Columns
Religious Life



Detail of the table in the reception area of the Santa María del Camino Parish hostel in Carrión de los Condes, Palencia, Spain. (Photo: Amaya Hernández)



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Starting over is not easy. Looking back at the road I have traveled, I clearly perceive that starting over is a constant in life.

When I felt God's call, I recognized myself in Nicodemus listening to Jesus speak about being "born again." I understood that I had to enter into a much deeper transformation, one that did not depend on my efforts, merits, will, or desires, but on God's grace that desired to act in my fragile and inconsistent nature, perhaps without being perceived, but always respecting my freedom.

Moving from a blind or hidden faith to a living faith was how I would define the first beginning for me. Something new was happening inside of me, like a seed that was growing slowly, invisible to human eyes. My response was to allow it to take root and to accept in myself the adventure of giving birth to a new life that did not belong to me.

> "Starting over is always possible. ... Where God is, there is home, brothers, sisters, a task to do, and a mission to carry out in his name": Sr. Amaya Hernández
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Through the Word of God, which soon became a "lamp to my feet," I heard the call to enter religious life and experienced in my own person what St. Paul says of himself: "The old things have passed away; behold, the new things have come," because "whoever is in Christ is a new creation.”

My life suddenly felt guided, especially on the inside. I had a direction; I would no longer be motivated by my own instincts. Something stronger than myself was moving me to make unexpected decisions in my journey. A light opened my eyes to an unfamiliar reality. It was a slow path in which circumstances and particular people converged; and in which I heard a clear invitation, a personal and nontransferable call.

It was the cry of a faith that demanded to be lived and professed, because it touched the deepest fibers of my being, asking me where true joy was, and requiring and provoking adherence.

It was a faith that needed to be celebrated, because the relational dimension took on a new meaning for me. I understood that no one comes to this life to live in isolation, totally alone, indifferent, or without responsibility for others, but to reach the same destination together. In the diversity and multiplicity of origins and experiences, I learned that we are all called by heaven itself, to travel this path on earth together until we arrive at our destination.

It was a faith that could not exist without prayer, because it was evident to me that there is a sacred bond with something that cannot be grasped nor understood. That something gives meaning to my limited and precarious existence, unites my origin to my destiny, and has a name: God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was he who invited me to enter the rebirth of baptism, to live as a daughter of God, a sister to all human beings on earth, created and destined to live with him forever, and he called me by name.

This new beginning emerged from a seal engraved on my heart that I discovered at a particular moment, and that redirected my existence, mysteriously marking a path. On this path I received a new name, a belonging, an identity, and a mission.

> "During my first years in religious life, I always heard the same voice calling me to keep walking, because when I thought I had reached a goal, I realized that the horizon was always further ahead": Sr. Amaya Hernández
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Entering religious life meant, as in any form of life, choosing one direction and leaving others aside; and it meant responding to the newness of God who continues to call, placing a goal before us: identification with Christ. The call was stronger than the difficulties of following this path, which includes misunderstandings, renunciations, and carrying a cross that is not understood, nor anticipated, nor easy to embrace.

During my first years in religious life, I always heard the same voice calling me to keep walking, because when I thought I had reached a goal, I realized that the horizon was always further ahead. First, there was the challenge of the novitiate; then, making a public commitment before the church in the community that he had

given to me. Later, was the time to say yes forever, but with clear awareness that nothing depended on my strengths, certainties, nor successes; and everything would come to pass despite difficulties or failures.

To begin again was simply to walk knowing where I come from, where I am going, who is calling me, why and with whom I am walking. To be in continual conversion was the challenge that I should never forget, and this manifested itself as a truth that I could not refuse: inside me the echo of his voice resonates ceaselessly, asking me to pitch my tent and to keep walking; to live free of passing things, yet with my feet on the ground; and to anchor myself only in God, letting him be the protagonist of my story.

An expression that has marked my path has been, "come out of your land." It has opened new horizons for me, enabling me to abandon securities, leave comforts, and to sometimes face the unknown; for example, living in a small community where everything needs to be done, or taking the risk of being different by witnessing unity in diversity.

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Beyond accepting external changes, taking on new challenges, embracing crosses or failures ... everything is about responding to the concrete will of God, discerned amid lights and shadows, together with my sisters. I can say that there has always been a golden thread that has guided the steps of my life and our communities, continually uprooting me from myself to root me in him.

What remains in every new beginning is belonging to God, the recognition of the seal of a call engraved in my heart: to live in him who is One and Triune, who is communion. From that source we must allow the life of God to flow so that others may drink; to be a bridge where he opens roads; and to be a table where he distributes his bread and a channel through which he pours out his grace.

Starting over is always possible if we are guided by the Spirit who invites us to take nothing for the journey because, where we are going, he is there. Where God is, there is home, brothers, sisters, a task to do, and a mission to carry out in his name.

There have been many beginnings throughout my life, and I am sure there will be more to come, but there is no point in recounting external adventures if they are not the fruit of a movement of the Spirit, of having enlarged my interior space to listen and be docile like Mary. It is he who guides the slow, insecure, and timid steps of my community pilgrimage in this way until I arrive, together with my sisters, at the Father's house.

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