

Reflection for February 2021
Theme: Ordinary Season- not so ordinary

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.

And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:21-21)

When I was young, my father would often hold out his hand at the door, before he stepped out. "Coming?" he would ask. "Where are you going?" I would enquire. "Are you coming?" he persisted. Even though my father would never tell me where he was going, there was something so mysterious and tempting about his extended hand and his glistening eyes, that I would put my hand in his and off we would go. It was always a new excursion. Sometimes, we went grocery shopping and among the many items in his list, he would get me a candy. Sometimes we would go house visiting, and on other occasions it was to play in the park. On a few occasions, Daddy would take me to his office and I would watch him as he poured over piles of paper work. And so even the most banal chores would become adventures with Daddy. However, some of the trips were scary too. Sometimes we would be chased by street dogs on the way. My dad was not bothered by these dogs at all, and this bothered me very much. You see they were almost as high as me, and the sight of their sharp fangs scared me. I would tell Daddy to shoo the dogs away, try to collect stones on the way but Daddy would just hold my hand and walk. It angered me that Daddy didn't care about me enough to send the dogs away. Strangely, however, the dogs could never dare to harm me as long as I was holding my Dad's hand. And so it is with our heavenly Father too. He stretches out his hands and asks every morning "Coming?". We might not know the destination, but the journey with our Father is always beautiful.

Hardly has a year been welcomed with as much hope and excitement in the recent past, as 2021. With the roller-coaster ride that 2020 was, people couldn't wait for it to end, and with it, was the hope that all the sufferings that the world had witnessed, would end too. As all years do, 2020 also ended with one of the most beautiful and hope-filled seasons of the year- the Christmas season. There was music and joy in the air, some even bravely stepped out of the safe cocoon of their homes to wish family and friends. Soon, the Christmas celebrations spilt into the New Year which perhaps lasted a good week, if not more, for many.

However, not long after that, the wine had run out, the sounds of the carols had faded, the lights were brought down and baby Jesus was packed away. Perhaps for some, even the hope turned to bitter disappointment as we realised 2021 wasn't any different, only an extended version of the year that was...

"and though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore"

With the sudden end of the rush of excitement that we had somehow sustained for a month, we bid adieu to the Christmas season and begrudgingly stepped into the quiet, and easily forgettable 'Ordinary Time of the Year'. Somehow the name itself causes us to think that there is nothing substantial or special about this season! Yet, we couldn't be further from the truth.

Unlike the major seasons of the year- like Advent, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter, The Ordinary Time does not depict a major event in the life of Jesus- but it depicts his daily life- the things he said and did during his time on earth! What could we, as his disciples, need more for our sustenance in *our* daily life? After all isn't much of our life, too, filled with ordinary events- sans birth, death, miracles or epiphanies? And yet, it is in our daily 'ordinary life' that we must learn to find hope and joy!

While the feasts and major seasons of the Liturgical Year provide opportunities for an experience or an encounter, it is the Ordinary Time where the learning, meditating and living out of that experience happens.

If Advent teaches us that God is with us, then it is in the Ordinary Time that we truly discover him as Emmanuel. If the Lenten season draws us closer to the Passion of Jesus, it is the Ordinary Time that helps us 'take up our cross daily', if the Advent season reminds us that Christ will come again, it is the Ordinary season that helps us prepare for his coming.

Bread and water are metaphors of daily living, our prayer is to have the daily bread and to be filled with waters that do not make us thirst any more. Sometimes we do the blunder of living with the expectation of life offering us one major event after another, one high to the next, one intensity to the next. And when Life itself doesn't present events to us- we make them! This is perhaps the greatest misfortune of our times- we struggle to live in the 'quiet now' unless there is excitement in it. However, the scripture reminds us that the bread that satisfies our hunger is *adversity* and the water that satiates our thirst is *affliction*, not in the high but the lows, the very things we do not want. But this is precisely the things that sustain us and make us grow. It is the mundane, the humdrum of ordinary living where life and growth are hidden or to use St. Teresa's famous quip – the God between the pots and pans.

Our spiritual director and Christian Brother of happy memory , Br Dermot Barrett would often state- One of the signs of a spiritually mature person is that they do not experience boredom.

Do we experience boredom? What do we do when there are no feasts or visitations to break the monotony of our community life? What is the bread of adversity and the water of affliction you are facing today?

but your eyes shall see your Teacher.

The Ordinary Time of the Year much like the ordinary time of our life becomes meaningful only when we learn to see God even in the drudgery and banality of it all. When sickness cripples us, and a lot of our time goes in staring helplessly at the ceiling, can we see God in those moments? When age forces us to shed our responsibility and

time seems to crawl, do we see God in our emptiness? When we long to visit our parishioners, long to travel, long to meet the young in the classrooms, but cannot and Life begins to feel empty and meaningless- this is precisely the place where as the Scripture reminds us where we *shall see our Teacher*.

Do we have the eyes to recognize our Teacher in all of this?

Fr Ronald Rolheiser, OMI explains “there is much, much to be said for that seemingly dram routine. The rhythm of the ordinary is, in the end, the deepest wellsprings from which to draw joy and meaning.” He goes on to illustrate how illness can teach us this truth. After having been ill, when we regain our health and energy, nothing seems as sweet and as fulfilling as returning to the ordinary- our routine, our work and everyday life. “Only after it has been taken away and then given back, do we realize that the clean simple appreciation of daily things is the ultimate treasure.”

And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,”

Incidentally, the Ordinary Time is the longest time of the year and is also sometimes known as the Green season. Green of course symbolises Life and it is in this quiet time of preparation that we learn the greatest lessons of life, not so much by celebrating it as by simply living it.

We experience God as a Father stretching out his hand, inviting us to journey with Him as he leads us on the way we need to take. And let us not forget that walking is something slow, deliberate and very ordinary. But as they say it is not the destination at the end of the journey alone which is important but rather the One you are journeying with. If we are holding on to His hands then the ordinary is not so ordinary after all (*even the street dogs become interesting*). The paths may be same, the sights familiar but the *voice* weaves a new story, a fresh perspective and that is what makes it all glow with life. And needless to say we experience the intimacy of Our Father and His guidance in our simple, faithful living out of the Christian life, of our religious committment.

They say the tree grows in silence and anyone watching it every day cannot even trace the growth, but it is in the very ordinariness of this silent growth that it produces flower and in due season fruit. If that be true of a tree would it be not be true of us?

Questions for reflection-

What does ‘ordinariness’ look like to me?

How do I deal with moments of ‘ordinariness’?

How did returning to ‘ordinary life’ after a certain break of an illness /covid/pendamic feel like to you?

How will you make the ‘ordinary days’ not so ordinary, but joyful, special and meaningful?