

Disruption Comes to Ordinary Times

(Column 29: March 15, 2020)

By Lucia A. Silecchia

These past days have been unlike any I have known before as every email I read and headline I see announces a new covid-19 related disruption of everyday routines, events, and conveniences.

For now, I am not on the “front lines” of this. I am not a health care worker, not considered medically vulnerable, and not responsible for the care of anyone who is. As far as I can tell, my loved ones and I are healthy. So, although I can – and do! – whine about the disruptions that are coming to my own life, I can more wisely fill that time with gratitude for the many blessings I have and so often do not notice.

I have been urged, as has everyone, to “socially isolate” and avoid large crowds of people. I am grateful that this is hard to do because there are so many people with whom I want to be. Perhaps these days are an invitation to pray for and take better care of all for whom social isolation is the norm in lives that are lonely.

I am now teaching my classes online for a while. I am grateful that I have the ability to continue working at a job I love in a way that has changed in form but not in substance. Perhaps these days are an invitation to pray for and take better care of all those who will lose their income or security or even their businesses in the days to come.

I have stocked up on what I think I will need if I can’t get out and about as I regularly do. I am grateful that I am able to shop and gather what I need. Perhaps, these days are an invitation to pray for and take better care of those who live in a constant state of insecurity or fear of running out of the most basic things they need to care for their families.

I am reading headlines about the difficult decisions that are being made by medical professionals, government leaders, pastors, school administrators and others with responsibility for the common good. As they are criticized for both overreacting and underreacting, I am grateful that these decisions do not rest on my own shoulders. Perhaps these days are an invitation to pray for and take better care of those who do have to make these decisions – knowing that so often decisions seem simple when I am not the one who has to make them.

I see the statistics about those who are ill or who have died of covid-19. I am grateful for the great yet fragile gift of my own health. Perhaps these days are an invitation to pray for and take better care of those to whom this virus has brought death, not mere disruption – as well as for all those who die unnoticed, unmourned and unknown from so many causes each and every day with no attention at all.

I expect that I may be spending more time at home than I usually do. I am grateful to have a home with utilities, clean running water and every means I need to stay in touch with friends, families and colleagues. Perhaps these days are an invitation to pray for and take better care of

those who have no dignified place to call home and who will be spending these days as they spend all others – in circumstances that I cannot imagine.

Activities and events that I had been looking forward to have recently been cancelled or postponed. I am grateful that my life is punctuated with special celebrations and ways to mark both happy and sad occasions with others. Perhaps, these days are an invitation to pray for and take better care of those who live without special occasions to anticipate and also for those who have recently been prevented from being with their families for the sacred times of weddings and funerals and the first or last moments of their loved ones' lives.

Announcements were made that my diocese has suspended public celebration of Mass until further notice. This was a disruption I had never anticipated – perhaps because I am not sufficiently grateful for the fact that my parishes have always been second families. In the large cities I have always called home, I can go to Mass any day I want. Perhaps, these days are an invitation to pray for and take better care of those whose who, due to infirmity, distance, familial pressure, political persecution or violent oppression do not have the freedom to worship that is, for me, an underappreciated expectation in my ordinary way of life.

I hope that the days to come will bring a quick end to the destructive path of covid-19 with a return to health and well-being, in all senses of those terms. I also pray that this dark shadow that falls over our Lent will, as Easter approaches, give way to a new spring of joyful hope. But I also hope that, for me, this will leave in its wake a deeper sense of gratitude for those many blessings that stay hidden until disruption comes to ordinary times.

May God bless you and yours with good health in the days ahead.

Lucia A. Silecchia is a Professor of Law at the Catholic University of America. "On Ordinary Times" is a biweekly column reflecting on the ways to find the sacred in the simple. Email her at silecchia@cua.edu.