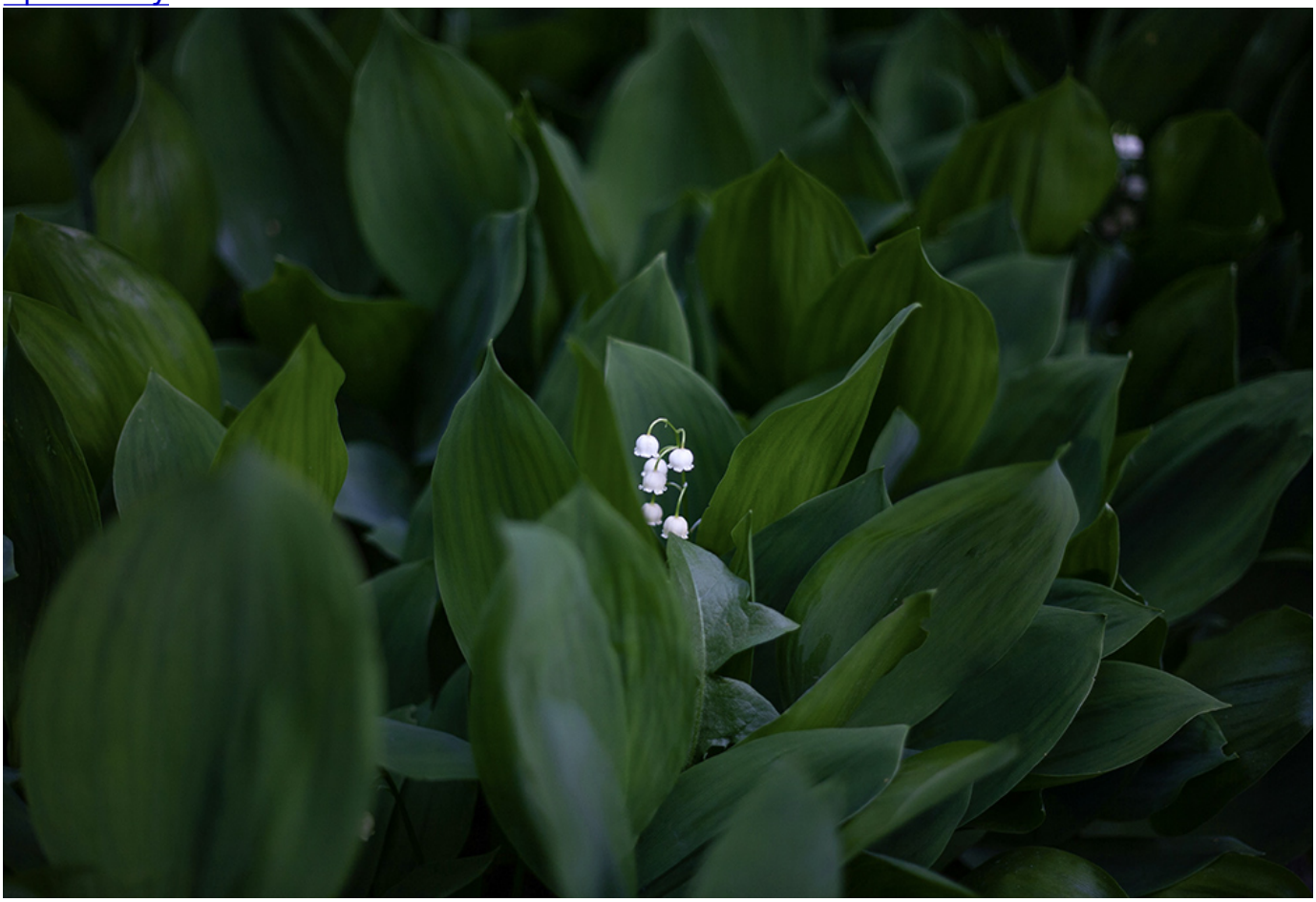
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We are overrun with words. They pester us incessantly, demanding our attention, orally and in writing; digitally and in print; through books, magazines and newspapers; on Facebook, Twitter (X) and TikTok. Many are fast food for the mind, no less ephemeral, disposable and ubiquitous than are paper wrappers in what Pope Francis calls our "throwaway culture."

But some are meant to be treasured.

English and Latin have only one common word for "word," but ancient Greek has multiple. A string of words across a manuscript page can be referred to as *lexis* (λέξις), while *logos* (λόγος) refers the principled ordering of reason in our communication. The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus himself is the *Logos*: the creative, ordering, life-giving force in the universe. Thanks to the Incarnation, the life-giving power of the *Logos* reaches from the grand and sweeping to the personal and particular.

Many of us have grown in understanding this *Logos* through the life and work of ethicist and theologian Margaret Farley. We are grateful for her own *logos*, as well as for the *lexeis* she uses to communicate her healing wisdom to us. Her wise counsel helps us understand the right relationship between *logos* and *lexis*.



Mercy Sr. Margaret Farley (CNS/Courtesy of Yale Divinity School)

Margaret's *logos* starts with her silence. She begins not by talking, but by listening, by offering her merciful attention and accompaniment as another human being begins to articulate their own experiences and troubles. Margaret builds and holds a fruitful space where our tumble of words — mishmashed strings of *lexeis* — can be ordered and enlightened by the *Logos* underlying all reality.

Holding a space for another human being to give voice and order to their own life is a profound act of mercy; one that takes time and patience. It also takes the strength of a steady and compassionate gaze to help that fellow human resist false, destructive and intrusive ways of interpreting her life and choices, to move forward in peace.

But Margaret's silence is not her only gift. Suffering human beings not only require space to speak about themselves, but also words of insight and encouragement given in response. Silence is not enough, so Margaret speaks too; because Margaret sees us all as beloved children of God, her *lexeis* to each one of us are infused by her own communion with the *Logos*.

Many centuries ago, the Desert Mothers and Fathers removed themselves from life's hustle and bustle to pray, fast and grow closer to God. But people continued to seek them out, asking them in person for "a word," *rhēma* (ῥῆμα), that they might be saved.

Here the Greek offers yet a third helpful connotation: *Rhēma* usually refers to an oral utterance or saying, including a personal communication. Those seeking out the wisdom of desert monastics were not looking for a script; they were looking for a spoken word from a wise person.

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Despite the busyness of her own life, Margaret is a true heir of the Desert Mothers and Fathers. When she took final vows as a Sister of Mercy, she was asked to give a word that would be inscribed on the silver ring that symbolizes her commitment. It is her word to the Sisters of Mercy, and by extension, her word to all of us. Margaret chose the word "Arise!" It is her *rhēma*.

In Scripture, "Arise!" stands at the border of invitation and command. It embodies the energization of mercy. As the Gospels tell us, "Arise!" can even reconfigure and redeem lost time.

When the official Jairus begged Jesus to heal his only daughter, he worried that the crowds would prevent them from getting to her without deadly delay. The grieving father's worst fears appeared to be realized when people from his household raced out to tell them not to hurry, because the girl was already dead.

But Jesus responded that she was only asleep. Taking her hand, he said to her in Aramaic, "*Talitha cumi*," which English Bibles often translate as "Little girl, arise!" It means "stand up," with the connotation of "be resurrected."

Rising from sleep — and one day rising from the dead as Jesus promises us — means returning to community. It means wiping away tears, both our own and the tears of those who love us. It means getting on in joy with the work of the day.

Arise! Margaret's *rhēma*, illuminated with *logos*, supported and elaborated by *lexis*, reaches past the ears and into the hearts of those who love her.