Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



A photo taken by the author during a walk along the shore of the Cantabrian Sea (Magda Bennasár)



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> And turning to the woman, he said to Simon: "Do you see this woman? When I came into your house, you gave me no water for my feet; she, on the other hand, has watered my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You did not kiss me; she, on the other hand, has not stopped kissing my feet since she came in. You did not put ointment on my head; she, instead, has anointed my feet with perfume." ... He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:44-50).

Whew! This is one of those texts that gives me goosebumps. I would like to explore what this woman must have felt when this scene took place.

Consider that the Simon within us represents what prevents us from being free, happy and open to the Spirit of love, without allowing the conditioning created by our past and present circumstances to overpower us. Simon cannot see the woman; she is completely invisible to him.

Jesus' method of teaching is to help Simon, who is a symbol of rigid and often hypocritical law-keeping, find the feminine-complementary side of himself that is hidden, repressed, ignored and undervalued.

And he says: "Do you see this woman?" And Jesus skillfully and respectfully lists each thing she has that Simon lacks, one by one. Jesus says: "She, on the other hand ...".

Tell us, sister, what happened within you when he set you as a model of love? You, *on the other hand*, are capable of crying tears of grateful love, tears of joy for the kindness and the tenderness that Jesus communicates to you through his body and that you give him through yours. There you find your east, your orientation, your origin, your belonging and your destiny.

Jesus, who allows himself to be anointed by a woman, does so even as the present-day patriarchy grants itself the exclusive right to use such a feminine gesture. Anointing — caressing significant areas of the body, such as the forehead, hands and feet — but this anointing goes beyond sacramentally strengthening us for the mission; it is an anointing of celibate love, surrender and total consecration to the first love.

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She, *on the other hand*, does not stop kissing his feet. Interesting ingredient for our personal relationship with someone. There are so many degrees of communication through the kiss, such a common gesture in our culture. In Belgium, France and Russia, people kiss three times when greeting, not twice as in Spain, or with a hug as in America and Australia. Being so common, why do we ignore it in our personal relationship with the mystical Christ that dwells in us?

Can you imagine not kissing your nieces and nephews, your sisters, your mother, your father, your friends, and your sisters in your community? How long have you gone without kissing or allowing your soul to be kissed? Don't tell me you have trouble praying because silence isn't enough, nor because it is simply reading and repeating what others have written.

She, *on the other hand* ... does not stop kissing his feet. I invite you to the prayer of the kiss. Many of you will frown; you will say that I have lost my sanity a little.

