**Running Through Ordinary Time**

**(Column 128: November 3, 2024)**

By Lucia A. Silecchia

I spent last Sunday on the sidelines of a marathon cheering for thousands who accomplished something I respect – but may never fully understand! The weather was stunning, the crowd was enthusiastic, and it is always exciting to root for a loved one crossing the finish line.

I may never run a marathon in my lifetime, and those who know me best would likely bet against the likelihood of that achievement. Yet, I learned much as a spectator.

First, I noticed that those of us on the sidelines yelled out two kinds of cheers. Many of us were rooting for the specific person or people we had come to encourage. With an app diligently loaded on our phones, we could track their progress so that we were in the right place at the right time to cheer on our loved ones. However, we also cheered for everyone else. There were generic cheers of *“Go Runners, go Runners!”* that filled the air, and we had a special cheer reserved for those who seemed to be lagging. While we cheered when those nearest and dearest ran by, we also had cheers, water and carbs for strangers too.

It strikes me that life is also like this. We have specific people entrusted to our care through the sacred bonds of family, friendship, and vocation. They hold claims on our heart that are unique and special. So, we cheer them on through this life to the next. Yet, in another way, everyone who crosses our path, even if unknown to us, is still a sister or brother. They also need our encouragement, help and support, even if it is in a different way. This is particularly true if they do not have others to do so. I think the runners who did not have a cadre of friends or family waiting to root for them were the ones most grateful for the support of strangers. So it is, I think, with life too.

Second, I noticed that there were quite a few runners who wore shirts with their name on it. I did not know “Paul” or “Kaitlyn” as they ran by. Yet, there was something about knowing their name that made the crowd – and me – cheer for them by name. When I joined the cheers for those strangers we could call by name, there was a brief bond that seemed, somehow, special.

It is also true that, in life, we want to be known by name. We are told that God calls us each by name. We are, with great solemnity, bestowed with names at our Baptism. Our names are carved on our gravestones so that those who come later can pray for us by name, whether they knew us or not. Indeed, in this month of All Souls, the names of those who have passed away are read out at Mass and inscribed in books of remembrances. Certainly, we can pray for each other anonymously. Yet, names are a special way in which we honor each other and the unique irreplaceability of our sisters and brothers. While I can both root for runners and pray for others without knowing their names, there is something sacred about a name.

Third, as moved as we were by those who ran the race with great speed and style, there was something particularly inspiring by those who ran the race while helping someone else. There were runners paired with others when one could not run the race but made it through the marathon because the other helped push their wheelchair for 26 miles. There were many runners who slowed their own time to stay at the side of another who needed help across the finish line. This was being a brother or sister’s keeper in a very real and moving way.

In life as well, we can all too easily focus our attention and energy on running our own race – whether in the physical, spiritual, economic or professional arena. Certainly, we are obligated to use our energy, gifts and talents to make the most of the time we have been given in this life. Yet, in our own circumstances we also have the vocation to bring others along with us. Our greatest saints did not seek heaven solely for themselves. Through their example, their witness, their evangelization and their sacrifices, they inspired others. In this month of All Saints, this is a reminder to bring others with us when we seek that which is of heaven.

As the weather gets colder and marathon season ends for a while, thank you to all those who inspired me on the course and on the sidelines. You taught me much about running through ordinary time.

*Lucia A. Silecchia is Professor of Law and Associate Dean for Faculty Research at the Catholic University of America’s Columbus School of Law. “On Ordinary Times” is a biweekly column reflecting on the ways to find the sacred in the simple. Email her at* [*silecchia@cua.edu*](mailto:silecchia@cua.edu)*.*