

Jan. 29, 2017

Happy Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

I'd like to wish you all a very happy and joyous Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

As many of you recall from your PSR studies, the first recorded celebration of the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time was in the Sixth Century AD, when villagers would gather for Mass, after which they would meet in the town square to begin a day of festivities.

First was the much anticipated "Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time Meat Loaf Hunt," when children would dash about the square, looking under bushes and atop tree branches for slices of meat loaf hidden by the town elders.

Then came the "Contemplating of the Sandals". (The incident was incorrectly described in Hans Melman's "Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time; a History" as a contest resulting in the awarding of a small hog to the villager with the most creatively decorated sandals. Scientific advancement has since provided evidence that the villagers instead sat in a large circle singing sandal-related songs.)

The day continued with the traditional lunch of mayonnaise pie, after which the mayor would offer a lengthy presentation on ordinary, everyday things that had occurred over the past four weeks, such as Mrs. Turner going to the market, elder Winston Philpot trimming his beard, or little Patrick Reinhart trying to get his mother's attention.

This was followed by the traditional "waking of the audience".

Then came the naming of the "Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Queen", who would parade along the main street with a note in her pocket which read, "Queen of the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time," just in case anyone asked why she was parading up and down the street.

The afternoon would conclude with the "throwing of the ceremonial twig". If the bishop's mastiff retrieved the twig, the village would have four more weeks of Ordinary Time. If not, Lent would start one week earlier, during which time nobody was allowed to chuckle.

If the mastiff were to simply lay down and chew on the twig, the eldest in attendance would receive a hair cut.

Records indicate that the traditional Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time gathering was celebrated for approximately 175 years before disappearing into history. Yet, some traditions continue to this day.

For example, each year on the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the people of Echternach, Luxembourg gather in the church hall after Mass where they enjoy rhubarb pie with a dollop of Mayonnaise topping, rather than the usual Whipped Cream. (This event is followed by the "Distribution of the Tums" by a specially chosen child between the ages of 5 and 9.)

Also, you've undoubtedly at some point heard a young boy in the park shouting, "Ordinary Time, boy! Ordinary Time!" as he urges his dog to retrieve a thrown stick.

Although we no longer celebrate Ordinary Time as our ancestors did, its relevance isn't lost.

It's during Ordinary Time (between Pentecost and Advent, and the Epiphany and Lent) that we can choose to focus on *all* the great gifts of our Lord--not only the joy of His birth, not only the majestic gift of his ultimate sacrifice, but the culmination of all the wonders of His existence.

Along those lines, yet not really along those lines at all, is an idea I came up with that I recently submitted to the U.S. Department of Miscellany (Titles Division, Sector 12):

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am the editor of the *Southwest Kansas Catholic* newspaper, the Catholic newspaper of Southwest Kansas. I would like to offer a suggestion of which I have given much thought. I would like to suggest that the federal government adopt a system of classification regarding the mental state of the country: "normal time" and "abnormal time". Special announcements would break into television, radio, social media and the newest communication craze among youth, Morse Code.

As the United States takes the first few steps into a new chapter, American citizens could benefit greatly from receiving notice when we have entered an "abnormal time". For example, should there be an over-abundance of hypocrisy, sad irony,

misdirection, or outright prevarication at the highest levels, it would be nice to have official notice. Otherwise, as has been proven through history, such acts may go entirely unnoticed and/or unopposed until the results are at direct opposition with the culture of life we so value.

We Catholics recognize and celebrate life from conception until natural death. Bullets, bombs and electric chairs, by the way, are not found in nature. We see Christ in *each and every person* on earth, regardless of gender, race, religion or ability. We would no sooner devalue another human than we would devalue Christ, because to devalue one is to devalue the other.