**Re-reading in Ordinary Times**

**(Column 99, July 3, 2023)**

By Lucia A. Silecchia

Recently, I joined some friends for a retreat where, together, we reflected on a wonderful text by Saint Bonaventure. It is fair to say that depth of his thought was much beyond me! So, when I was asked if I enjoyed the reading, my honest reply was that, yes, I enjoyed reading it but would *really* enjoy *re*-reading it.

Life, too, sometimes seems this way.

Certainly, each day of life is new – irreplaceable and unrepeatable. Certainly, too, new experiences, new adventures and new books to read are exciting. Yet, there are times when the opportunity to relive or re-experience something is a beautiful gift as well.

This somehow seems most true in summertime.

For some, summer is the time for revisiting hometowns and vacation destinations that are family traditions. For others, it is the time to visit the same people and hear the same stories told yet again. For others, it is the chance to return to a favorite fishing spot, familiar campsite or carefully chosen site for a beach blanket. For others, it is enjoying, once again, the familiar taste of traditional summer treats and, indeed, for some, it is long afternoons re-reading favorite books.

As the years pass, I have come to appreciate the “reruns” of life more than I did in the past. I still enjoy seeing and doing what has been unseen and undone. Yet, I also know what a gift it is to re-experience things that I may not have fully appreciated before.

It may be hearing a loved one retell a story I have heard dozens of times before. Yet, each time I hear it, I know that I am different and the storyteller is different too. There may be an insight I have yet to learn from a story I thought I knew.

It may be returning to a familiar place – one I have seen so often. Yet, there will still be subtle changes that I will see for the first time. They may make me more grateful for the beauty of that spot, more wistful for the way it used to be, or more eager to preserve it for the future.

It may be participating in a family tradition that I think I know and then, for the first time, noticing something I had not appreciated before or feeling something I had not felt before.

And, yes, it may be re-reading a book I did not understand on the first round that now makes a little more sense, or offers a new truth to discover.

Faith, too, sometimes seems this way.

Stories from scripture that seem so familiar may have something new to teach us each time we hear them because our hearts are different each time and may be open to learning something new.

Communal prayers, like the Stations of the Cross in Lent, a Rosary in May, or the words of a familiar parish Novena also have a different meaning each time if we are open to the unique graces they may hold at different stages of our lives.

A private prayer can also seem routine and familiar, as we repeatedly plead for the same things, express gratitude for the same things, or express sorrow for the same things. Yet, perhaps over time these same prayers are said with more patience, greater enthusiasm, or deeper sincerity as the years go by. Unknowingly, repeated prayers can change our hearts.

The rituals of a wedding or a funeral or a Baptism seem the same. Yet, the bonds we have with the couple uniting their lives, the soul commended to God’s care, or the infant joining the family all make the familiar blessedly brand new.

The heart of the Mass, too, is familiar enough that sometimes without care it can become habit rather than miracle.

Perhaps, then, there is a wisdom is seeking the insights, grace and adventure that come from re-reading life and seeing in the familiar all that is new, in the consistent all that has changed, and in what is ancient all the insights unseen.

Enjoy the re-reads, as life unfolds in ordinary times.

*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**.*