Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Sam Bark)



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As I get older, I find that I am questioning many of my beliefs. I have been a Catholic all my life with varying degrees of fervor. When I was young, I attended Mass regularly and looked forward to the rituals and traditional prayers. After worship, I felt good.

However, I don't feel very good after worship the way I used to.

Now when I say prayers, I feel empty and the words seem meaningless. Often during Mass my mind wanders, and when the Mass is over, I remember very little. My body was there as we worshipped, but my mind and heart were not there.

When I speak to my friends about my concerns, some tell me that they have solved doubts about their own faith by saying that they are not strictly religious, but rather spiritual. I'm not at all sure what they mean by saying they are spiritual. They seem to equate being a religious person with someone who follows the rules and teaching of the organized church. Do they mean that being spiritual is belief without rules? Somehow, I doubt that. Questions haunt me. I find myself asking, "What do I believe?" and "How do I know what my faith is?"

I decided that rather than only seeking the answer to my religious doubts with my friends, I would look back at my own life. I have certainly changed over the past 20 years. I'm still a Catholic and part of the church, and yet the realities of life have changed me. As the years passed, I have enjoyed success and faced failure and disappointment. I have watched my body age and my limitations increase. The deaths of old friends are more painful to me every year. When I face the realities of life, I understand that I am not the same person that I was 20 years ago, and that my experiences have also caused me to expand the way I think about my faith.

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Recently, I have found comfort in nature. Sometimes I sit on the porch of our house and stare at the trees and grass of my yard. They don't change much, though they do grow and flourish over time. If I sit on the porch long enough, and let my spirit

rest in the moment, I perceive something else. I see nature. I see the trees, grass, and feel the wind. I see life going on. I see subtle and vibrant life among the small changes happening around me.

As I sit there, I see that I am made of these same physical elements as the trees and grass. I am reminded that there are small yet vibrant changes going on in my life as well. My body is growing older and will return to the soil. This thought does make me cringe. When I go to a wake, the shocking thing for me is the stillness of the deceased body. I have only known this person filled with life and vibrancy, and that is now gone. Their life and vibrancy are what I remember and miss.

It is then that I believe there is spirit in life. I experience that spirit in myself most strongly in emotions like love. I feel a drawing toward someone or something. It starts by feeling good. However, this feeling can go either toward goodness or toward frustration. There are times that I wish I did not have emotions, because it means I have to deal with them and choose how to deal with them.

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It's this emotional drawing forth of love and feeling that attracts me to develop my spiritual self. I am attracted to a life of prayer and have been faithful to that prayer over many years. It has changed over time. In the beginning the emphasis was on Mass and devotions. Now there are fewer words in my prayer life, but I feel more attentive.

The other day I was in my car waiting at a long traffic light. I looked up and saw a bird gliding on a steady stream of air. She was showing no effort. Her wings were steady and she seemed to have no particular direction or purpose. She seemed to be simply enjoying the peacefulness of gliding. I've noticed we have fewer birds around where I live. I like to watch them and their behaviors. Watching that bird was a particularly grace-filled moment for me.

The memory of this bird catching and floating with a steady stream of air gave me an image for my own spiritual life. In the beginning there were many things to learn, rituals and practices that are a part of praying with others in an organized way.

There is also another way that has developed over time for me. I think of it as finding my own "spiritual upstream" where I can glide in peacefulness with an abiding presence of God. This is a part of my spiritual life that I cherish and nurture. I

do not work at it. Instead, I allow it to happen and try to stay with the experience. There are times then I'm in a hurry and miss the moment.

As I look out over my yard and my life, I feel a vibrancy. I call it the "upstream" of love that is active in life and all nature. I want this spirituality to be active and alive in my daily consciousness so that I can experience the "upstream current" in life around me.

This "upstream current" I experience may be what some people call spiritual. It is for me a life force carrying us beyond what we see, touch and feel.