

So, it's "Ordinary Time" again here at Good Shepherd and in the Church everywhere. Advent and Christmas are behind us, and the thrill and quiet specialness of that "Holy Night" have been followed by (for some) the partying of the "First Night." And now it's time to get back to work. Or school. Yes, in many ways, we have to return to our "ordinary" lives.

In the Church, the phrase "ordinary time" can be deceiving. Yes, our Sundays will be "ordinary" in that we are not preparing or celebrating the great and solemn feasts of our Faith: the Incarnation and Nativity, the Passion and Resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. But the Church focuses our attention now on the life of Christ and hopes that by meditating on that, we deepen our faith and grow toward union with Him.

It's true that we lead ordinary lives, most of us. But does that mean "dull," necessarily? Of course not. Jesus led an ordinary life, too, in the years he was growing up with Mary and Joseph and in the many unrecorded moments he spent with His disciples. The Gospels don't tell us much about this private time. Perhaps that's because the authors took it for granted that their readers would assume that that time was mostly the same kind of life that any of us live.

Like Jesus, our lives are full of the day-in-day-out getting up out of bed, setting about our chores, trying to be faithful to our prayer life, sharing meals and down-time with our families.... punctuated by a relatively few special events--such as first Communions, Confirmations, weddings. We read about events such as the finding of Jesus in the temple because it was different from His ordinary everyday life.

The beauty of it, in a way, is that Jesus the Christ took on the ordinariness of our lives, and in doing so, He reminds us that, if we are living our lives faithfully, even though we are not going out and making fantastic accomplishments every day, we are just where God wants us to be.

Now here's a paradox that may be one of the Church's best-kept secrets: if as families we are serious about being disciples of Christ, the very fact of living ordinary lives can become something extraordinary. You see, just as the Church is God's family, the family that puts God at the center is a kind of Church. That's not just Bishop Reed saying that. That's what we believe about the family and the family home. Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the Nations), is a deeply thoughtful exposition of just what Christ's Church is. It also speaks beautifully of the role of the Christian family in the Church:

//BLOCK QUOTE// "From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born. By the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism these are made children of God, thus perpetuating the People of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic Church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care any religious vocation."
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Parents, I want you to realize something: by working to provide for your family's material needs, you are not weighted down in drudgery, but exercising your ministry. Building that solid foundation wherein your family will be assured of its basic needs--food, shelter, clothing and good health--you can continue that ministry by providing for their other needs, which are

not physical or material: the need to be loved and cared for, the need to feel part of a family, the need to be instructed in social skills and manners and relationship, the need grow as an individual personality and develop one's own talents.

Ultimately, this manner of caring for your family is all leading to the most important part of your vocation as a married person and parent: to lead those in your care to heaven!

That may sound scary as a weighty responsibility. But remember: it is something that is worked out in all the little things in your everyday life, from resisting the urge to ignore a crying baby and get a few more winks to ignoring the urge to snap back at a perceived slight from your spouse to overcoming the fear of sitting down and having a heart-to-heart talk with an adolescent child to... any number of opportunities to respond in the way that Jesus would respond. Seen in this light, the "ordinary" life you lead as a family, as a "domestic church," becomes quite extraordinary indeed.

We can't overestimate the importance of the family as the domestic church. What would our Church be like, indeed what would our world be like, if we left all religious instruction and formation of our young to one hour of Mass a week and one hour of Faith formation? Children who attend Catholic schools have more than that, but even there, it is vitally important that all children receive a Christian formation from the very beginning. That's why at Baptism and beyond, the Church speaks of parents as being the first and the best teachers of their children in the ways of faith.

In sum, it is Christian parents who strive to live out their own faith, hope and charity, the teachings of the Gospel, and the imitation of Jesus Christ, who will preach in the most inspiring and lasting way to their children.

Bishop Reed