Columns
Spirituality



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by Laura Hammel

Contributor

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One of the most demanding questions that I face in my adult life is choosing how to respond to the challenges life brings me. Especially as we approach this season of Lent, I find myself asking the age-old question, "Where am I in my life?"

We all know that change is a constant in life. From our earliest days, we meet the challenge of change. We take our first steps, we grow older, we may get a driver's license, and on our 18th birthday we celebrate our "adult" status by registering to vote.

Now that I am older, I face different kinds of changes. This past year was emotionally demanding for me. Five important people in my life died. My faith sustains me in the belief that they are with God. However, my life is so much less now that they are not here with me. We have all been through these searing experiences and have come through them changed people.

After losing these five friends, I recognize how important relationships are. One of my friends died very young. I did not expect her early death. It was a chilling experience. Her passing has changed me in ways that I could never have foreseen. The biggest change was recognizing how much she and my other friends meant to me. Sad to say, I could have been a better friend.

It takes time and experience to find and see the values and gifts in life. Friendships are one of these gifts, a blessing hidden in plain sight.

One of my friends who died was so caring. I trusted her so much that I was able to tell her one of the worst things that I had done in my life. She didn't say anything to change my deep grief over this thing I had done; however, her listening to me relieved me of my pain. I had been carrying this secret deep in my soul.

After I was able to tell her, I felt that I was truly known for the first time. I was known with my faults as well as my gifts. She gave me one of the most precious gifts in a relationship, the gift to be who I am, the gift to be known. The memory of her care and understanding will always be with me like a treasured jewel.

Another experience of friendship that I have learned to value is honesty. I have done many ridiculous things in life. These friends were willing to tell me the truth. Sometimes the truths were hard for me to hear, and I did not always choose the changes they suggested. Gradually, I came to understand that they had my best

interest at heart.

Friendships can be demanding, and honesty in a relationship is hard-won. One friend of mine had a much stronger personality than mine. When we first met, I struggled to find my voice so that I could respond to her confident statements. When we disagreed, she would always "win" our arguments. I felt hurt and was unable to respond.

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However, over time I developed my voice. I learned to speak up — which was necessary if we were to continue our relationship. Her strong personality turned out to be a blessing for me. It helped me to develop my own voice. I learned to defend my point of view in a discussion. Being able to express myself was essential for a healthy friendship.

These friends of mine were gifts hidden in plain sight. Now that they are gone, I still need their help, even though they are not in plain sight. I feel their nudges and promptings even now. I see these friends as my supporting angels who will guide me to where they have already traveled.

More than events like graduations or rites of passage, relationships have changed me and made me who I am. For their honesty and trust, I am deeply grateful.

Lent is a season of springtime, a time to turn over the soil and let new light and air in to help this year's growth and change. We know how the season goes. Holy Week comes and we once again experience death and grieving. Then something happens called new life.

There is no question that something new is growing in me this year. I feel so grateful for having known these friends. Without them, I would be very different.

These experiences of human love are for me a taste of the promise of eternal life. I understand more completely how life is good and constantly changing, with or without our consent. Our cherished companions are always with us. They are happy memories inscribed on our heart and blessings hidden from me in plain sight.

[Laura Hammel is a member of the Sisters of St. Clare, a Poor Clare community in Saginaw, Michigan. In addition to the prayer ministry in her diocese, she has

developed and maintained a website introducing different prayer forms useful at certain times of the year. These include an Advent calendar, contemplation using Stations of the Cross, a Pentecost Novena and Mysteries of the Rosary.]