**To Bloom in Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

The petals were dusty yellow and flecked with white. They emerged with timid strength from a nearly invisible crack in the blacktop of a nondescript driveway. In the midst of the dark pavement, a spunky petunia bloomed.

The contrast between the delicate bright beauty of the flower and the cold ugliness of the asphalt was striking. Naturally, photos of this flower now fill my phone.

Yet, more than a random splash of beauty, the improbable petunia blooms said something to me of life.

I was struck by how little the petunia had received to launch and sustain itself. Greenhouses, nurseries, and our own gardens are filled with flowers that are cultivated and cared for, nourished with finely fertilized soil, and watered regularly. Yet, this solitary petunia had only a tiny sliver of soil, just enough drops of dew to dampen that soil, some morning sun to nourish it, and a strategic location inches away from the tires of the cars that came in and out of that driveway. It had so little – and bloomed so beautifully.

Sometimes, there are those whose lives seem to have few advantages, especially in comparison to others. Nevertheless, so often, they bloom with so little and live their lives in the ways that brighten the places in which they find themselves – even when those places seem to be the least beautiful. I have known so many who inspire me with how much they have done, can do and will do even when life seems to have given them so little. Maybe that one bright petunia was a reminder not to overlook those with humble starts in life.

More importantly, though, as I looked at how beautifully that flower bloomed with so little, it was also a reminder not to be discouraged when we see need in the world and believe we can do very little to help. Human needs can often be so great that it is easy to begin thinking that what we can do to help meet those needs is insignificant and, therefore, of little use.

Yet, it may be a small act of kindness that makes all the difference for someone on a difficult day.

It may be a modest contribution to a scholarship fund that allows a student to remain in school and succeed against the odds.

It may be a quiet word of encouragement that makes someone try one more time.

It may be a quick note of thanks that makes someone’s efforts seem worthwhile when discouragement is setting in.

It may be a generous smile to a harried mother that gives her the strength to complete an overwhelming day.

It may be a quiet prayer before a meal or an invitation to a parish event that makes another keep the faith in a difficult time.

It may be the offer of rides to a homebound neighbor that seem trivial but remain that neighbor’s only lifeline to church, friends, and the community.

It may be a thoughtful gift to a pregnancy center that makes the difference to a frightened young woman.

It may be silent prayers and simple presence at a wake or funeral that lets grieving families know that they do not suffer alone.

It may be a seemingly insignificant word of praise to a struggling student that keeps that student in school.

It may be a well-timed challenge to friends choosing a wrong path that spares them lifetimes of regrets.

It may be a seemingly small gift to a child that becomes a lifelong, cherished memory.

It might be a tentative foray into public life and local politics that makes a real difference in a neighborhood, and a single volunteer initiative that plants lasting roots.

This is not to say that we should not attempt to do what is big and bold when we can. But, to see the beauty that a few grains of dirt and drops of water in a crack of pavement may sustain is a reminder that what is small and slight matters too. It is, sometimes, the smallest of our gifts that can help each other bloom in ordinary time.

*Lucia A. Silecchia is Professor of Law and Associate Dean for Faculty Research at the Catholic University of America’s Columbus School of Law. “On Ordinary Times” is a biweekly column reflecting on the ways to find the sacred in the simple. Email her at* *silecchia@cua.edu**.*