

ORDINARY TIME 2020

If there's one adjective that seems out of place when referring to any time this year, it's "ordinary." The coronavirus pandemic and our response to it has made everything quite extraordinary and we long for a return to normalcy, to the way things were, to boring, routine daily lives without masks or social distancing, or limited gathering sizes. And the Church's calendar gives us Ordinary Time.

Can we observe Ordinary Time when everything seems upended in our lives? Yes, if we consider what this period of the liturgical year is about – living and deepening our faith. It's not a period of big celebrations, like Christmas and Easter are. That's good, because our pandemic world doesn't have much room for celebrations – we even had to forgo most of our usual Lenten and Easter observances this year. But even when our communal religious observances are reduced to livestreamed Masses, we can still take time at home – we have a lot of that! – to read Sacred Scripture, reflect on it, and pray.

Ordinary Time is when we reflect on the teachings of Jesus and how his followers experienced Jesus during his earthly ministry. His purpose was to lead them – and us – to a better understanding of the Kingdom of God and how to make that Kingdom a reality in our world. So even if we're "stuck at home," we can read, reflect, and consider whether there are ways for us to witness to the Gospel, even if we won't be with others in person, but may have a virtual, online presence.

This month, the Sunday Gospels present us with 7 parables from the 13th Chapter of Matthew – two of them long, with explanations, the other 5 quite short. Jesus used the parables to give us not only a more visual image of God's Kingdom, but also more to reflect on. Longer ones, like The Sower and the Seed, or The Weeds in the Wheatfield, contain several instructive elements and cannot be reduced to a one-line lesson or moral. Each aspect of such parables gives us food for thought.

In August, Matthew shows us Jesus working more signs – feeding a crowd with five loaves and two fish, walking on the stormy waters, healing a woman's daughter – and culminates in Peter's confessing that Jesus is the Christ, even though Peter doesn't yet realize what that will mean for all of them. Jesus' question – "Who do you say that I am?" – is one that believers must answer for themselves, even to this day.

The green vestments of this season are symbols of hope – our confident assurance that we will share in God's promise of eternal life. In this pandemic time, anything that gives us confidence about our future is welcome indeed! Our hope should energize us to put into practice Christ's teachings as proclaimed in our Sunday Scriptures.

This Time may be liturgically Ordinary, or in our present situation, quite extraordinary, but in our faith lives, it – like all time – is sacred, for during it, strengthened by the Holy Spirit's gifts to us, we continue our journey towards the fulfillment of God's Kingdom. It is a time for growth and maturation, a time in which the mystery of Christ penetrates ever more deeply into history, until all things are finally caught up in Christ.