Columns
Coronavirus
Spirituality



A woman wearing a protective face mask holds a candle in her home while watching Easter Mass via livestream near Hanoi, Vietnam, April 12, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. (CNS/Reuters/Kham)



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April 4, 2021

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I found myself a couple of weeks ago in a small group of women religious reflecting on the gift of religious life to our world at this time. "We believe in the paschal mystery," I said. "That is our gift to this time. We believe in transformation, life from death and the presence of a loving God," I shared — and felt deeply what I was saying.

I do not know where that statement came from. I was surprised I said it. However, I do know that I believe it deep down in my heart and have felt it in prayer this past year. A year fraught with fear, death, isolation, loss and feelings too numerous to name. I am sure you have some other feelings you can add. As a global pandemic was gripping our world last year, we were in the midst of Lent. A Lent that has lasted much longer than 40 days.

During this past year, I have felt a continued connection with the Agony in the Garden — "if this cup could just pass" — and the deafening silence of Holy Saturday, waiting for word to spring forth that Jesus had risen. Even though our liturgical calendar celebrated Easter last April, there was little joy and very somber alleluias as we waded through the height of an unknown disease and a day that was a date on the calendar but far from lived reality. A day that saw some of our highest death tolls in New York City.

What does it mean that I believe in the paschal mystery? How can my belief be a witness to hope, transformation and life in our world?

I have walked this year humbly and reverently. I have listened to the struggles of many and offered support and life. Those of us in health care who still minister to this day — and trust me, there are many who have left the field for valid, self-preserving reasons — and all who ministered in health care during this past year are forever changed.

We witness to the Agony in the Garden and the waiting of Holy Saturday. We witness to God's presence in the isolation and despair.

We have watched the disparity in health care ravage our patients, who continue to experience racial injustice and fight economic hardship, and we were grateful when they were often protected by holds on evictions and extended unemployment benefits. We have agonized with those who worry about how to provide food and

housing for their families and are suffering physically because of choices they have made.

We have listened to their stories of death and loss with tender hearts. Each death is another death that hits us at our core.

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During this year, many have stayed at the tomb. Many have prayed long and hard hours in the loss of life and have waited in anticipation of new life promised. And so, I reflect, what is the transformation that is offered through me in my lived reality of paschal mystery?

I am a woman of faith who has felt profoundly the love of God during this past year — a love that has called me to new life. A love that has given me the strength to stay, a strength that has allowed me to help others see their goodness through this last year and stand with them in their despair. A faith that has given me the courage to call out injustice and to act with and for those who are victims. A faith that has allowed me to admit my own sinfulness and how it affects others. A faith that allows me to believe that there is more than what we are living in this present moment. It is our responsibility to do the work we need to do so that the Gospel values of hope, freedom, justice are evident in the way I live.

Our faith tells us that there is Easter Sunday. Jesus rose. Jesus defied death and injustice. I know I will sing alleluia this year. Not with the frivolity and joy of years past but I will sing alleluia (I imagine with tears streaming down my face). I will sing alleluia with great humility. Jesus lives! I have survived this year and witnessed to life from death. I witness to Jesus among us.

And I, like Mary at the tomb, am missioned to go to my sisters and brother and tell them the news of the Resurrection. I have seen the Lord! In so many profound ways this past year, I have seen the Lord! I must tell them of God's faithfulness and victory over death. I am called to witness to life. Life that is still unfolding in new and unforeseen ways. After all, isn't that what transformation is all about?

We each have our own story of paschal mystery in our life. As women, lay and vowed religious, let us identify it, name it, own it, reflect on the transformation offered and then share it with others. That is paschal mystery. That is the gift we

have to offer each other, our church, and our world. In the transformation of paschal mystery, we can humbly say, "Alleluia."