**The Wisdom of Ordinary Time**

**(Column 96, May 15, 2023)**

By Lucia A. Silecchia

If it is graduation season, then it is graduation speech season too.

High schools, colleges, and even elementary schools seek out high profile speakers to impart their wisdom to graduates – or, at least, they aim to. I am a bit dubious about what a pampered celebrity or popular sports figure could possibly know about the life of an average graduate, and I am disappointed when political speakers bring disheartening division to what should be a final moment of unity for a class that has lived four or more years together.

When I think about the wisdom imparted to me in the speeches at my graduations, I cannot recall what any speaker said to my classmates and me.

What I have recalled, through decades of university life, is all the wisdom imparted to me by those who did not *tell* me how to live a good and great life, but by those who *showed* me how to do so. With prayerful gratitude, I can remember so many people whose lives well lived told me more than the most eloquent of speeches ever could. In the quiet, humble ways so loved by Christ, their lives were silent speeches I will never forget.

So, if you are graduating this year, enjoy your graduation and the speeches given that day. I hope that they inspire you to goodness, greatness, and holiness.

However, I hope that you will also think about what you have been taught by the people you met along the way. In their silence, not in their speeches, what did you learn from –

* The maintenance worker who, after long days at work, left for a second job to support his family and see his children attend college and live the dreams he dreamt for them?
* The staff member battling a serious illness who still spent time patiently helping students with problems that must have seemed so trivial to her?
* The teacher who taught an early morning class with grace and good cheer after spending most of her evening awake with a parent suffering with dementia and unable to sleep – or to recognize the daughter who kept vigil with her?
* The campus chaplain who became the voice of hope and courage when public tragedy struck campus – or private heartache struck any member of the campus community?
* The fellow student who made sure that a classmate who went home after the sudden death of a parent did not fall behind, and shared notes, wisdom, and review time with kind generosity?
* The server in the university cafeteria who greeted everyone with love, asked how all were doing – and really, truly wanted to know?
* The quiet classmate who found the courage to confront a bully, and in an instant changed the culture of the playing field?
* The student athlete who lost a critical match and, with grace and good sportsmanship, congratulated a victorious opponent with genuine admiration for a job well done?
* The roommate who prayed quietly at the break or close of day and whose example reawakened your own faith?
* The professor whose family extended a Thanksgiving invitation to anyone who could not travel home for the holiday weekend?
* The classmate who gave birth to a child – planned or unplanned – and did not sacrifice motherhood for mortarboard? All those who supported her with material and intangible support?
* The professor who noticed that you were not yourself and cared enough to ask what was wrong?

I have known some of these people. Others have told me about some of them.

The truth is that schools and universities are filled with people such as these. They are people who will often not be well known, whose names will not be announced as graduation speakers, and who will not be receiving honorary degrees.

Yet, if you are graduating, I hope you will think about those whose lives touched yours and whose lives were loving lectures without words. If you can, thank them with your words and with your prayers. No matter how eloquent your graduation ceremonies may be, it is those such as these who impart the wisdom of ordinary time.

May God bless them, and the class of 2023!

*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**.*