

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

February 4, 2011 at 10:11am

Ordinary time allows us to celebrate the great mysteries

by Eugene Cullen Kennedy

Bulletins from the Human Side

When the Church speaks of *Ordinary Time*, it is really talking about *our* time -- the season set aside for us ordinary people who have bit parts in the true Reality Show of the human condition.

Ordinary time matches our experience because it comes in plain wrapping -- in-between the big liturgical seasons of Advent's violet hued lead up to the snow capped evergreen of Christmas, and Lent's purple robed prelude to the dogwood of Easter.

That's what the Reality Show of the human condition is like for us because although the ancient Oriental proverb says that we are blessed to live in interesting times, most of us really don't. We dwell in that period that stretches between the big events of existence like baptisms, graduations, weddings, or long planned trips.

These are true celebrations of a deeper truth that everything that really makes a difference in life occurs on days that come and go and do not seem to make any difference at all. People go to church not to find religion there, but to bring the religion of their ordinary days to have it symbolized sacramentally so that, refreshed and strengthened, they can return to the ordinary time of their everyday lives.

Ordinary time is a recognition and symbolization of the sameness of our days. Ordinary time understands that for most of us the feeling tone of life is much like that in airports in which we also spend a kind of bland, featureless time in-between landing and taking off again.

The hints and evidence of the great mystery of salvation are found here as well. Just inspect the passing crowds. They seem to be the same people we were with last week, as the terminal seats seem the same as those on which we might be waiting for flights either to Limbo or to the Last Judgment that, like so many flights and plans of life, are routinely delayed.

Even if we take off, we may end up in a holding pattern -- another symbol of the seemingly endless mythic journey that is remembered, as are we who will never be famous for even fifteen minutes, by Ordinary Time.

If we look up from reading that crumpled newspaper that some other traveler left behind, we will see what, beneath the endless routine of airport activity, the greatest of human experiences and religious mysteries is being celebrated all around us.

For here people are waiting for their children or grandchildren or one safely back from the wars and an aura of loving expectation spreads across their faces, allowing us to see into the mystery of homecoming and welcoming that is both ordinary and extraordinary at the same time.

Here, too, people are seeing loved ones off on sometimes uncertain or lengthy journeys. And the plangent mystery of separation, the Eucharist of Ordinary Time, is being celebrated -- making the chrome and plastic airport soar like the Cathedral at Chartres with the real religious mystery.

Ordinary Time is indeed *our* time and, if we look at our own apparently in-between days, we may find that we are also celebrating the great Mysteries.

Woody Allen is famous for saying that we get credit just for showing up, but, on any of these nameless days, it is likely that quite unselfconsciously you are carrying out your obligations, doing your work as well as you can, keeping your word, and, in the simplest ways, as through an understanding word or an embrace, being true to yourselves as you love somebody else.

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These days may seem flat but so is an altar and the same mystery is celebrated on both.

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