

I want you all to know that I am trying to make friends outside of FACEBOOK while applying the same principles. So, every day I walk down the street and tell passers-by what I have eaten, how I'm feeling at the moment, what I did the night before, what I will do later and with whom. I'm handing out pictures of my family, me at Harris-Teeter shopping and at home cooking, standing in front of places I have visited, having lunch and doing what anybody and everybody does every day.

I also am listening to their conversations and giving them the 'thumbs up' and telling them I like them. And it works just like FACEBOOK! I already have 4 people following me: 2 police officers, a private investigator and a psychiatrist! I guess after almost 2 years of putting up with me, you aren't all that surprised!

First, some background on the gospel. Scholars say that the term that gets translated into English as 'kingdom' usually means reign or rule or even authority. And of all 4 gospel writers, it's primarily Matthew who connects the life of Jesus to prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. Some of those prophecies had to do with the idea that one day God would create an unchallenged reign 'on earth as it is in heaven,' as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. Even an ancient form of the daily Jewish prayer called the Kaddish says: "May he cause his kingdom to reign."

What both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed was that this reign of God, which was long promised and hoped for, was beginning. The Biblical phrase is 'at hand.' Jesus wanted people to know they could experience God's reign this very day – a reign mercy, love, justice, love and compassion. And did I mention love?!

Clearly, Jesus was stunningly and deeply persuasive with His announcement of this reign. Matthew says Peter and Andrew 'immediately' left their fishing nets and followed Him. Their lives were never the same again. But the truth is that Jesus remains equally stunning and persuasive today – but our culture is so overfilled that we often don't even think of Him. We have to carve out some time to encounter Him. The more we read about Him; the more we encounter His words and ways; the more we pay attention to the lives of those who have chosen to follow Jesus; the more we are open to God's plan for us, the more eagerly we will be to respond to Jesus' call-- to exit the darkness of this world and join Him in the great light that He brings -- and that He *is*. (adapted from PROCLAIM, 26 January 2020, p. 2)

But we need to always remember that the kingdom is AT HAND. Peter and Andrew, James and John were all called in the midst of their DAILY – ORDINARY lives. They hadn't run off to a monastery or retreat house – good as those things are – but they were called in the midst of their daily – ordinary activities. *They were at work!*

Which brings me to my second point. This season we call ORDINARY time. In a marvelous little book entitled THE MUSIC OF SILENCE, David Steindl-Reist highlights how each hour of the day has its own special light and its own particular mood and how we are more attentive to the present moment when we recognize and honor these 'special angels' lurking inside each hour. Every hour of the day and every season of the year have something special to give us, but often times we cannot make ourselves present to meet their gift.

We grasp this more easily for special seasons of the year. Even though we are sometimes unable to be very attentive to a season like Christmas or Easter because of various pressures and distractions, we know that

these seasons are special and that there are ‘angels’ inside them that are asking to be met. We know what it means when someone says: “This year I was just too tired – or pressured – or sick or sad – to get into the Christmas spirit. I just missed Christmas this year!”

But this isn’t just true for special seasons like Christmas and Easter. It’s true too, perhaps especially true, for the season we call Ordinary Time. Each year the church calendar sets aside more than 30 weeks for what it calls ‘Ordinary Time,’ a season within which we are supposed to meet the angels of routine, regularity, family, predictability, work and ordinariness. Like seasons of high feasting, this season too is meant to bring a special richness into our lives.

But it’s easy to miss both the season and its intent. The term ‘Ordinary Time’ comes simply from the fact that the Sundays are counted – we speak of ORDINARY (counting) numbers. The term sounds bland to us, even as we unconsciously long for precisely what it is meant to bring. We have precious little ‘ordinary time’ in our lives. As our lives grow more pressured, more full, and more restless, perhaps more than anything else we long for ‘ordinary time,’ quiet, routine, solitude, and space away from the hectic pace of life. For many of us the very expression, ‘ordinary time,’ draws forth a sigh along with the question: “What’s that? When did I last have ‘ordinary time’ in my life?” For many of us ‘ordinary time’ means mostly hurry and pressure, the rat race, the treadmill of work, carpooling, babysitting grandchildren, caring for elderly parents or a spouse declining in health.

