Columns
Spirituality



Sr. Jane Marie Bradish made time to enjoy the ordinary activity to visit the Oscar Meyer Weinermobile at the grocery store. (Rose Hacker, OSF)



by Jane Marie Bradish

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Everything has a cycle. Planet earth has seasons. All living creatures have hormonal cycles of life, growth and death. Our church year is divided into various liturgical seasons. I think it's time we give so-called Ordinary Time the respect it deserves. We live most of our lives in the ordinary: laundry and grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning, prayer and presence and ministry, watching the news and paying bills, relational connecting and self-care. Nothing exceptionally glamorous or celebratory but all necessary.

All our traditions and rituals remind us God is present in the "big celebration seasons." But God is very much present in the ordinary. Scripture, while full of teaching stories, has a fair number of stories where Jesus and so many named others are doing ordinary things. Jesus goes to temple, just like all good Jews do. Moses tended flocks, Peter and Andrew fished, Martha and Mary kept house for their family. None of them lived their entire lives outside of the ordinary.

In my experience, the seasons other than Ordinary Time have all kinds of "extra things" for us to do. And, I'd venture to say, participating in them we can miss the important things we are supposed to be focused on and celebrating. Many parishes offer missions and additional prayer and sacramental experiences during Advent and Lent. There is extra preparation and practice for liturgical ministers. Let's not forget plans with families and friends: meals, travel, decorating and the like. I've participated in online weekly retreats during both seasons the last couple years. Some years I get to Christmas and Easter and wonder if I'm prepared, if all the preparatory activities have somehow diverted my attention.

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The non-ordinary liturgical seasons have us hearing and reflecting on all-too-familiar Scripture. Because we know the stories oh so well, it can be hard to focus our attention and discover what they are teaching us "this time." Ordinary time, however, sees us cycle through different readings and presents what I think is an easier opportunity to learn and apply those long-ago lessons to our current lived realities.

Ordinary Time, with its routines and generally less expectations, can be a great gift. Going about our "usual business" or daily life can free our minds and hearts. In the freedom of not having to focus on "extra things" I find we can often encounter God in new, unusual, unexpected and much-needed ways.

In my hometown, someone got the idea years ago to celebrate April 14, as 4-1-4 is the local telephone area code. The day itself can be cold and snowy, springtime stormy, or exceptionally warm, as this year was. People gather at City Hall to watch a giant flag unfurl, some stores and restaurants (mostly bars) offer food and drink specials. It's kind of a random celebration for a group of people who share part of a phone number. This year on April 14 I drove to City Hall to see the giant 4-1-4 flag hanging from the building. It was a silly detour and a fun way to spend a little time as I returned home from Mass.



As Sr. Jane Marie Bradish drives along the Mississippi River, she reflects both on its strength and its danger. (Jane Marie Bradish)

Ordinary is also a drive along the lake or river to see its height and speed. The mighty Mississippi is running fast and high in 2024. I reflect on the strength of the river and how it allows supplies to travel across the country, while also recognizing the danger it can pose if it spills over or moves too quickly. One only needs to look back to the barge/bridge accident in Baltimore earlier this year to know both the gift and dangers.

For me, in mid-May the garage gets rearranged, with the lawnmower being brought forward and the snowblower pushed to the back. It's a symbolic welcome of warmer weather and more outside time. I pull out flower pots and plan for planting in early June; experience has taught me not to plant earlier unless I want to cover and uncover the plants when the overnight temperatures drop too far. The mowing and trimming and planting are all signs of growth and potential. It can be quick or gradual, depending on temperature and moisture. There’s nothing particularly exciting that calls for big celebrations. It's very ordinary and very everyday and very much a touch point for my connection with God, our Creator.

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Many restaurants offer special — and pricey — meals for holidays. While I have never attended one of those special meals, reports from family and friends are that the meal was "OK" but expensive and rushed so the restaurant could feed as many as possible. Ordinary is checking the freezer and creating meals from what is already on hand instead of creating something "fancy" because of some expectation. Some of my best family gatherings have been each of us bringing our favorite food thing to share. It's by no means a coordinated meal, sometimes too many salads or desserts, but it's simple, fun, very ordinary and the time and effort goes into being together.

Ordinary was joining a long line of people to see the Oscar Meyer Weinermobile that happened to be at the grocery store. I've seen it before but couldn’t resist as it’s not around all that much. Bunches of strangers made idle chatter as we waited to see the silly hot dog-shaped vehicle and then went our separate ways. Ordinary is noticing the shy student's new glasses or hairstyle and offering a compliment. Ordinary is stopping to ooh and ahh over the three new babies in my neighborhood; I’ve gotten all three to smile back at me.

Celebrate the seasons, by all means. Each offers gifts. But let's celebrate the often overlooked ordinary, too. That time could just teach us something.