

Peace in Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

Some people are creative in beautiful ways. They make the art, music, literature, and drama that inspire and soothe the world. Others are creative in more practical ways. They build buildings, invent machines, find cures, and solve problems to improve our daily lives. Others – myself included -- can be very imaginative when it comes to worry.

For all of us, ordinary times are filled with things that cause anxiety. For those more prone to worry, a doctor's simple request to take another test can trigger certainty that dire news is soon to come. An unreturned phone call can generate fear that a friendship has ended, while a routine workplace mistake can elicit deep doubt about competence or ability. Watching another age can spark worried introspection about one's own future, and an unbalanced budget one month can cause profound anxiety about financial stability. Anyone who has had the misfortune of accompanying me during a flight knows how extraordinarily creative I can be in anticipating all that may go wrong!

Yet, scripture overflows with invitations to be at peace and cast anxiety aside. The angelic welcome at Christ's birth heralded "peace to men on whom His favor rests." During His life, Christ greeted loved ones with "Peace be with you" and bid farewell with "Go in peace." In parables, Christ spoke of God's care for the flowers of the field and birds of the air, preaching that worry adds nary an hour to our lives.

During the everyday celebration of Mass, consider how many times "peace" is invoked. In the *Gloria*, we pray for "peace to people of good will." Eucharistic prayers speak of advancing "the peace and salvation of all the world." At the Sign of Peace, we remember that Christ promised, "my peace I give you," priests pray that the "peace of the Lord be with you always," and we are invited "to offer each other the sign of peace." The *Agnus Dei* asks God to "grant us peace," while the prayer that closes Mass urges us to "go in peace" as we scatter. Beyond the celebration of Mass, peace is hailed as a fruit of the Holy Spirit and the words of absolution beg not only for God's pardon, but also for His peace.

Nevertheless, peace is so often elusive as we wend our ways through ordinary times. In a cruel irony, sometimes those most prone to worry can become even more worried by worry – fearing that their lack of peace is a failing in holiness, trust, or faith itself. Oft-heard slogans like "let go and let God" or "too blessed to be stressed" have a simple appeal. Yet, even the most optimistic among us know that bad and tragic things, in fact, do happen. Sometimes, they happen to good, holy, and faithful people. Dire medical news does come, friendships do end, jobs are lost, ageing can be painful, financial ruin destroys families, and travel does not always end safely. This reality seems to contradict the call to be at peace. How can there be a hope-filled peace that is not

based on an unrealistic expectation of a calm carefree frolic through the ordinary times of our lives?

Several years ago, I came across a prayer card left for the taking on a shelf in the back of an old church in Baltimore. I saw in its words a reply to these questions that touched my heart. In fact, I liked this prayer so much that I put the card in a frame and have it in my office as a daily reminder about peace and worry. The card bears these words of Saint Francis De Sales:

Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow; the same Everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow... Either He will shield you from suffering, or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace ...

I liked this beautiful prayer. These brief sentences are a calm call to peace. But I have come to treasure these lines for their realism. They bluntly acknowledge that there is no guaranteed shield from suffering, even for the most faith-filled, holy, and trusting among us. They do not promise a blithe and carefree life. But they promise something more and something better. They are a hope-filled promise of God's presence even when – and, especially when -- the storms of suffering roll into our ordinary times.

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