

Ordinary Time, Fall, 2023

Reflection

*The growth of faith is a gradual process.
It includes quiet time for revelation and transformation to gestate.
(WhiteLotusGrace.com)*

Ordinary Time 31

Extraordinary Time 21

We are now into the second half of that long stretch of Ordinary Time between Easter and Advent. As I was thinking about it and my usual question of what to write, it struck me that the Church gives us far more Ordinary Time than Extraordinary Time—31 weeks compared to 21, as noted above. With that wee bit of research, I further thought about why that might be. As I've written in many other Ordinary Times, the purpose of Ordinary Time according to the USCCB is to provide us with a time to grow spiritually, to deepen our faith through prayer and contemplation. Could it be intentional that the Bishops—or whoever determined the liturgical calendar—are recognizing our greater need for such times than for the extraordinary times of action and celebration that fill the rest of the year?

Doing a little more probing, I came across a number of references to this very idea. I was reminded of how Jesus would retreat to the desert or other remote and quiet places to fortify his relationship with his divine parent, to refresh himself and nourish his weary soul, to pray.

In Pax Christi USA's wonderful old prayer book, *The Fire of Peace*, I found further support for this notion in the section by Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB, on "Meditative Prayer." Sr. Mary Lou begins that section with the familiar verse from Psalms: "Be still and know that I am God." She continues: "Perhaps that's another way of saying that God is always present to us and our task is to become more aware of the presence. Meditative prayer, reflective prayer in silence and solitude, is one way to 'know God' in a deeper way." To help us along, Sr. Mary Lou offers a few methods for doing this, including Lectio Divina (sacred reading); Repetition of a Sacred Passage from scripture; the Jesus Prayer (simply repeating "Lord, Jesus Christ, son of the Living God, have mercy on me" or even more simply just repeating "Jesus" or "Jesus, mercy"); Centering Prayer (see <http://www.centeringprayer.com/>); or Mindfulness, which Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh encouraged. In Mindfulness, one keeps consciousness alive to the present moment whether doing something as routine as washing dishes or as challenging as contemplating an enemy to gain compassion for him or her.

The irony of my writing this is that I know, for me, none of this comes easily or naturally. Nevertheless, I do believe in its immeasurable value. Whether you are like me, struggling to embrace such quiet contemplation, or unlike me, readily contemplative, I encourage you to let Ordinary Time draw you in, envelop you, and nurture your spiritual life into our next Extraordinary Time.

"Prayer for a Contemplative Heart" in *Prayers for a New Millennium* by Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB

Be still and know that I am God.

Be in stillness

until I erupt in spontaneous awe
at a grain of sand,
a hollyhock in bloom,
an ocean spray,
the air I breathe,
the energy of matter,
the sacredness of being.

Be in stillness

until each person I meet

is bathed in such light
that I genuflect in adoration.

Be in stillness
until I dance with you, God
in a circle of fire
at the heart of the universe.

Be still and know that I am God.

Suggested Actions

Turn off the TV, the radio, the phone, the computer....

Sit, be still, try to empty your mind of all thoughts, worries, concerns, anxieties, plans, expectations....

Listen—to the sounds around you. Listen for God speaking to you in those sounds, in your heart,
in your mind.

Try at least one of Sr. Mary Lou's options for Meditative Prayer or pray her prayer above for a
"Contemplative Heart."

Relax. Come away refreshed, renewed, energized for the extraordinary times that are sure to come!