Columns
Spirituality



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Baptism is a process. There is a special time for its ritual at the heart of the community. But the awareness of our deep identity may only come slowly and spirally.

It might come only slowly because it is too profound to be absorbed fast. Like a balm, it slides along the skin of our soul, permeating each pore, hydrating the dryness of our inner self, which is tired of seeking outside what abides within.

It is the water that opens our soul to the *Ruah*, the water that cleanses the dust from our eye, so we are able to comprehend, bit by bit — spirally — who we are.

Spirally, yes, since like any relationship it has its different seasons: A day of winter may be followed by an experience of spring for a period of time, then back to winter. It depends on our personal and social reality, and on the emotions and life changes we experience — our personal and social pain, injustice, joy or renewal.

To enter into the spiral dynamism of the *Ruah* is a safe refuge. She understands processes and spirals, and if we remain quiet, she does her work.

It is in this movement of the Spirit in and through us that baptism, received ritually once, acquires its meaning again: "You are my child, in you I find pleasure." And the wheel of life starts to roll again, leaving the anger and the pain and the loneliness behind, and offering the water, the meaning and love needed, like air to breathe anew.

One of those deep breaths in the *Ruah*, filled with new fresh air for me, happened a few years ago in Wicklow, Ireland. A small community of Dominican sisters offers an integrated sabbatical program on "the New Story." It is a 10-week immersion in the study and the experience of the beginning of every kind of life in its different forms; of inner and outer life, through the lenses of present-day science and diverse spiritualties, especially Celtic spirituality.

The place is called An Tairseach, which means "Threshold" in Gaelic. It houses the ecology and spirituality center whose mission is "to grow in awareness that the Earth is our own home and home to all living beings."

And it happened that the experience, generously provided by a grant from the sisters, was a threshold of a new baptism for me.

I was getting near the end of my rope with the patriarchal-clerical model, whose presence is still dominating our church in Spain. I needed to create a space within me and around me that was safe from its tentacles!

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And while it is true that the power comes from within, but it helps if you can get immersed for a while in the deep, warm waters of baptism. Those sisters and their program were for me the hands, mind and heart of the *Ruah*.

I did experience personally and in community an entrance, through their threshold, into a deeper comprehension of everything: science, mysticism, myself.

Now, a few years later, I experience that the gifts of "becoming" — priests, prophets and shepherds — given to us in our baptism have acquired a new meaning. I see my priesthood as a profound call to consecrate everything my hands and my mind and heart touch: the planet within the universe in its multiple facets; the air, the water, the earth itself, the mountains, the forests, the animals; and foremost the suffering people — especially those in deep search of meaning — which is the kind of poverty and injustice I am called to address.

To be prophets is an amazing challenge for today's people of all ages. We are at a threshold as a civilization, and a new paradigm is emerging. We are the midwife of new ways of living, therefore of thinking and worshiping and relating with everybody and with everything.

This is not new to anyone anymore; what is new to me is that after having been touched by a new comprehension, my call to be prophetic takes a turn in the spiral of life, a turn from which there is no return. And that means a change of attitude about who I am and what I do with my mind's energy, my creativity, my religious vows.

How much better I understand now the "listening" to the cry of the Earth, far and beyond the obedience to somebody else's vision of ...

Or how the sharing of everything I am and I have is acquiring a dimension that I never suspected I would experience: to collaborate with the planet, far and beyond the repressive guilt of never being poor enough.

The same wonderful vertigo happens with my invitation to unconditional love — not to abstain from love, but rather to participate in a life of giving love, creativity, compassion and passion to care and heal the Earth and its inhabitants.

Yes, I like to see the unfolding of the experiences that this new baptism has ignited in me. And, I dare to say, that as a consequence, many people have been touched by it.

Thank you, sisters, caretakers of the Earth, for your new ways of consecrating life, of being prophets and excellent shepherds whose pastures are as green as those in Ireland.

[Maria Magdalena Bennasar (Magda) of the Sisters for Christian Community is from Spain. She has worked in teaching, conducting retreats and workshops, creating community and training lay leaders in Australia, the U.S. and Spain. Currently, she is working on eco-spirituality and searching for a space to create a center or collaborate with others.]