**Walking Together in Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

In the candle-lit glory of the Easter Vigil Mass, I watched with joy as new sisters and brothers were welcomed to the Church through the waters of Baptism. There just may have been water of a different kind that welled up in my eyes as I watched with a grateful heart.

To my new sisters and brothers, the warmest of welcomes!

I hope that on Easter eve you saw and felt the warmth of the welcome that surrounded you as your time of preparation culminated with your sacraments of initiation. I hope that you never stop feeling that welcome every time you join your new faith community around the table of our Lord. With time, it may become a quieter, more subtle welcome than the glorious embrace you experienced on Easter eve. I hope you will understand that to be the quiet, loving embrace extended by a family that will, from now on, greet you with aptly named familiarity

I also hope that you know how deeply grateful I am to you.

These are days in which it can be so easy to take my faith for granted. It was my parents who did the work and planning for me years ago when I was Baptized at five weeks old. I may have slept through the entire event. Indeed, my parents probably hoped that I would. Yet, I see how much you committed yourselves to study, reflection and preparation over the past months and years as you weighed this decision and prepared to enter the Church. I am in awe of all you have done to prepare for what I take for granted. Thank you.

These are days when I can get discouraged hearing about how religious disaffiliation is the trend of our times and how participation in the life of the Church seems to be in decline. This was exacerbated by the dark days of COVID-19 from which many of our parishes have not yet fully recovered. Yet, in you, I see renewed hope for a Church that will always beckon God’s sons and daughters to her embrace. I also see renewed hope that there will always be a response to that call. Thank you.

These are days when, in too many circles, religious faith is underappreciated, mocked, misunderstood or even threatened. Yet, I see you respond “yes” to a faith both ancient and ever new. I see you embrace a treasure with all your hearts and rejoice that you have not let the message of a cynical world drown out God’s call to your soul. Thank you.

These are days when those who do wrong seem to get so much attention, while quiet acts of goodness fall unnoticed. Yet, I know that for so many of you, your first promptings toward your journey of faith were stirred by the quiet example of an ordinary person whose goodness and faithfulness caught your eye – and now inspires my gratitude. Maybe a faithful grandmother, fiancé, neighbor, co-worker, sibling, teacher or friend lived his or her life in such a way that made you want to have what you saw in a life well lived. Thank you.

These are days when we lament the decline in the number of priests and religious serving the people of God. Yet, recent experience shows it is likely that some of you who were received into the Church this year will continue your journey to another joyous day when you pledge your lives wholly to the service of God as the priests, sisters and brothers of tomorrow. To those of you who will answer the call to those unique vocations, my gratitude in advance. Thank you.

These are days when too many seem to be living without joy. A glance at the headlines reports that levels of pessimism and apprehension are at alarming highs. The reasons are complex, to be sure. Yet, I see in all of you a bold statement of joy. You were brought to new life, became new creations, were charged to walk as children of light and renounced all that would keep you from the freedom of the children of God. If that is not a statement of great joy and hope, I am not sure what is! Thank you.

Welcome to the faith that I cherish and thank you for all the years to come when we will walk together in ordinary time. Alleluia!

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