Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



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Psalm 61 says I will "hide in the shelter of your wings." Sometimes that is what I want to do when I try to make sense of all that is going on in life.

I wonder how to hold the successive climate tragedies in Haiti — testifying to the code red warnings of the most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change — together with climate deniers; the rapid fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban with the potential consequences for human rights, especially for women in a country that was on the road to democracy; the opposition to being vaccinated with the increases in COVID-19 variants escalating hospitalizations; the roadblocks being put in place to prevent easy access to the basic right to vote espoused in our Constitution; and everything else that is on the daily menu of what happens in our world and in our lives.

Holding it all feels like such a burden.

I was reflecting on this outside one morning when my attention was drawn to something moving on the ground. I saw an ant carrying what looked like a huge piece of leaf. I watched as it stumbled and staggered across the patio. I thought what a burden that is for the ant. Why does the ant do that? What is it for?

When I Googled that question, I found out some interesting things. One is how heavy that leaf is — it is likened to a human carrying 600 pounds in one's teeth! Quite a burden.

The second is why they do it. The leaf provides the "stuff" for a nutritious fungus which they feed to their offspring. But first, they have to prepare it. They don't eat the leaves; rather, they clean the leaves, crunch them and arrange them in stacks; compost the leaves, spreading spores around from which the nutritious fungus grows.

This fungus becomes the food for their offspring. That 600-pound weight is no longer a burden — it has been transformed into life-giving energy.

I began to wonder whether the burden I feel could become something else.

Could it be a source of life-giving energy?

I wondered whether our lives and all that happens in the world might be that "600-pound leaf" that we are asked to carry. If we simply carry it, it is a burden. But if we understand that we must prepare how we see the suffering, injustices and joys through the lens of the Gospel, the burden will become a source of energy and ongoing life.

Through the lens of the Gospel, we see what happens in life in new ways: the weak and vulnerable are not expendable; violence and war resolve nothing, nor does revenge; personal choices affect more than one's own life and have consequences for the common good; we are not separated but are all connected as human beings and with all life on our Earth home.

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We see through Jesus' eyes that all are welcome to the banquet table. The sick are made whole and the hungry are fed. People are forgiven and mercy is shown to them.

Seeing the realities of our lives through the Gospel lens is like the process of cleaning, cutting and composting the burdensome leaf. Once completed, the fungus is ready to grow. With contemplation, we drop down into the spaciousness where Divine energy flows and we surrender our old ways of seeing and allow God to be God in us. Our consciousness is transformed, feeding us with nutritious energy to begin to hold and respond to all that we experience in new ways.

We are able to hold that all are loved by God: the perpetrators and the victims, the winners and the losers, the weak and the strong, the healthy and the sick, the rich and the poor. We can see that disasters and destruction are not acts of God but rather part of an evolutionary process in which humans are participants. We can hold paradox and widen our embrace of love.

Such realizations do not make us passive in the face of suffering and injustice, but it does invite a response rooted in love for our neighbor and for Earth.

It takes many forms. Listening more carefully to those with whom you differ. Writing your own letter to your congressperson without off-putting rhetoric. Speaking up in a social situation for those who are being mocked or attacked. Composing letters to the editors or thoughtful pieces for social media. Witnessing to the Gospel vision in

parish and church settings. Imagining and creating alternatives to live life more conscious of the common good. Networking with others locally to share the energy and continue the process of transforming life's burdens.

Compassion and love become hallmarks of one's response.

The realities of our lives are always with us, and whether they are burdens or not depends on how we make sense of them and how aware we are of who we are and the workings of God within us.

As Christians, the Gospel invites us to see these realties through the lens of love. With that vision comes paradox and complexity, and we are asked to prepare this emerging vision deep within us. In contemplation, the vision becomes clearer. We "know" that God is in it all. From this place we enter fully into life.

Psalm 61 drew me back. I didn't feel I needed to remove myself from the realities around me by hiding or finding shelter. Yet I wondered if there could be another way of interpreting those words. I found synonyms that offered a new interpretation. I could sense that I may seek this space to continue to transform the burdens into life-giving energy.

... I will veil myself in the sanctuary of your love ...