

## **The Prayer of Ordinary Times**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Can a lazy lack of creativity ever be good for the soul? I would normally answer “no” – except for Lent when I was 19 years old.

That was a Lent I intended to take more seriously than I had before. A growing realization that adulthood had dawned led me to reflect more thoughtfully on that sacred season. Even then, I understood that in the wisdom of the Church calendar, forty days is a perfect length of time for a season of preparation. It is short enough that a commitment to something ambitious is less frightening than it might otherwise be – yet long enough that a new practice or habit has a chance of becoming a more permanent part of life.

Nevertheless, in spite of my good intentions, when the Sunday before that Ash Wednesday rolled around, I had not yet decided what I could do so that my 19<sup>th</sup> Lent might be the season I hoped it would be. There were three days left, and nothing of note had crossed my mind. Fortunately for me, that Sunday I was blessed with a homily that changed my life. It was filled with practical suggestions about Lenten practices. One that caught my ear was the simple, obvious invitation to attend Mass during the week. I had rarely given that any thought. Unless it was a special occasion, I was on the Sunday plan. But, to my practical mind, this was a do-able Lenten initiative. I walked past my parish church every morning on the way to my college classes. The three Masses celebrated every day meant an early wake-up was not required. It was merely a half-hour time commitment. Most importantly, although I did not know the exact words of the Catechism at the time, I knew in my heart that Mass was “heart and summit of the Church’s life.”

Thus, for want of another plan, I very casually began a practice that has lasted, with varying degrees of regularity, to this day -- decades after that long ago Lent drew to a close. I found that I had begun to treasure this daily celebration, secure in the happy knowledge that around the world in tiny remote chapels, grand urban cathedrals, crumbling city churches, secluded mountain monasteries, far-flung military bases, parochial school auditoriums, and quiet convents, countless others were doing the same. A weekday morning Mass is the Eucharist at its simplest. Without distractions, it is a quiet, intimate start to the day and a cherished oasis before the hectic pace of life begins anew.

I love a grand liturgical celebration. Whether it is celebrated with an enthusiastic student choir, or majestic organ music shrouded with incense, or, yes, even the felt banners and

tambourines of my childhood years, such celebrations fill the heart with awe. A large Sunday crowd gathered to praise the same God together is a beautiful reminder that we are all part of the family of God. A stirring Sunday homily, carefully planned, and an altar reverently adorned with flowers all point the way to God in a powerful celebration. The sometimes-too-rare moments of silence in a large Sunday crowd offer a chance to offer praise, petitions, apologies and thanks in the company of an extended parish family.

Yet, when I have the wisdom to make time for it, I also treasure those quiet celebrations during the week when two or three or more of us gather in God's name, bringing Him the hopes, happiness, worries and woes of the day and receiving far more in return. I am grateful for that chance suggestion years ago that introduced me to the sacredness of the simple, daily Mass. It is the beautiful prayer of ordinary times.

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