Columns
Spirituality



An altar for the Day of the Dead prepared by Elia Cárdenas, honoring deceased sisters who inspired her faith journey (Courtesy of Elia Cárdenas)



by Elia Cárdenas

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Last month, I had the honor of accompanying the Province of Santa Catalina de Siena, a vibrant community of the Dominican Congregation where I am an associate, to the funeral services of a beloved religious sister.

The beautiful Mass included a ritual presentation of symbols associated with the Dominican charism of the Congregation and the life of the sister. These symbols — the pointed star cross, the word of God, the rosary and a baby Jesus in his blanket — hold deep meaning within our faith and served as a tribute to her life and service.

It was moving to hear a priest talk about how this sister, with tenderness and *cariño*, played a decisive role in his decision to pursue his vocation to the priesthood. Curious about how this happened, I later asked him to share more. He explained that she had been God's instrument in his discernment process because she accompanied him during his formation, serving as a calm and peaceful presence especially in challenging times. He still remembers how, just minutes before his transitional diaconate ordination, she spoke Spirit-inspired words that he needed to hear at that moment.



Detail of the altar created by Elia Cárdenas, featuring candles, flowers, and symbols of gratitude for the lives of Dominican Sisters (Courtesy of Elia Cárdenas)

This story made me realize how the quiet witness of religious sisters, with their diverse charisms and ministries around the world, has been instrumental for many priests as they discerned their vocations. And not only for priests — there are many inspiring stories of their presence and wordless witness that have shaped the lives of other religious sisters and associates like me.

As we approach the celebration of All Souls' Day — a special day to commemorate our loved ones who are no longer with us — let us remember the witness of religious sisters who have touched our lives. These women live their lives mostly within the quiet rhythm of community life, radiating compassion, serenity, wisdom and a peaceful, reassuring presence. In the silence of their hearts, they live their call with fidelity, participating in the mission of the church.

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Many of these women — whose names may not be inscribed in earthly books of saints, remaining invisible to the world's eyes — have left a profound mark. Through their love and compassion, they have shown us how to draw closer to the love of God.

Think for a moment: Did you have a sister whose faith or kindness left a lasting mark on your life? Was she your teacher, your catechist or your novice director? Perhaps it was that sister who hardly spoke but truly saw you when others didn't. How did her example shape your faith, your choices or the way you care for others?

As a community, let's come together to celebrate their lives by setting up an *altarcito* — a small place where their silent presence will serve as a powerful reminder of their lives of sacrifice. Each of us can light a candle, say a prayer and reflect on their influence in our lives and in the world. Let us not forget their contributions, but rather, let us honor and celebrate them, for they are an integral part of our faith community. After all, this is the month for remembrance, a month to say: "¡Gracias!"