

B proper 6  
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RCL

### Ordinary Time?

We in the Church have spent about six months re-living the life of Christ in a symbolic manner. It is something we do every year. This color-coded liturgical time-frame stamps our lives with a life cycle different from the secular year. It adds drama and meaning to our lives, the drama and meaning of the Savior of humankind. It is a great gift forged by our ancestors in the faith and given to us as our legacy from them. It is the sanctification of time. Advent calls us to await the coming of God's Agent for sanctification; Christmas and Epiphany tell us that God has acted decisively by inserting Himself into history and creation in a human life, the life of that Agent; Lent celebrates the courage of the Savior and His dedication to God and to the welfare of His brothers and sisters; Easter shows us every year that God's will for life and good and sanctity and love will not be frustrated, even by death.

For six months we have lived the drama of God's Messiah. Now comes a quieter time, the Sundays after Pentecost, again about six months in length. We have a little more leisure to re-examine the teachings of the Lord Christ and re-visit some of His important life events, once more giving us a chance to reflect and know and love. These Sundays after Pentecost are called ordinary time in the Catholic Church. I much prefer our term as being somewhat more oriented to the great event that governs our relation with God, the coming of God's Spirit into our lives.

I've been thinking about the term "ordinary time," though. It's almost a contradiction in terms, especially on the lips of the Church.

Scientists are intrigued by time. What is it, really? What seems a mundane experience turns out to be a puzzlement, as the King of Siam said to Anna. Mathematical equations which describe the behavior of time and space work equally well backward and forward, that is, according to equation, time could as easily run backward as forward. Just stick the universe into a film or dvd projector and run reality backward – it works, according to the scientist. The problem, of course, is that it doesn't work. We never experience time running backward; it always runs forward. Why? The scientists don't know. What they do know is that it is so bound up with the space of the universe, this gorgeous immensity of creation, that scientists now refer to it as spacetime, one word, denoting a mysterious reality that grows more mysterious with investigation, not less.

Welcome to our world, well might the theologian say. Theologians have been intrigued by time and space for centuries, especially as they relate to their absence. We mean eternity, that is, life outside of time, and heaven, which is a place with no place, no dimensions, a spiritual reality containing spiritual bodies (!) according to Saint Paul. He says in his first letter to the Corinthians: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15.44). How can we, whose very brains are structured

according to principles of spacetime, whose every word and concept are shaped by our immersion in space and time, even think about their absence, about a kind of existence and life beyond their limitations. The mind boggles, and so does the spirit.

You see my point: what is so ordinary about time? Even before we begin to consider the drama of salvation history, the ways of God with Man, the confluence of divinity with humanity – even before we begin to talk about the mystery of the Divine, we are flummoxed by the mystery of the ordinary. In a very real sense, nothing is common; everything is extraordinary. And that is the point of the Church, of its theologians, of its scientists. We can but stand in humble wonder before the mystery of what is and of its Creator.

I suppose it is fair to say that the word “ordinary” has some utility. For us, some days flow more evenly and unremarkedly than others, a leisurely Saturday is more ordinary than the Saturday in which our children are born or our lives are transfigured by death into eternity. For Jesus, any Friday must have been ordinary by comparison with Good Friday, God’s Friday, the day on which His love of God and responsiveness to God focused in a unique fashion.

Jesus speaks in today’s gospel (Mark 14.26-34) about the mystery of growing things and says that what God is doing is like that growth. The kingdom of God is like growing seeds, like the tiny germ of a mustard seed becoming a field of yellow-headed flowers. The kingdom of God is intimately bound up with God’s mysterious power for life and vigor, with the working out of divine purpose in time leading to eternity, in space leading to heaven. The kingdom of God is at once as common as mustard and as extraordinary as God Herself. The prophet Ezekiel says the same thing through God’s sovereignty to make or break our reality (17.22-24) Are these ordinary or extraordinary? You decide.

The Psalmist may say it best of all: “For you have made me glad by your acts, O Lord; and I shout for joy because of the works of your hands. The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, and shall spread abroad like a cedar of Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.” (92.4, 11,12)

Indeed. Amen.