

Conversation and a cup of tea

She greets me with a smile and offers me some hot tea. “No, thank you,” I say. “I’m fine for now.”

As we sit down, she eases herself into her chair, pushes her walker aside. Right away, she wants to hear all the latest news. How are the children doing in school? How is my family? How are things at work?

I chatter on and on, and she takes it all in, delighted at all the right places, concerned at all the right places, reassuring and praising and complimentary at all the right places. It’s just an ordinary conversation.

But a few minutes later, she asks one of the same questions, and I repeat my answer. Then after a while we go through it all again. Every time she is just as curious, just as interested. With her short-term memory slipping, she just can’t remember what we have already discussed. The information is brand new every time.

When I mention my sister’s baby girl, her eyes light up with pleasure. A few minutes later when she asks about my sister, she is surprised – and ecstatic – to hear that she has a baby. Seeing her joy each time is wonderful because it’s so like her to be overjoyed to hear baby news. It’s also painful. She has always been the person who could keep track of everyone she knows and all their highs and lows.

Every few minutes she offers me a cup of tea, and I decline. I’m trying not to be too much trouble for her as she leans on her walker and finds her way around her kitchen.

Being with an older loved one and thinking of the decades she has lived, I think of how aging is both a gift and a challenge. We are blessed to be given time on earth.

Somehow we find the strength within ourselves and from our companions to continue on the journey, and God accompanies us along the way. Who knows what time we will have? I try to remember to be so grateful for every day - and I am.

As our conversation continues, I start seeking out easier topics - topics that don't change. We marvel at the birds and butterflies that visit her yard, the beauty of the world around us, the pleasure of children, how lovely summer weather can be, how quickly time passes, and how blessed we are.

It's counter-intuitive to me to pick timeless topics, rather than touching on the here and now, but this conversation is thriving because we are discussing topics that haven't changed in 20 years. There's a certain peace to coming back to the same comfortable, familiar subjects again and again.

As we talk, I realize we are settling into a rhythm. We go back and forth over the same ground, and I try to push aside the sadness and the frustration and let the repetition bring comfort. We aren't trying to find a solution. We aren't traveling to any grand conclusion. We're simply letting our words swirl around us, connecting us in companionship.

Our conversation has the feeling of a prayer we know by heart. During a rosary, we say the same words and phrases and meditate on the same set of mysteries, but it's the sameness that makes the prayer so peaceful and intimate - and allows us the space to connect with the Blessed Mother, and with her Son.

In a world where we crave everything that is different and new and exciting and unique, there is much to be said for embracing things that never change. Perhaps that repetition keeps us steady in the times of confusion.

At a lull in the conversation, she offers me - yet again - a cup of tea. And in a sudden flash, I realize that I must accept her offer. So I say, "If it's not too much trouble, I

would love a cup of tea.”

Her face lights up and she heads to the stove to fill the kettle. And we begin our conversation all over again.