**A Helping Hand in Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

It was one of those meandering conversations that old friends have – with random questions and accidental insights. As happens more frequently of late, we talked more about the ever-accelerating passage of time and asked each other when in our lives we knew we were fully and finally adults.

That moment happened a long time ago for each of us in the conversation. Yet, our insights as to exactly when this occurred varied a great deal. Predictably, life’s major milestones such as graduations, first jobs, first homes, marriage, parenthood or the death of a parent were often the moments when it was clear that life had entered a significant new stage.

I mentioned, only half in jest, that the first time I felt the full weight of adulthood was the first time a loved one asked to name me as an emergency contact. In retrospect, there really was something about that moment that indeed did mark a subtle change in life.

Certainly, it may simply have been routine paperwork that required the name and phone number of someone relatively local with a working phone number – a low bar, indeed. Yet, there is something oddly humbling to know that, in the event of an emergency, there was someone who hoped that I would be on the scene. There is something even sobering to know that I might make decisions for someone else who trusts my judgement in circumstances that neither of us could foresee.

As the years have passed, I have been an emergency contact multiple times – and, yes, I have gotten those unwanted emergency phone calls. I have also filled out so many forms myself with doctors’ offices, airlines, employers, and residences and, in so doing, imposed on my own loved ones this responsibility that I always hope remains theoretical and not real.

I wonder, though, if we ever think about who our “emergency contacts” might be if life takes an unexpected turn for us in matters of the spirit. I wonder, too, if there is anyone in whose lives we play that role.

A person is blessed, indeed, to have loved ones on call for the routine emergencies of life. Indeed, such *“[f]aithful friends are a sturdy shelter; whoever finds one finds a treasure. Faithful friends are beyond price, no amount can balance their worth. Faithful friends are life-saving medicine.”* (Sir. 6:14-16).

But, especially blessed are those who know who they can call on when faith is unsure, when doubts or temptation settle in, when the “dark nights” are too frequent, and when the good, the true and the beautiful seem just a bit out of reach. Maybe this person is the same parent, child, spouse, sibling, friend or neighbor we name anytime we are asked for our “emergency” contact. But maybe it is worth considering who else we might call on when we need help in time of spiritual crisis. Could it be a faraway friend, a devoted Godparent, a trusted priest, sister, brother, or deacon, a respected teacher, a wise elder of our family, or a fellow parishioner?

I have been blessed to know such people, and they have truly been among life’s greatest blessings. I am not sure if I have ever been one of those people to others. Yet, with age and experience, I hope I may one day be that blessing.

In a world that insists that we plan for the emergencies we can see, it is easy to forget that there are other deep needs we often cannot see – and for which we also need to rely on others.

As we move from Lent toward Easter joy, we have the chance to celebrate all the rich blessings of this life. One of them truly is all those who, in word and deed, are the “sturdy shelters” where we find the helping hands to guide us through our ordinary time.

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