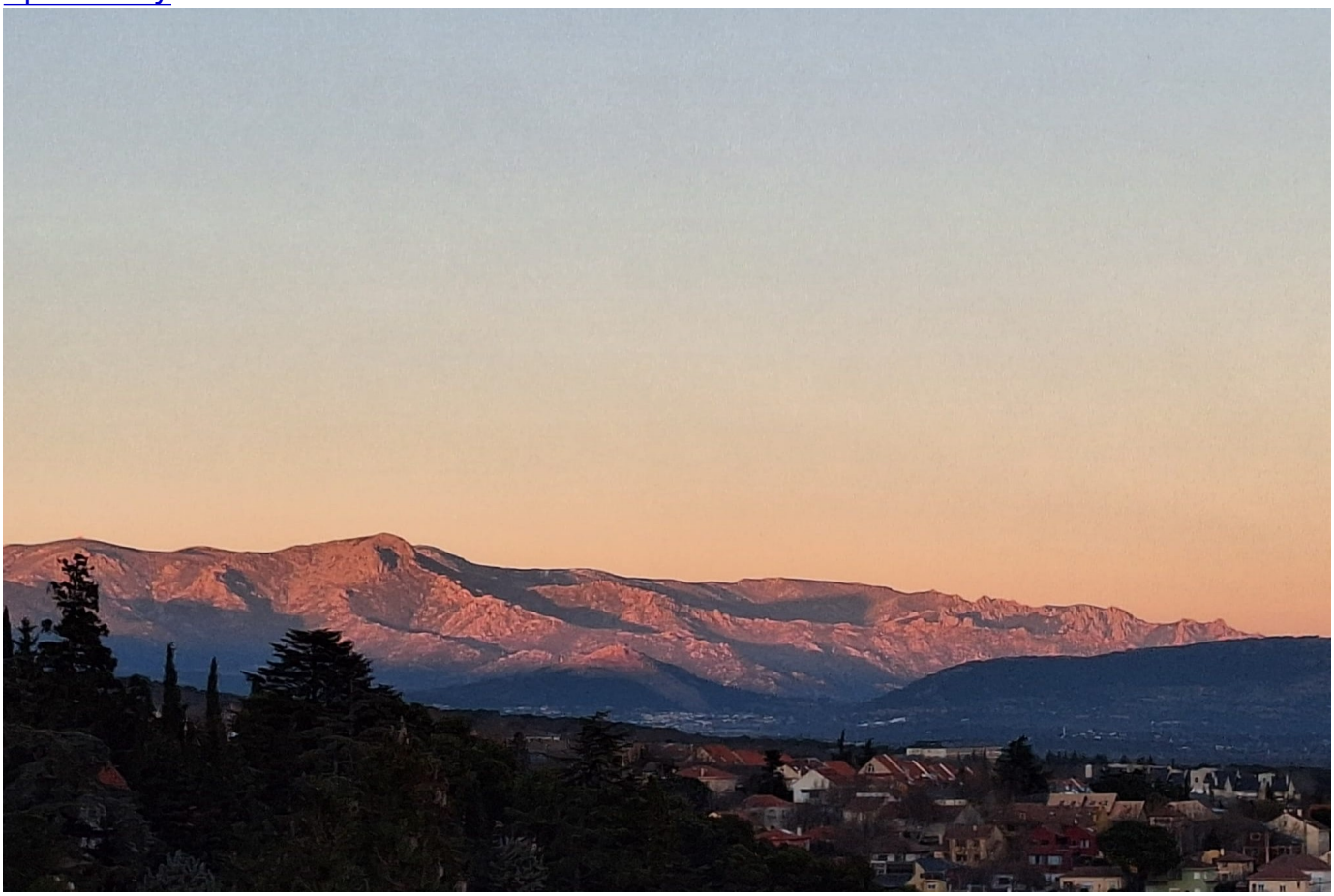
Columns
Spirituality



(Carmen Notario)



Carmen Notario

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Translated by Helga Leija

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I would like to share an experience that, while deeply personal, might resonate with others, at least in part. I hope it can provide some light for those moments when the path of discipleship grows dark and narrow, when it feels like there's no light left to guide us.

At certain points in life, we all experience sharp halts — moments we didn't see coming — because we didn't realize that a tiny thread of life was slowly slipping away. Maybe a gentle calling was knocking at our door, but we didn't hear it.

Often, we're so busy, so distracted by a thousand things, that we forget ourselves. We convince ourselves that the right thing to do is to give ourselves to others and ignore our own needs.

And then one day, subtly, our joy fades. We lose the strength and courage to keep going. Meaning seems to vanish, and the apparent absence of God distorts everything.

Sadness consumes us. We're caught in a loop of doubt and discouragement. We ask ourselves: Why is this happening? How did I get here?

In my case, that question surfaced as a cry from deep within I could no longer ignore: "I can't go on living in this meaningless prison." I kept telling myself it was just a passing crisis, but the reality ran deeper. My experience of God, built over many years, seemed to falter, and the certainty of God's love was now hidden behind a fear that threatened to take over.

> Like Elijah, I have searched for God in clear signs and manifestations. But in this time of darkness, I discovered that God's gentle breath was there — in the hidden place — where I found myself.
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Even in all that darkness, there was a glimpse of clarity. I trust in the God of life who says: "Do not be afraid. I am with you, no matter the circumstances."

Our mission as women religious is to help others discover the divine presence in every moment of life. That mission demands a constant search. When we search for God ourselves, we are also able to walk alongside others on their journey.

In times of depression, it is also necessary to allow ourselves to be accompanied — by our communities and by God's Word. A dear friend and sister once recommended I read the passage of the prophet Elijah's encounter with God on Mount Horeb. Elijah was fleeing what seemed like an unbearable situation (1 Kings 19).

He believed he had done God's will, but even so, "he was filled with fear and fled for his life" from those who pursued him. He wandered into the desert, wishing only to die. "He lay down under a tree and fell asleep." But then an angel touched him and said: "Get up and eat, for you still have a long way to go" (1 Kings 4-6).

Elijah rose, ate and drank, and set out on a journey to encounter God. When he reached Mount Horeb, he was told the Lord would pass by. But God was not in the strong wind, or the earthquake, or the fire. It was in a gentle whisper that Elijah recognized God's presence. He covered his face, stepped out of the grotto and stood waiting.

This is where the encounter happens — because life is not only about suffering and struggle. It's about once again encountering the God who brings us back to life.

When we grow tired of struggling, of trying to remain faithful, we may even long for death — the kind of death that shows up as spiritual sleep.

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Like Elijah, I have searched for God in clear signs and manifestations. But in this time of darkness, I discovered that God's gentle breath was there — in the hidden place — where I found myself.

Many times, we want to find God in big, undeniable moments — in the strong wind that we can feel and name. We look for experiences that shake the ground beneath us, signs that God is moving powerfully. We search for fire — for feeling, warmth, light — and even in the dramatic destruction of what we once held dear. But God does not show up in any of these violent phenomena.

And when we have had enough of struggling — when like Elijah we want to give into the desire to "fall asleep" — God touches us gently and says: "Get up and eat."

At last, a whisper comes …

You may not hear God's voice clearly, but that soft breath refreshes and comforts you. It is there, in your darkness, waiting with you.

That's where I find myself now.

Like Elijah, I want to cover my face in reverence and recognize your presence with my whole being, Lord — and step out to wait for you, standing at the entrance of the grotto.

Do not delay, Lord.

This story was originally published in Spanish on Jan. 22, 2025.