Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality
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The day before New Year's Eve I met for breakfast with an old friend from college. In a tiny café in Boston, far from the life I've grown accustomed to with my sisters, we reminisced about days gone by. The truth was, with the exception of a message here or there and a random dinner a few years back — the year of which neither of us could exactly recall — we had slipped off each other's radars.

Still, as we laughed about the things we thought we knew when we were younger and listened attentively to the events we'd missed in each other's lives, drawing parallels all along the way, it was as if the 10 years of relative absence in between us melted away.

"When did we get so old?" We uttered in unison to one another as the meal began coming to a close.

It wasn't a question of age, but rather an acknowledgment of a distance covered quickly in conversation and yet separated clearly by chronology. *Where had the time gone?* We seemed to be asking one another. *And what's more, where would the time ahead lead us?*

Parting ways, we both gave thanks for the relationship we had and the connection rekindled at year's end. The questions of time past and future still hung in the air, and yet, overwhelmingly, I was taken by the gift of gratitude and grace of perspective I found in that moment.

In this season of recollection and renewal, as we make resolutions and mark the new year, it is the perfect moment to consider the grace of a healthy perspective and to step back and assess the grace at work in our lives.

At its core, perspective is the way we see the world and our place in it. A healthy perspective grounds us in the reality of what is; it recognizes who we are and how we are in the world, it allows us to better interact and relate to others, and it judges freely how to proceed based on a balanced vision of experiences and encounters.

Perspective, of course, comes from our own vantage point. Thus, to have a balanced and fairly realistic view both of what has been and what is requires self-awareness, frank honesty, deep patience, and a willingness to consider the many sides of a

situation. Gaining perspective, then, is a process that requires the hard work of mindfulness, which ultimately leads to peace.

This work of gaining perspective is done both in our everyday interactions and in the silence of our hearts. At this time of year, as we pause to look back at the year and decade that have been, we have the perfect opportunity to gain and deepen our perspective.

A healthy perspective "doesn't only see what we wish to see … it allows us to better encounter everything we must face to move forward in life," psychologist Dr. Robert Wicks writes. "[A healthy perspective] doesn't help us run away from the truth … it enables us to put things in their proper place."

At the precipice of this new decade, we have the opportunity to consider what has been, how we've come to where we are and what perspective these considerations offer to our assessment of what may be, or what we may be called to in the days, weeks and months ahead.

For myself, I've found it helpful to consider what the last 10 years have held in my life. If I were to give this decade a name, what would it be?

For me, the decade by and large had been marked by the transition into adulthood that comes in your 20s and 30s, with particular attention to my own movement into religious life. Above everything else that this decade has held, socially, politically or otherwise, it has been for me the decade of the sister.

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At the beginning of the decade, I was just beginning to visit sisters and inquire about what this life and call could mean for me. Hopes and desires abounded. In the ensuing 10 years, some of those dreams have become realities, transforming with all the realism that comes with such metamorphosis.

Realized dreams, we soon often find, can be less shiny than we imagined. Looking back on what has come to pass in these last 10 years, it is important to take stock in the essence of what was longed for and what was realized. The congruence of these two aspects gives us perspective on the work of the Spirit and our own attentiveness to the Spirit's work in our lives.

In 2010, I longed for intentional community, for a deeper relationship with God, for a spirituality, charism and mission I could find a home in. That longing led me to religious life. What I imagined was a beatific vision of the life I now live. The years since have refined that vision, revealing realities not seen or understood before. Experience has put my hopes and dreams in perspective. The essence of those desires has not changed, but the perceived path forward and vision for what can be and how it can be has needed to be re-envisioned.

As I look back, I read my own words from 2015. At the midpoint of the last decade, I was writing about the need to see with eyes of hope through lenses both mystical and realistic. "We have to be visionary," I wrote then as I reflected on the call of religious life. "We believe in what we cannot see and, through faith, we learn to see in ways unknown and unclear. In time, vision progresses. We cannot know what tomorrow holds, but we can learn to see the signs of the times and anticipate what may be to come."

On the brink of this new decade, I still believe this to be true. The vision of our hearts adjusts just like that of our eyes. Whether the outlook is bleak and foggy or bright and clear, we have been given eyes to see and hearts to weather all conditions.

The hopes and desires with which I started the decade have not been lost. Some have changed, and some have faded. Others have been reinforced and demand attention more readily. And yet still others — new dreams, desires and hopes — have come and been added to the collection in my heart.

If the decade has taught me anything, it is that change comes incrementally. God works in our desires and our desires are realized in the slow work of the Spirit played out in daily choices and prayerful attentiveness.

Where I began the decade as an inquirer to religious life, I end these 10 years as a newly perpetually professed member of a congregation. This change didn't happen overnight; it relied on the faithfulness, patience and perseverance that become apparent within the context of healthy perspective-taking.

As I look forward to the year ahead and beyond, I wonder what could possibly be in store. What will change in me and in the world? What do I need to hold tightly, and what would I be better off letting go of? How clear is my vision and to what might God be inviting me — both in big movements and small — for the years ahead?

No matter how we answer these questions, we must be mindful of our vision: what we see, how we see, and why we see things the way we do. With a healthy sense of perspective, we can receive the grace of eyes open and spirits attentive to the gifts God offers. May whatever we encounter this year open in us a space to take account of God's vision in us and for us: the grace of perspective for the good of all.

[A Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, Colleen Gibson is the author of the blog Wandering in Wonder and has been published work in various periodicals including America, Commonweal and Give Us This Day. She currently serves as coordinator of services at the SSJ Neighborhood Center in Camden, New Jersey.]