**Travels Through Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

*“Over the river and through the woods …”*

*“From Atlantic to Pacific, gee the traffic is terrific …”*

Popular songs in our canon of carols and songs have travel as a key theme. The jarring reference to traffic is a realistic acknowledgement that those travels have their challenges!

In the days ahead, news reports will tell us how many people are traveling for the holidays by road, air and rail as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day prompt so many to embark on journeys of all kinds. Intrepid reporters will stake out airports and train stations to interview far more intrepid travelers about their transit plans.

Some travelers will be in the best of spirits – eagerly anticipating reunions with loved ones, home-cooked food, exotic destinations, or nostalgic returns to beloved hometowns. They are looking forward to meeting grandchildren for the first time, returning home after first semesters in college, or being guests at their child or sibling’s very first homes. They look forward to that unique joy of returning to childhood homes. They face the same travel hassles as everyone else, but do not seem to notice because the joy of the journey has captured their heart.

Other travelers will be less than jubilant. They are overwhelmed by the inconveniences of canceled flights, traffic jams, crowded trains and that unique brand of travel-related chaos that seems to bring out the very best and the very worst of human nature. They may also be approaching their destinations with sorrow or fears, in spite of the festivities that surround them. They may be heading to family tables fraught with tensions, or with an empty seat for the first time. They may be traveling to see older relatives whose health is in a rapid decline. They may be returning to places that hold sad memories or evidence of joys that time has taken.

In a happy confluence, these days of frantic travel correspond so well to our annual journeys through Advent. It is precisely the Sunday when those eking out the last day of Thanksgiving festivities wend their tired ways home that we light the first candles of Advent and embark on our journeys toward the joyful hope of Christmas.

As is true of travel of all kinds, the journey through Advent will seem different for each of us.

Some may be easily distracted by the many joyous events in anticipation of Christmas. Others may be overwhelmed by the stress of holiday planning. Still others may find themselves in wistful sorrow as they contend with the emotions of the Christmas season. Many of us, perhaps, find ourselves in all three of these categories at some point during our Advent journeys. I know I have met all of these descriptions at the very same time.

Perhaps, through Advent, as we make our ways toward Christmas, we can keep in our prayers all those who make this journey with us – whether we know them or not. Perhaps, too, we can offer our hand in help or friendship to our fellow travelers in need.

There have been countless times when a fellow Amtrak passenger helped me hoist an over-stuffed suitcase into the luggage rack, when a stranger offered me directions when I was lost, and when a person arriving at a boarding gate with me motioned me to go ahead when I looked exhausted after racing to make a close connection between my flights. As one who chronically over packs, gets frequently lost, and takes some daring risks with scheduling flights, I have always been grateful to these kind travelers.

I am also grateful, even more, to those friends and family who, with love, help me carry a load when I am overburdened, give me guidance when I am lost, and offer a friendly gesture when I am exhausted.

I hope that Advent may offer the chance to return favors such as these as we journey together toward Christmas. Although the journeys may be different and the paths as different as each of us can be, the hoped-for destination is the same.

It is to that silent night, that holy night to come. It is to that place where wise men traversed afar and where all ye faithful have come joyful and triumphant for so many centuries. It is to that place where, even when the journey is exhausting, we have the chance “to rest beside a weary road to hear the angels sing.”

May your Advent travel be blessed. May Advent lead you to joyful hope as you journey to Christmas, and then back to ordinary time.

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