

**By Woodeene Koenig-Bricker**

**Until Advent or Lent begins, we're in a liturgical transition phase. How to make the most of it**

Advent has its wreath, its candles, its hymns -- all of which culminate in Christmas. Lent has ashes, fasting, Stations of the Cross -- and the Resurrection. It's easy to be energized and excited about the faith during the High Holy Days. But Ordinary Time? It's just so, well, ordinary.

How do you stay involved and engaged when Sundays seem to run together and the next liturgical high point is weeks or months away?

There are, of course, the standard suggestions: attend daily Mass, say the Rosary, make more frequent confessions. They are good ideas and can certainly help with a lagging faith, but many of us either already do these things or have done so in the past. What we long for is an infusion of ideas that are both a little different and yet still deeply rooted in our traditions.

So here are six suggestions to help make Ordinary Time a little less ordinary.

### **1. Create your own novena**

A novena, nine days of private or public prayer intended to obtain a special grace, favor or blessing has long been a part of the Church's devotions. You can find novenas for everything from world peace to healing, most of which are directed to end on a particular feast day of Mary, Jesus or a prominent saint. But you can create your own novena, choosing your own ending day and devotional activity. For instance, create a birthday novena. Do something special for the nine days before your birthday or the birthday of someone you love; you can certainly say a prayer like the Hail Mary or Our Father, but you might also light a candle, read a poem, work on a piece of art or plant a flower. Whatever you do, place yourself in the presence of God and offer your activity with your whole heart, mind and soul.

### **2. Keep a gratitude journal**

Some scientific studies have shown that people who regularly "count their blessings" are happier than those who don't. Often we are so focused on the negatives in our lives we overlook the positives. So, during Ordinary Time, take a small notebook and, once a day, write at least five things you are thankful for. They don't have to be earth-shattering; "a cup of coffee" will suffice. Then, on Sunday, read aloud your list, saying before each item: "God, I thank you for..." It seems like a simple activity, but it can literally be life-changing as a concrete, permanent record of the blessings of your life that is hard to overlook even when you are feeling down.

### **3. Focus on God's abundance**

Last year Marcia Dumler decided that since so many things seemed to be going wrong in her life, she would concentrate on the ways God showed his providence in a tangible, practical manner. Every day she e-mailed a friend to relate what "abundance" God had provided. Sometimes it was a small

thing -- like finding a quarter on the sidewalk. Other times it was larger -- like being given a washing machine when hers broke. At times it was nonmaterial, like having a neighbor blow the leaves from her yard. But as the days went by, it became obvious that God was continually showering abundance on her. It became a daily joy to see what new gift God had for her that day.

#### 4. Act out

One of the reasons our faith can become stale is because it becomes too cerebral. Instead of "doing," we spend most of our time "thinking." So put your faith in action. No, that doesn't mean you have to start vigils at abortion centers or volunteering at soup kitchens -- although those things are good and may be just what some people need. You can act out your faith in smaller, more homey ways as well. For instance, Jesus told us if we had two coats, we should share with those who had none. Most of us probably have at least two coats in our closets, so paring down our clothes could be a great place to begin. During Ordinary Time, simplifying, eliminating and giving away those things that we no longer use can become a great act of faith... and a great faith-builder.

#### 5. Read something with moral value

Have you ever read "The Confessions," by St. Augustine? "Introduction to the Devout Life," by St. Francis de Sales? "The Brothers Karamazov," by Fyodor Dostoevsky? Or for more modern tastes "Mr. Blue," by Myles Connolly, "In This House of Brede," by Rumer Goden or even the current best-seller "The Shack," by William P. Young? In the weeks when the Church is not preparing for something special, we have the time to read what others have written about God, faith and the meaning of life. We don't have to agree with everything we read, but reading morally engaging literature is one of the best ways to keep our faith vital and vibrant.

#### 6. Keep the Sabbath

The weeks of Ordinary Time are ideally suited to creating family rituals that keep the Sabbath as a special day. Without the pressure of holidays and holy days, we can design our own personal practices that make Sunday a day to anticipate. As with most things, these don't have to be elaborate. Perhaps stopping at the doughnut shop on the way home from Mass and letting everyone pick their favorite could become a "tradition." Or reinstitute a sit-down family dinner Sunday evening, even if you are sitting down to eat take-out. Or read aloud or listen to a book on tape. Just find something you and your family can enjoy and save that activity for the Sabbath.

Ordinary Time is only ordinary if we think of it that way. If we consider these weeks, not as the long boring stretches between the good stuff, but as a time to try new things and refocus our energies on our spiritual growth, Ordinary Time can become one of our favorite -- and most rewarding -- times of year.

## There's Always Something to Celebrate

Even though Ordinary Time doesn't build to a single great feast like Advent or Lent, it's not without its high points. Trinity Sunday (June 7), Corpus Christi (June 11 or 14), the Assumption of Mary (Aug. 15), All Saints (Nov. 1) and Christ the King (Nov. 22) are just a few of the important celebrations that fall during these weeks.

## No First Sunday of Ordinary Time?

If you go to Mass on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which is celebrated on the Sunday after Epiphany, you may be startled to see the next Sunday is "The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time." What happened to the First Sunday? It's a little confusing. The Sunday Masses for the Baptism of the Lord are the very last celebrations of the Christmas season. However, Evening Prayer that night is the first liturgical marker for Ordinary Time. Therefore, the first part of that Sunday is Christmas and the second part is Ordinary Time. The next day, Monday, is the "First Monday of Ordinary Time." Therefore, the next Sunday has to be "The Second Sunday in Ordinary Time," because it is the Sunday of the second week in Ordinary Time.

## It Wasn't Always Ordinary

The early Church didn't seem to have any special terms for the non-Advent and non-Easter seasons, even though they were clearly recognized. During much of the Church's history, the two blocks of time were called the "Season after Epiphany" and the "Season after Pentecost." It wasn't until the new Catholic calendar took effect in 1969 after the Second Vatican Council that the term "Ordinary Time" came into common use in the liturgical calendar.

## The Cardinal Difference

It's tempting to think that Ordinary Time got its name because it is "ordinary" or non-exceptional, but that's not really the case. Ordinary Time means ordered or numbered time and is derived from "ordinal numbers" (first, second, third, etc.) as opposed to "cardinal numbers" (one, two, three). It begins on the Monday after the Baptism of Our Lord and is counted sequentially until Lent. The count then resumes where it left off on the Monday after Pentecost and continues until Advent.

Because the beginning of Lent is a movable feast, Ordinary Time can last 33 or 34 weeks. This year, Ordinary Time goes from Jan. 10 to Feb. 22 and from May 28 to Dec. 1.

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