

# Gift In the Ordinary Days

By M. Jo Berning

I attended a small spiritual group meeting called the "5th Week," a monthly follow up to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. The topic for discussion that night was "The Ordinary Days in Life" and the scripture readings and questions that accompanied the lesson were based upon those things that happened in the everyday life of Jesus.

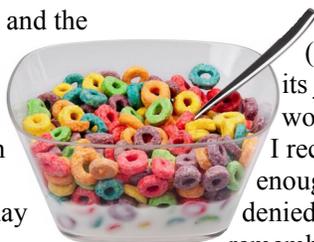
As graduates of the Exercises know, any phrases, readings, or questions that strongly repel or attract one's attention generally indicate that they should be paid some attention to. As I made my way through the readings, I found myself continually returning to one of the discussion questions asking which of my daily activities I consider "ordinary" and finally gave in and decided to tackle it, making in my journal a list of the tasks that I perform in an ordinary day. At first I thought "big deal, there's nothing significant or special about any of these things." But as a good student of Ignatius, I read the items again, one at a time.

**Wake up.** We all do that every day, don't we? It occurred to me that not everyone who went to bed the night before woke up, that some will never see another day. But I did.

**Shower.** Most of us upon waking in the morning head straight for the shower; to cleanse ourselves, to wake ourselves from the slumber of the night before. My shower is a mere 10 steps from my bed, and I rarely recall an occasion when I didn't have hot water to get me going in the morning. But suddenly I

thought about those people who don't have running water available to them, some barely have water from a well or river to drink from, let alone shower. But I do.

**Eat breakfast.** I don't always eat breakfast, or sometimes (most of the time, actually) its just a donut on the way to work. Not once in my life do I recall not having access to enough food, or having been denied breakfast. Then I remembered the stories of nations



and people who live with famine everyday of their lives, where not only do they not get breakfast, but some aren't even lucky enough to receive one meal a day, let alone three. But I am.

**Go to work.** I find myself feeling that I have to drag myself to work some days, that wouldn't it be nice to win the lottery and never have to work again. And then it occurred to me that there are many people, some who live down the block from me, some in another part of the country, and many all over the world who would kill to have a job like mine: regular hours, paying a good living wage, providing benefits like health care and retirement. My job may not always be satisfying and it may not make me wealthy, but I have one.

**Work all day.** I have a regular place to be during my day, in a safe, clean environment with people I like, mostly allowing me to do something I enjoy. Many people can't say that, and suffer the indignity of not being able to support themselves or their families, as much as they try. But not me, I'm lucky and have a job.

**Come home.** After a day at work, I

can come home to a place all my own. It's a modest little 2 bedroom, 2 bath condo that is nothing fancy, but it's warm, it's comfortable and after 28 more years of mortgage payments it will be all mine. Nothing special about it, right? There are people everywhere who live on the streets, under highway overpasses, in cars with their families, and some who have nowhere to call home. Many people in this state will never be able to afford their own home. But for now anyway, I can.

**Watch TV.** I have the luxury of being able to come home from a long day at work, sit down and turn on the TV and be entertained, if you can call it that. Then I thought about the many people who have no electricity, let alone a 27" television and VCR, who struggle every waking hour just to survive, let alone be entertained. Is that ordinary?



**Go to bed.** Everyone goes to bed at night, don't they? Don't they? I have a nice warm bed to crawl into, a mere 10 steps from my shower. Doesn't everyone?

Maybe it was the recent emphasis on the meaning of Stewardship that we debated in our pastoral council meetings, in learning what it means to live as Jesus teaches us, the idea that "All is Gift." Maybe it was God speaking to me through the exercise, or maybe all those forces working together, but I was aware for the first time in my life that all of those everyday—ordinary, if you will—things that I take for granted are really not that ordinary, that I am blessed with many things. Everything that I have is a gift from God, everything that I am is a gift waiting to be given to others. What will I do with my gifts next?

