**Envy in Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

*“The seaweed is always greener in somebody else’s lake.”*

Thanks to the Disney franchise’s uncanny ability to generate memorable movie tunes and some time spent recently with a young “Little Mermaid” fan, this line keeps running through my mind. Like any good jingle, it has wormed its way into my ears. At the same time, like any good life lesson, it has also found a place in my heart.

This modern, nautical twist on the old adage *“The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence,”* is sung by a curmudgeonly crab, Sebastian, to a restless young mermaid, Ariel. Ariel is convinced that life on the land is far better than life under the sea. Certainly, this opinion is bolstered by her romantic interest in Prince Eric, whose castle and kingdom are, inconveniently for Ariel, on land. Hence, while Sebastian tried to open Ariel’s eyes to the beauty of undersea living, she remained convinced that life could be better elsewhere.

It is easy to criticize Ariel for her inability to appreciate all the goodness that surrounded her. Yet, maybe, there is a little bit of Ariel in all of us.

Like her, it can be very easy to overlook the gifts we have received, the blessings that fill our lives, and the beauty in everyday living and assume that the worlds of others are better, brighter, easier or more exciting. The Facebook posts and Instagram feeds of others show perfect worlds of happy celebrations, flawless meals and amazing vacations. It is easy to look at them and envy those whose lives seem immune from any traces of burnt meals, cancelled flights, rainy days or toddler melt-downs.

Like her, we can look from afar at the seemingly serene family lives of others we see whose beautiful children, devoted spouses, close-knit siblings and loving parents seem the stuff of Hallmark perfection. It is easy to believe they live easy, carefree lives without seeing any of the drama of unseen everyday struggles.

Like her, the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, the talents we have and the balances in our checking accounts may often seem lacking when we compare them to those of others that we know – or think we know.

Like her, when we look at our jobs, no matter what they are, there always seem to be others whose work is more carefree, respected and rewarding – financially and otherwise.

Like her, when we are young, we think that the adult world is far more exciting than our own and we cannot wait to enter that grown-up realm. When we are older, we look at those who are younger and may pine to live, once again, in their world.

Even when it comes to faith, without seeing what is deep within the soul of another, envy can creep in if it seems that they hold a faith deeper and more unshakeable than our own. At those times, in the words of an exasperated cartoon crustacean, the seaweed seems greener in their lakes.

This affliction is not unique to our day. Since time began, the things enjoyed by others can seem better than what we possess, what we are, and what we do. Indeed, in the very beginning, our first parents wanted the knowledge that God possessed, astonishingly dissatisfied with all the bountiful beauty of Eden itself.

Our lives are not lived in Eden. Yet, for all of us, there is beauty in the time and place and circumstances in which we find ourselves. It may be different from that of others whose lives may seem to be far easier, richer or fuller. But, seeing only what we think we are missing can hide from our view all that is good about the lives we live.

Maybe in his pleas to an impetuous, restless mermaid, Sebastian has a lesson for the rest of us. Rejoice in the good that fills the lives of others. Admire all that is good in the joys they share. But save a deep spring of gratitude for all the good that fills your own world. The seaweed is not always greener in somebody else’s lake. Sometimes, what is most precious fills your own ordinary time.

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