**Companions for the Journey Through Ordinary Time**

**(Column 118: May 6, 2024)**

By Lucia A. Silecchia

*“If you become a teacher, by your pupils you’ll be taught*.” So goes a line from the prelude to “Getting to Know You,” one of the songs that punctuates the classic musical *The King and I.*

After many years as a teacher, I can vouch for the truth of this observation. I am particularly reminded of it during this time of year. Invariably, as I watch my students prepare for final examinations, they teach me much about how we should and could be companions to each other on our journeys through this life.

Anyone who has been to school will remember final exam season as a time in the semester that is fraught with work, worry, and the desire to perform well on the examinations that will determine course grades. (Students may not realize that this season can also be one of equal stress for their teachers!)

Each semester, I am pleasantly surprised when I see my students navigating this season together. I see them working together in study groups, coming to my office hours with friends, and lingering after class to continue discussing the material we covered amongst themselves or with me. When I meet with them on Zoom, there are sometimes two, three or four on the screen, bringing to me their debates and their questions – or asking me to resolve a friendly dispute they have had about the correct resolution to a problem. I see them gathered around tables in our student lounge or our courtyard deep in discussion and notice that they share their notes with each other when one seems to grasp some of the material better than his or her peers.

In one sense, this is not what many would assume to be rational behavior. After all, there is a temptation to don blinders during the final weeks of the semester and focus solely on individual preparation for the exams that lie ahead. It can be tempting not to “waste” time helping others in the hope that all will cross the finish line together. To cynics, it might even seem counterintuitive to share wisdom or understanding with others out of fear that this will propel them to outperform the one who first shared that wisdom.

Yet, each semester I see my students traveling this final stretch of the semester together, and I am both proud of and grateful to them.

I am proud of them because they have not let the stress of exam season distract them from the opportunities they have to be of help to each other, to support each other, and to share the highs and lows of their common adventure.

I am also deeply grateful to them because the way they treat each other during exam season teaches me something about living the Christian life.

As human beings made in the image and likeness of God, we are made to live in community with each other and to share our lives with those entrusted to us and to whom we have been entrusted. We are not made to travel through this life to the next life alone. Rather, we are called to a faith that we do not keep to ourselves, but that we share freely with others.

 We are called to help each other through the seasons of doubt and to rejoice with each other in the seasons of fulfilment. We are called to wrestle with the challenging questions of life together and help each other bear the burdens of difficult times. We are called to share freely “the reason for our hope” with those who ache to hear it. We are called to pray alone, but also to gather with our parish families, our friends and family, and even strangers to pray as a community.

My students show me this. In the mundane ways they walk together through exam season, they show me a glimpse of the more glorious way we are to walk together through this life and enter the next one in the company of each other. They show me what it means to be companions for the journey through ordinary time.

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