coiffed. He spoke with enthusiasm about the groceries that made their way into the basket that she held with care. In one aisle, he spoke of the way they would enjoy fresh sliced peaches with vanilla ice cream later that day. A few aisles later, he debated over cans of soup before selecting one that earned a smile from her. He picked out a bottle of dish detergent, promising her he would wash their dishes. As I crisscrossed the aisles of the store getting my own groceries that day, my path seemed to cross often with theirs as they went slowly, together, aisle by aisle. They did not buy much, but they selected everything with great care in those small quantities that bespoke plans for a quiet meal or two by themselves together.

They were not young newly-weds planning a romantic evening together, or a new couple anticipating a special dinner enjoying the excitement of each other's company. The wedding rings they wore could have been on their fingers for fifty or sixty years. She held their grocery basket on her lap in the wheelchair where she sat and which he pushed. A cruel disease of the kind that comes for so many had stolen her mobility, her strength, and her speech. Perhaps it had even taken many memories of the life they had lived together. However, it did not dim the love between them – a bond that was so obvious to anyone privileged to notice them that day.

He spoke to her constantly and contentedly about the food they were buying, the high price of grapes, their plans for the day, and the beautiful weather. He expressed appreciation for the convenience of an express checkout lane, and duly counted their purchases to ensure they would not risk the wrath of their fellow shoppers if the basket held more than fifteen things. It was not condescending chatter, but the kind conversation reserved for the one who was and remained his partner in life. Their preparations for this simple shopping venture could have consumed hard hours that morning, and this trip to the supermarket could have been a fleeting pleasant prelude to a difficult day for her followed by a long, lonely night for him.

Yet, there they were. Together and in love.

I did not know them, and my shopping schedule never again coincided with theirs. Yet, I will never forget the gift of their witness.

February, this shortest, often coldest month of the year has become a time to celebrate the warmth of love. As Valentine's Day approaches, the bright red and pink trappings of romance can be found everywhere. Indeed, they crept into stores even before Christmas decorations were off the shelves. Perhaps this is for purely commercial reasons – or, perhaps, in our too-cynical world, we still want to believe in love. February's World Marriage Day, marked in different ways in faith communities across the country, calls to mind the beauty of the marriage commitment, ever ancient, ever new. Even late February's Academy Awards festivities attempt to celebrate the Hollywood version of romance – such that it is.

In our celebrations, we anticipate the joy of love to be discovered. We delight in the happiness of love found. We rejoice in the hope of love promised. But, in the bland aisles of the supermarket, I saw the sacred glory of love *lived*. May God bless those courageous romantics of a long ago Saturday – and all who live in love that way. That love is the treasure of ordinary times.

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