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## Ordinary and Extraordinary

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## Ordinary and Extraordinary

As colors, black and white are complete opposites. But “ordinary” and “extraordinary,” although they surely express different meanings, can, through the exercise of a bit of reflection, help us to recognize the unity between our decisions and their consequences.

We might think that much of our environment, our work, and our lives are quite ordinary because we are so accustomed to our routines; the external, physical realities probably seem to us and to most people around us as unremarkable. If we look within, at other realities which we still might take for granted – for example, trust, faithfulness, responsibility, integrity, and love – these are extraordinary. Whether or not we operate habitually from faith, hope, or love, habitual exercise of values such as these is anything but ordinary.

By way of contrast, think of some persons or groups who have become quite famous (perhaps “infamous” is a better word) because their external deeds are deemed legal and are so common in our culture as to be considered ordinary, but whose attitudes of arrogance, selfishness, and hostility towards others are best identified as extraordinary. We want good-will to be the norm among us, and fairness to be so common as to appear ordinary. But we see around us enough absence of kindness and caring as to reveal how extraordinary it is to live lives that are consistently oriented by generosity and love.

Many people whom we call “good” seem, in their conduct, extraordinary in their ordinariness. We find them uniformly dependable and trustworthy, so that we rely on them without question, and perhaps emulate them in our own manner of living. Little expressions in words and deeds that are welcome by all recipients might be ordinary in the sense of being habitual and seemingly effortless, but extraordinary in the interior qualities out of which they apparently flow. We do not become caring persons automatically. We develop our preferences for helping rather than hindering and for being concerned about others at least as much as we are for ourselves, only by making conscious choices, one after another, each one requiring of us adherence to ideals. When we consider the consequences of our many small decisions we can see how extraordinary our ordinary lives can be.

Because we are created in love, and continually given inspirations to act out of love, caring behavior would seem to be the norm, and negative conduct should be extraordinary. But our human freedom to turn to self as “number one,” even to the harm of others, is apparent in all levels of society. No one, certainly not God, forces us to be concerned for the well-being of others. We

might have to learn from experience, sometimes through suffering at the hands of others, and sometimes through the pain of a truly guilty conscience, that our ordinary mode of living is far better when we "bear one another's burdens" than when we either cause pain in others or ignore them in their needs. We have the capacity to bless the world around us by all the ordinary things that we say and do

How extraordinary are the results of our ordinary choices.