

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Our time has come! The Church proclaims the time between the Christmas Season and Lent and the time after Pentecost as ORDINARY TIME. Since most of us see ourselves as just plain old ordinary people, this must be our time. Right?

God's Word for us today presents us with some Biblical characters who saw themselves pretty much the same way that we see ourselves—just plain old ordinary people.

The sacred writer of our first text from Isaiah says in the fourth verse, for some reason eliminated from the reading, "Though I thought I had toiled in vain and for nothing, uselessly spent my strength, yet my reward is with the Lord."

Which of us haven't found ourselves there—working hard day-in-and-day-out, with nothing to show for it—perhaps feeling unappreciated by our families; not recognized for the effort we put into our jobs; bills piling up and the money's not there to keep up with them. Like our sacred author, there are times when we feel we've toiled in vain and for nothing, uselessly spent our strength."

Then, there's Paul in our second reading, now recognizing that he is called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God," speaking to the church, but, who for so long had not only seen himself as a great upholder of the law as a Pharisee, but had made himself the enemy of Christ and a persecutor of his followers. It took him almost a lifetime to figure out who he really was, and then, only by the intervention of God Himself. How many of us "ordinary people" struggle with who we really are and what we should be about with our lives?

Then, there's John the Baptist who acknowledges that he was preparing for and proclaiming a person whom he didn't even know. How many of us "ordinary people" who call ourselves Christian Catholics aren't even sure what we believe or what the Church teaches?

Then, there is Jesus Himself, who had spent the first thirty years of his life, living the ordinary life of a Gallilean carpenter, coming to be baptized by John. Then, according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, led by the Spirit into the desert where he was tempted in all the ways we ordinary people are tempted—by pleasure, fortune, and fame.

Finally, though not a Biblical figure, there is the living example of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who had lived a not quite ordinary life as a Jesuit priest, then Bishop, and finally Cardinal Archbishop, who had submitted his letter of resignation as required when he turned 75, who now finds himself in the extraordinary position of Supreme Pontiff. Which of us ordinary people, as we age, don't see our lives winding down, expecting we have nothing else to contribute?

What are we “ordinary people” to make of these examples of “ordinary people” who wound up doing extraordinary things and living extraordinary lives. I believe each of them prayed somewhere along the way of their lives what we prayed today in our Responsorial Psalm 40: “Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.”

I encourage each of you “ordinary people” to speak to God from your heart, “Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.” Wait, in silence, for God’s response. Is there restlessness now in your life, a sense that you should be moving on to something else, or trying something new? Is there an anxiety in your life through which the Lord might be speaking to you? Try listening to your gut. By that, I mean, read your feelings carefully because God might be communicating to you through them. Because they are feelings, you cannot escape them. They are there. They just might be saying something to you that God wants you to hear. Don’t turn them off. Don’t shut down this communications system. Listen to God and have the courage to respond.

“Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.” Don’t be surprised if God makes his will known to you through your inclinations toward something new and positive. Let yourself think, even say out loud, “I feel I should be doing this or that; I feel the time is right.” This feeling may be from God. This feeling may be reinforced by other words and phrases that you will find in other psalms or prayers. You can turn to your feelings for confirmation of the new direction you might now be inspired to take. Take it, and see how it feels. If the feeling is one of peace and sense of “that’s right for me,” you’ll know that your will is aligned with the will of God for you.

If you do this, if each of us do it, I believe that, like those who have gone before us, our lives will become anything but ordinary, because we will find ourselves doing extraordinary things for God.