Columns
Spirituality
Religious Life



Once we confront our fear and accept that we are miracles, our lives are forever changed. And then our work truly begins. (Unsplash Ian Kiragu)



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A religious sister is first a woman, a female, a sister and of course a mother with all the innate qualities associated with each of these roles, which include being careful, aesthetic or beauty conscious, loving, protective and considerate. When she was created (Genesis 2:21-24) by God she was blessed and given a vocation. In her response to the divine call as a religious sister, she takes with her all the feminine characteristics of a woman. I have been thinking about the relevance of our call as religious sisters in a fast-changing world.

The religious sister has in her the divine — the miracle in her. In other words, "We are miracles!"

Think about it. We have within us the divine, and most of us believe in a higher power, a spirit or a force outside of ourselves. However, what is striking is that no matter what we call this power — God, Yahweh, Jehovah, Christ, Allah, Buddha, Yemoja (a Yoruba goddess), believers in every religion profess to be claimed and loved by this power. Every master — Jesus, Buddha, Krishna — has had the same message: "What I am you are. What I can do, you can do. These things and much more shall you also do." Neale Donald Walsch talks about this in his book *Conversations with God* (which is quoted in *Prime Time*).

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I ask each religious sister: Are you a miracle yourself? Do you feel so from within? I would define a miracle as an extraordinary occurrence that cannot be explained by science, and therefore is attributed to God. As I mentioned at the beginning, the fact that each sister and each human being has God within him or her, it then follows that each one of us has something special, something unique within. It is the responsibility of the individual to discover this with the help of existing systems like the family, church education or the government. What is unique in you as a sister, called from among many?

Marilyn Hughes Gaston and Gayle K. Porter (Prime Time) wondered why we ignore our miraculous bodies. But I echo, why do we allow others to demean us? Why do we fail to honor and affirm the divine within us? Each of us could probably provide an

explanation, from the sublime to the ridiculous. Or have we allowed the negative thinking that surrounds our environment to cloud our own thinking, making it difficult to see beyond the challenges that we encounter?

I have thought of possibilities ranging from home through the education system, to corporations where — as each individual grows — he or she is met with comments like, "You are actually good for nothing" or, "You cannot make it in life — you have to be like so and so." I think such negativity weighs heavily upon our personalities to the extent that they destroy our growth and development. This could be a reason why we do not consistently honor and care for the miracle of our lives.

Marianne Williamson's book *A Return to Love* (often misattributed to Nelson Mandela) offers a valuable explanation for change:

> Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. As we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

For people that choose to embrace change, the COVID-19 era has been a milestone of self-discovery that has affected them immeasurably. Some examples: During this pandemic period, a sister-friend of mine — who in the past had no interest in catering — has found a new passion in the production of everything made out of wheat, from cakes to meat pie. A neighbor has begun to supply table mats made of beads — which she learned how to do and made during COVID-19. Personally, I have learned to prepare multi-purpose soap for household use and even the ingredients that make this soap, among other household items.

All these talents and many others lay hidden in our hearts and mind until COVID pushed each of us, mercilessly challenging us to think outside the box — or better still, to think inside the box. Each person seemed to ask "What else can I do besides the normal work?" I may not know the plans of each and every person after COVID-19, but for me the new normal is to keep going forward and integrate this fact of

embracing change into my life.

Once we confront our fear and accept that we are miracles, our lives are forever changed. And then our work truly begins. As Dr. M. Scott Peck wrote in *The Road Less Travelled*, "If we seriously listen to this 'God within us,' we usually find ourselves being urged to take the more difficult path, the path of more effort rather than less."

If we really believe we are miracles and contain the divine within us, there is no way that we could discriminate against another on account of color, class, background or level of education. It would be like discriminating against God Himself. The God within us works the miracle of loving the other sister or brother, in spite of all odds.

If we truly believed that we participate in the divine nature of God, we could not ignore or minimize the time we spend in personal prayer to build a personal relationship with God. Also, because of this presence in us, we become more disposed to obey, accept and own the constitutional rules of our individual religious institutes and the liturgical hours that once attracted us to the religious life; all these become more meaningful to us and very productive in our lives. This results in an authentic witness of Jesus in society. These positive attitudes in us can help us to regain a healthy spirituality, so that the divine light of Christ could shine through.

I have always loved the quote attributed to Hans Urs von Balthasar: "What you are is God's gift to you; what you will become is your gift to God." At the beginning of this column, I did say that each of us has the divine within us. What would the world be like if every person experienced the divine within, celebrated this experience, and shared the same with others?