Columns
Spirituality



Augustinian Sisters of the Monastery of the Conversion in Spain, accompanying families on the Camino de Santiago (Courtesy of Augustinian Sisters of the Monastery of the Conversion)



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Our community began Lent with a retreat entitled "From Slavery to Freedom," during which we were encouraged to use the materials of Pope Francis' Lenten message of 2024 and the confessions of St. Augustine as a guide to deepen our understanding of the theme. These texts inspired me to enter into Lent as an interior pilgrimage towards the God who dwells within us.

In this inner journey, I experienced Kairos, God's time, in the concrete and ordinary aspects of my life. I discovered his presence and heard his voice saying to me: "You are my beloved daughter" (Mark 1:11). Thus, I was able to leave behind Kronos, a cruel and paranoid time over which I have no control, and which ensnares me in continuous chaos, devouring me without my awareness.

> "This has been the most moving experience of this Lenten season for me: to truly feel like a child of God and to be free. I believe I have begun one of the most challenging journeys of my life as I delve into this truth (…)": Sr. Marlene Quispe Tenorio
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Freed from the tyranny of time, that voice gave me the possibility of turning my gaze towards him and discover him as God the Father who loves me without limits, without conditions and who always waits for me. Hearing again: "Daughter, come home, for you 'my heart is moved' " (Jeremiah 31:20), reminded me that my life is a continuous exodus, in which He Himself accompanies me through the desert of my temporality and sin, through life's trials, encouraging and sustaining me in my pilgrimage towards eternity and forgiveness. This is the paschal experience, the freedom of the children of God.

This has been the most moving experience of this Lenten season for me: to truly feel like a child of God and to be free. I believe I have begun one of the most challenging journeys of my life as I delve into this truth of faith in God the Father. Moreover, this experience of filiation leads me to discover within myself what I have so often

sought outside. To discover the one who dwells in me, the one who is more intimate than my own intimacy and who continually urges me to come out of myself. I do not know how to explain it very well, but now I understand the words of St. Augustine: "Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient and ever new, late have I loved you. And behold, you were there within me, and I was outside, and there I sought you."



Augustinian Sisters of the Monastery of the Conversion in Spain, accompanying young people on the Camino de Santiago (Courtesy of Augustinian Sisters of the Monastery of the Conversion)

God granted me the experience of returning to the heart, to love. It was the gift of coming home, where I was awaited with open arms, where I found joy, peace, trust, freedom and a new horizon. It was the place where I rediscovered that my filial relationship opens me to responsibility in fraternal relationships, inviting me to recognize every human being as a brother and sister, and where I am taught to safeguard our common home to make life possible for all.

Although this is not always the case, it is not easy for me to maintain myself in this transformative dynamism of life. One of the hindrances to my pilgrimage is my tendency to focus solely on myself and not on God or my brothers and sisters when I retreat into my heart. When this happens, I become disoriented, unsure of where I have come from or where I am going. Emptiness and incoherence accompany me. My face sours like a lemon and my fraternal relationships reflect the worst of myself. If someone knocks at the door of the monastery, I consider it an obstacle disrupting my peace and our common house becomes a possession to be defended from strangers, from outsiders.

Once, while I was meditating in the cloister of the monastery, I heard the doorbell ring. Instead of welcoming that moment as an opportunity to meet, I perceived it as an annoying interruption that disturbed my concentration. The bell kept ringing and the sister in charge did not appear. I got up in disgust and went to open the door, hoping to quickly get rid of whoever was on the other side, indicating that we were in prayer time.

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To my surprise, I found myself face to face with an elderly man who, with his kind smile, handed me a bag of school supplies for the campaign we were conducting. His simple and loving gesture touched me deeply, and at that moment I understood that God was surprising me and giving me peace through the kind face of the elderly man. The person knocking on the door was not an impediment to my inner peace, but the very place where I could meet God.

This simple encounter drew me back to God, reminding me of his paternal embrace, revealing that he comes to meet me and asks me: "What do you seek?" And he says to me: "Take up your mat and walk" (John 5:1-3, 5-18). This encounter invites me to embrace the fountain of mercy that speaks my name, looks at me, kisses me, washes me, heals me and says: Let us rejoice, "for this my daughter of mine was dead and is alive again; she was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:24).

As we enter the portals of the paschal memorial, I can only say that I am a sinful woman on a journey. Reflecting on my personal history, marked by encounters and misunderstandings, I can only cry out: "O God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Nevertheless, I ask God, rich in mercy and compassion, to allow me to experience this Easter triduum with the certainty of his presence in my daily life. I

yearn to continue to discover his presence within me, to recognize myself as one sought, found and inhabited. I wish the same for each of my brothers and sisters, so that together we may proclaim to all people that we can embark on a joyful pilgrimage towards the Easter that God desires to celebrate with each one of us.

This story appears in the **Lent** feature series. View the full series.