

Ordinary Time, Winter 2023

Reflection

The Christmas season comes to an end with the baptism of Jesus. Once Jesus is baptized, the Church proceeds into what it calls Ordinary Time, but how ironic that is! For the Church, as noted many times before, Ordinary Time is a time for contemplation and growth, free of all the demands of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. But let's look back at that not-so-small point that Ordinary Time begins once Jesus has been baptized. Prior to his baptism, Jesus might be described as living a rather ordinary life. We know almost nothing about him before that baptism. We can assume that, after all the excitement surrounding his birth, the flight into Egypt, and that one recorded incident of his getting "lost" in the Temple at about the age of 12, he blended into his local community, the son of a carpenter, learning what every other Jewish boy was learning about faith and culture, work and play. Then, at the age of 30, he goes to his cousin John and asks to be baptized. Only at that point does the ordinary fall away and Jesus comes into his own, a prophet and miracle-worker, a teacher and healer, a magnet for some and a repellent for others.

So what can we make of this notion of Ordinary Time? Liturgically it seems a contradiction. While Jesus is becoming more and more active, are we supposed to be sitting back, observing, thinking, but not really doing much, allowing our faith to mature while we wait? Probably not.

In the midst of his very active ministry, Jesus repeatedly took time to get away from the crowds to pray. He understood the need for both action and contemplation. Perhaps that is what the Church is trying to tell us, as well. We, too, need those times to engage and to disengage, times to exert our energy and times to restore it, times to exercise our faith and times to nourish it. This Ordinary Time, let us make time for both. And let's remember that we can only do so much, unlike Jesus. Let's strive to do what we can with the guidance and energy we receive in those times of reflection when we transition from prayer to action.

A Prayer attributed to Oscar Romero by Bishop Ken Untener

*It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The Kin-dom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is a way of saying that the Kin-dom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything,
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.*

*We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future that is not our own.*

Amen.

Suggested Actions

Take time to pray, to listen to inspirational music, to read spiritual writings, to participate in instructive discussions, and to reflect on them. Open your heart and your mind to what God is telling you through them all.

Use what you've "heard" through the practices above to take at least one action that you feel called to do. It might be to reach out to a person in need; to speak out against an injustice in your community; to join a demonstration for peace in Ukraine, Yemen, Palestine, or elsewhere; to alter a behavior that will help the natural environment, for example drive less, recycle more, or plant a butterfly garden.

During this Ordinary Time, we will celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday (January 15th) and the second anniversary of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (January 22nd). Find celebrations in your community and join them. Make ending racism and abolishing nuclear weapons part of your prayer and action lives.

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