

Reflection

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Welcome to Ordinary Time!

Yesterday we concluded a lengthy flow of special, *extraordinary* liturgical times: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany and yesterday, the Baptism of Jesus. With his baptism, we have again the dramatic statement of who Jesus is. As he comes up from the water, the Spirit descends and the voice heard states: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

That was yesterday and today we enter what is called liturgically, "ordinary" time ... if there is such a thing. We have watched the Christmas decorations disappear, bit by bit. First in the stores, in homes, then in our corridors. The Chapel is last.

Although today's Gospel account comes from a different evangelist, Mark rather than Matthew, the story is the same as yesterday. In Mark, there is the same proclamation following Jesus' baptism, "This is my beloved son ..."

Then comes today's Gospel reading: John the Baptist has been arrested and it would seem that Jesus goes to Galilee to continue John's mission. The words are familiar: the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.

I recall years back when studying Scripture, we were made aware that Mark frequently speaks of things happening "immediately." On Wednesday, the disciples will tell Jesus *immediately* about Simon's mother-in-law being ill. On Thursday, the leprosy will *immediately* leave a man when Jesus touches him and speaks words of healing. Mark is noted for brevity and moving things forward.

As I read the Gospel for this morning, I found myself thinking of Mark as the "breathless" evangelist. Things seem to happen so quickly. Jesus walks along the seaside and calls Simon and Andrew—they follow. Now three are walking along the shore and Jesus calls James and John—they follow. They leave their boats, their nets, their father and co-workers and follow. This does not strike me as an "ordinary" vocation story; it seems breathless and we know from our own stories that no one's account is really *ordinary*. Each is special, unique, ours.

We know what "ordinary" means in liturgical language. We know that after about eight weeks of this ordinary time, we will again find ourselves in the extraordinary seasons of Lent, Easter and Pentecost. Later, things will be ordinary again. But for now, how do I want to live ordinary time?

In the course of any ordinary day, something special, unique, extraordinary may happen. Such things can delight us or may be so small that they can be entirely missed.

It could be a letter or a phone call or a kind word—or there may come a sense of urgency to visit, write or call someone. There may be a new insight into the Scriptures or the discovery of a good book or film. There may be a new bud on a plant that has shown little sign of life, or a small bird getting the last berries.

Obviously, not everything that turns an apparently ordinary day into an extraordinary one, is desirable. We may get bad news personally. We may be following the disturbing accounts of national and world affairs. These easily grasp our attention and urge us to prayer.

It is in the seemingly ordinary days of ordinary time that we risk missing opportunities for prayer, gratitude or action.

Today's psalm a good response for the small but special events in ordinary time:

How shall I make a return to the Lord
For all the good he has done for me?
The cup of salvation I will take up,
and I will call upon the name of the Lord.
(Ps. 116)

Have you experienced anything special yet this morning, on this first day of ordinary time?