

527,040 Minutes of Ordinary Times

(Column 24: January 6, 2020)

By Lucia A. Silecchia

This year, I managed to stay awake until the clock struck midnight to usher in a brand new year and decade. The attention that the turning of this page received in both the secular and religious senses reflects the importance we place on the passage of time. We mark major epochs in important ways as our midnight festivities call to mind the sacredness of the gift of time.

Yet, while large blocks of time receive celebratory attention when they come and go, lowly minutes are often overlooked as they slip by. Our lives, though, are lived by the minute – not just in the hour, week, month or year. So, perhaps while we welcome the start of 2020, it may be worth celebrating not just the significance of a brand new year but the gift of the 527,040 minutes from which it will be knitted. (1,440 bonus minutes for the leap year day!)

Why celebrate the mere minute? During the course of the year will lie many minutes, still hidden from our view, in which important things will happen that are unplanned and unscheduled precisely because they happen so quickly and may seem insignificant at the time.

There will be the minute when we send a quick text to a friend – and it will brighten his day when he needs it the most. There will be the minute when we decide to let a harried mother ahead of us in line – and it may be the only kindness she will see all day. There will be the minute before dinner when we bow our heads to pray silently in a restaurant – and it may be just enough to awaken gratitude in someone else. There will be the minute when we put down our phones to let a child flaunt her loose tooth or glittery art project – and show her how important she is to us.

There will be the minute when we are tempted to say something unkind in anger – and summon the grace to stay silent. And, there will be the minute when are tempted to let a wrong go conveniently uncorrected – and summon the grace *not* to stay silent.

There will be the minute when our eyes meet those of a troubled old man on the street – and our “hello” may be the only greeting he hears all week. There will be the minute when we say no to an old temptation – or the sadder minute when we give in to a new one. There will be the minute when we decide to give a student, a child, a co-worker or a relative the benefit of the doubt – and the minute that one of them gives that benefit back to us.

There will be the minute when we impulsively say “yes” to a new project or challenge -- and the course of our life may be changed forever. There will be the minute we casually greet a stranger – and he or she turns out to be a friend for the rest of our lives.

There will be the minute when the mere expression on our face can make a difference in the way a person struggling with an unplanned pregnancy, an unexpected job loss, or a fearful heart can face the future. There will be the minute when -- perhaps out of habit -- we say a heartfelt prayer for a stranger when we stop to let an ambulance rush him to the hospital or a hearse

slowly carry her to her place of rest. That prayer may help his body and her soul more than we will ever know.

There will be the minute when life seems overwhelmingly difficult, and, in despair, the name of God is all that we are able to say. Then, there will be the minute when life seems overwhelmingly beautiful and, with gratitude, the name of God is all we will want to say.

There will be the sacred minutes when new lives enter this world and the sacred minutes when those in this world leave it behind for eternity, when minutes will matter no more.

Until then, though, the minutes of the year to come are worth cherishing for all of the promise that they hold. At the threshold of this new year, we might think we have already planned out the months, the weeks, the days and the hours as events, obligations and celebrations have been inked on our calendars.

But we have not – and cannot yet – account for the humble minutes of the year. It is those minutes that will hold the things we will look back on most vividly when this year draws to a close. Only then will we know what those minutes held and all that unfolded in them. Right now, this minute holds a prayer for God’s loving help, guidance, and strength for the next 527,040 minutes of ordinary times.

Happy New Year!

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