

Seasons of Ordinary Times

(Column 41, September 21, 2020)

By Lucia A. Silecchia

The quirky old building that I call home has a temperamental heating and cooling system that cannot both heat and cool at the same time. Thus, every September, when the first crisp fall days roll in, some want to switch it over to heat. Others, like me, want to believe that summer will make a triumphant – albeit temporary – return. So, we want to hold out on the switch to heat for as long as we can.

Ultimately, though, the day comes when fall's arrival becomes too obvious to ignore and the heat comes on. This dance will come again in six months when we debate when and whether a cold winter has loosened its grip and given way to the warmth of spring.

In one sense, this semi-annual debate is nothing more significant than a quest for comfort in the 'tween seasons. In another sense, though, it seems to mirror the tensions and difficulties that come not only when the seasons, predictably, change on the calendar but also when the seasons change, both predictably and unpredictably, in our lives.

Life is full of such seasonal changes – even for those who do not see their lives as particularly dramatic. Seasons change when the predictability of staying at home gives way to the adventure, or misadventure that is kindergarten. Seasons change when the security of student life is traded for the stress and excitement of the working world. Seasons change when jobs change through the excitement of promotions and new opportunities – or with the abrupt hardship of unemployment.

Seasons change when commitments are made to marriage or religious life or parenting. Seasons change when the parents who cared for their children become those cared for by their children. Seasons change when a phone call from a physician brings the good news longed for or the bad news feared. Seasons change when a mistake made has unpredicted and profound consequences. Seasons change when a grudge is released and an enemy is forgiven with a grace that frees the forgiver as much as the forgiven. Seasons change when a fear is overcome, or when a new fear burdens the heart.

Seasons change when a loved one moves away or when a new friendship is formed. Seasons change when a family home is packed up and sold – and when a new home becomes the backdrop for a lifetime of memories. Seasons change when a parish or a school close and when a new parish home is found.

Seasons change every time a new member of a family is born, and every time a family member breaths his or her last breath. Seasons change in those moments of profound

spiritual comfort and also when those moments give way to seasons of the soul's dark nights.

Seasons change when a virus unknown to the world a short while back wreaks havoc on a fragile world and its most vulnerable people. Seasons change whenever a long held view is found to be wrong, or when the conscience gently – or not – calls into question a past or present prejudice, imprudence or unkindness.

All of these changes of season are hard – even when they are the ones that are also joyful and longed for. Right now, I am eager for a crisp fall and the start of a new season. Indeed, new beginnings seem especially welcome this year. In this spirit, I met a friend this weekend for the first hot cocoa of the season – my annual low-budget welcome to fall. Yet, I am also sorry to see the end of long warm days and the full sunshine that is slipping away as darkness comes earlier each night.

Maybe the tug at the heart that comes with life's changes of season merely reflects human nature's affinity for the familiar over the unknown. But maybe it is a little bit more. Maybe the changes in seasons remind us how uncertain life is. They remind us how much we do not know the ways in which the future will unfold as much as we yearn to believe that we do. They remind us how leaving behind the familiar demands a leap of faith – or, at least, a tiny step of faith.

Maybe, as with so many other things, these changes of season are a time to, once again, renew our trust in the God who knows that there is “*an appointed time for everything*” (Ecc. 3:1) that happens in our lives. This is true of the large dramatic changes in seasons – but also in the small, subtle and gradual ones as well. I know that I want what I want when I want. But, maybe there is a wisdom in watching the seasons change with a bit more patience, and trust. May God bless all the changes that come to the seasons of your ordinary times.

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