Many things in our lives conspire against ‘ordinary time’; not just the busyness that robs us of leisure, but also the heartaches, the obsessions, the loss of health, or the other interruptions to the ordinary that challenge a sense of normal routine and rhythm and rob us of even the sense of ‘ordinary time.’ But this is the struggle of adulthood. And learning to deal with the ordinary is what can make us mature – even holy – adults.

Many of us probably remember the opposite as being true for us when we were children. I remember as a child I often felt bored. I longed for a distraction, for someone to visit our home, for special seasons to celebrate – birthdays, Christmas, New Year’s, Easter, summer vacation from school. I longed for almost anything to shake up the normal routine of ‘ordinary time.’ But that’s because time moves so slowly for a child. When we’re 7 years old, one year is 1/7 of our life. That’s a long time. In mid-life and beyond, one year is a tiny fraction of our life and so time seems to speed up – so much so in fact that, at a point, we also sometimes begin to long for special occasions to be over with, for visitors to go home, for the tree and decorations to come down, and for distractions to disappear so that we can return to a more ordinary rhythm in our life. Routine might sometimes be boring, but we sleep a lot better when our lives are being visited by the angels of routine and the ordinary.

There has been a lot written in recent years in both secular and religious circles that speaks of the difficulties of being attentive to the present moment, of meeting, as Richard Rohr puts it, ‘the naked now,’ or what David Steindl-Rast calls ‘the angels of the hour.’ The literature varies greatly in content and intent, but it agrees on one point: it’s extremely difficult to be attentive to the present moment, to be truly inside the present. It’s not easy to live inside ‘ordinary time.’

There’s a Chinese expression that functions both as a blessing and a curse: May you live in interesting times! As children, had someone wished that on us it would have meant a blessing; our lives then were replete with routine and the ordinary. However, as adults, for most of us, that wish is probably more curse than blessing: The pressures, heartaches, illnesses, losses, demands, and seemingly perpetual interruptions that beset our lives, though perhaps not normally recognized as ‘interesting times,’ are indeed the antithesis of

routine, regularity, domesticity, predictability, and ordinariness. And they deprive us of 'ordinary time.' (taken from Ronald Rolheiser, posting of 26 May 2013, "Ordinary Time")

Third, how do we DO ordinary time well? We need some prayer – at least 10 minutes every day – which provides us the quiet to see the angels in the hours – to become transformed. To be open to a bigger view, a bigger world, a bigger love. To believe that truly, the kingdom of God is 'at hand.' In my very life. Now.

The world tends to be cynical about most things. We have a hard time believing in an enchanted world, a sacred or benevolent universe, a kingdom of truth, justice, peace and love. How could we if we see only at the surface level? Everywhere we turn, every time we watch any news, we see suffering. We have become skeptical about God's goodness, humanity's possibilities – OUR possibilities, and our planet's very future. We can't help seeing WHAT IS NOT and are often unable to recognize or appreciate WHAT IS. I think we all face this temptation every day. We have to pray and wait for a second gaze, a deeper seeing. This is our daily bread. And it only comes to us in prayer.

Only through prayer do we see that nature is good, humans are good, and God is good. I have never met a loving person who did not also believe in the foundational goodness of people and all of creation. We are beloved sons and daughters of God, and everyone on earth is our brother and sister. We come forth from God, we have the privilege of stewarding this world with God, and we will return to God. Each human being uniquely reflects part of the mystery of God for a while on this earth, before returning home. We need to remember that the divine image is objectively held by ALL people, but we each have to choose to grow in our LIKENESS to that divine image. This is our primary task on this earth.

When we discover and accept that unique part of the divine mystery that is ours to reflect – then we have discovered the kingdom of God AT HAND. All we ever really do is to give back to God what God has already given to us. We must choose it, respect it, and allow it to blossom. The most courageous thing we will ever do is to bear humbly the mystery of our own reality, to trust our divine image and grow in God's likeness. It is simply a matter of becoming who we already are. How ordinary. How special. How like God. Amen. (last section adapted from Rohr, posting of 1/7/2018 "The Second Gaze")