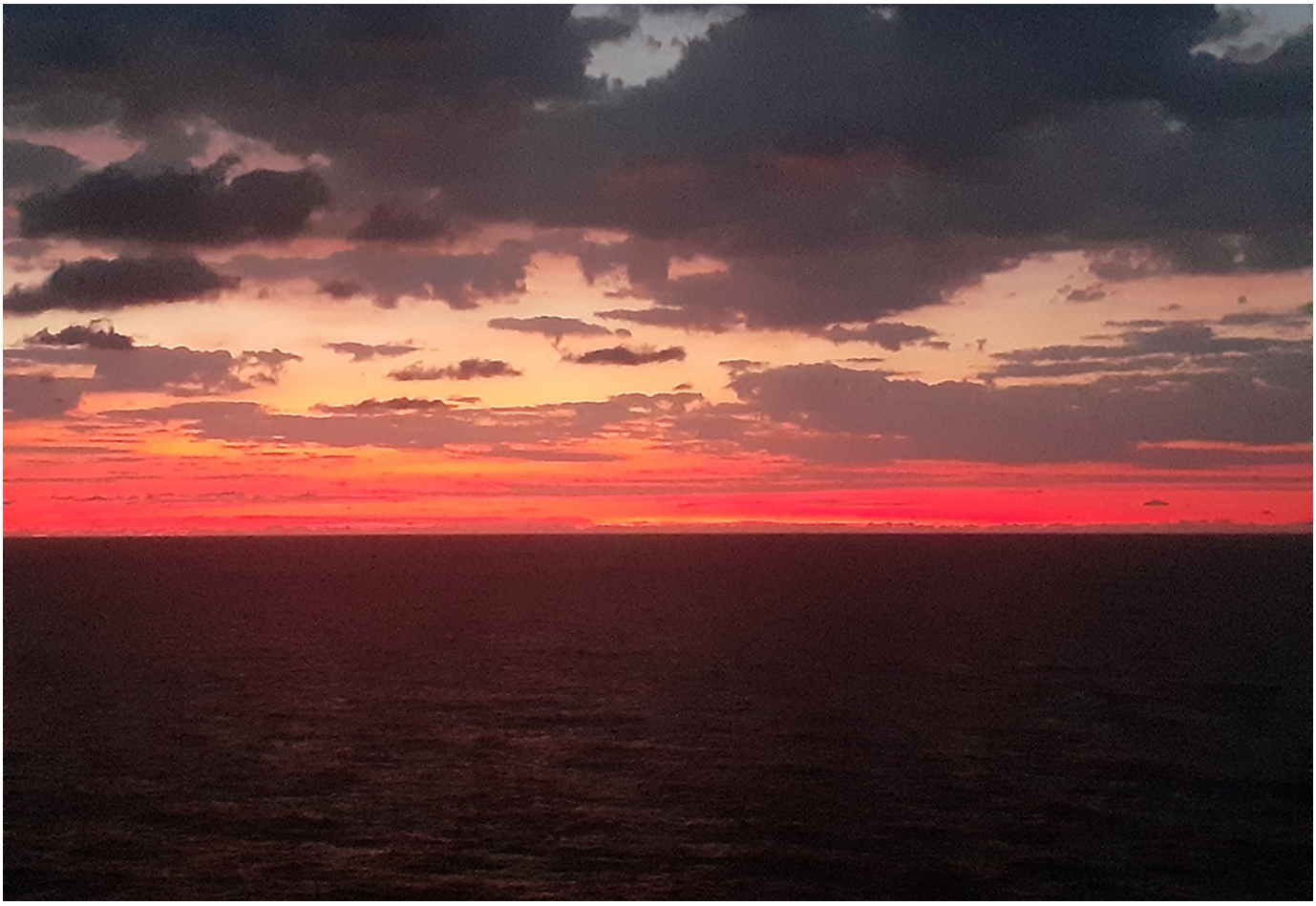
Perhaps, but we will not find the spark that illuminates and warms everything until we incorporate our senses, sensuality, into our experience of relationship with the mystical Christ that dwells in us.

That intimate, personal prayer is our orientation to love, and it is from that dialogue of love that you will learn to kiss.

And when you kiss the skin of God on everything, you also kiss it on everyone. Your gaze is transformed.

In the Church of St. Peter in the center of Louvain, I lit two candles for Father Damien of Molokai. He speaks to me, like Francis of Assisi, of how to kiss God on the sick skin of brothers and sisters. This man, Damien, grasped the mystery of the kiss and could not differentiate between kissing God and kissing the lepers around him. His life continues to attract men and women from all five continents. Damien, a man, learned to kiss God.

As for us, consecrated, anointed, dedicated women, how is our intimate, personal prayer?



A photo taken by the author during a walk along the shore of the Cantabrian Sea (Magda Bennasár)

Last night, I went for a meditative walk along the shore of the Cantabrian Sea, where I live, and I could see how the surface of the calm sea — which on the horizon was joined with the sky, with many stars — was like an immense beauty that could not help but speak to me of the face of God, the face of my sisters.

And as my prayerful walk continued, my heart was drawn to Ukraine, to the horror of an unjust and cruel war, as all wars are. And I could see, with the eyes of my soul, the frozen skin of our sisters and brothers, without electricity and running water, with the continuous threat of bombs, and with no safe place to take refuge.

And my evening prayer became, like so many other days, a silent offering, like a promise to keep trying to kiss people's pain too, even if I rebel and cannot understand it. And I let my senses calm down and introduce me to a contemplative silence, where everything becomes one and there are no more words. It is like when our sister in the Gospel passage expresses with a gesture, a kiss, all that she carries inside: And only he welcomes her, giving her back her dignity and her place among the people who followed her.

She has been spoken of throughout the centuries. She was not silenced, and she was not made invisible, but she remains anonymous. Perhaps this is the step we are invited to take: to give a name to the people we serve! And what better way to do that than with a hug, a kiss, and a warm welcome, even if it is time to go running to prayers.

Let us provide the warmth that consecrated life invites and requires. It is the difference that Jesus indicates to us between Simon's fidelity to the law and the defiance of her kisses, a gesture that continues to be groundbreaking and prophetic.

A wonderful challenge. An amazing invitation.