Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality



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As her hands slid over the smooth surface of a river rock, worn down by the water and showing the speckles of sediment that come to light only once it is dry, my friend looked off into the distance lost in a moment of remembrance. As if talking to someone I couldn't see, she marveled, "This is the same stone as my husband's gravestone." The dark gray granite seemed to sparkle in her eyes as she turned to me. "I'll have to bring it with me the next time I go to visit or maybe I'll just keep it in my pocket as a kind of reminder."

Feeling my heart ache for her, I couldn't imagine she would ever forget her dearly beloved, and yet something about that stone called to mind a concrete connection she wanted to hold on to. Her remembering was an act of love, a reminder that love not only lives on but also finds new life in the act of remembering.

Traditionally within the Christian community, November has been designated as a month of remembrance of the dead. In the waning days of the year, we remember those who have come before us, all saints and all souls, all the people who have populated our lives and those who unbeknownst to us have shared in the common human experience of our earthly existence. We pray for one another: the living for the dead and the communion of saints for those in need here on earth.

As the days grow shorter this November and the liturgical year quickly draws to a close, the darkness calls us to reflect on things that have come to pass and the people in our lives who now live on in our hearts and our memories. Such remembering brings with it a whole host of emotions. When we remember, we grieve; we cherish; we give thanks; we hold anger; we process regret; and ultimately, one way or another, we are called into union with God, who is love. In this way, remembrance is, at its core, an act of love.



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What sparkles in our souls when we remember is the love of God. This love could feel like longing or belonging. It is why we find such comfort in others saying to us "I remember," or we say to others out of love and affection, "Remember me to her." Memory stirs our souls and calls us into relationship. We may not physically be together but, linked spiritually in remembrance, there is a depth that even absence cannot fully overcome.

In his prayer "For Absence" from *To Bless the Space Between Us*, John O'Donohue prays: "May you know that absence is alive within hidden presence, that nothing is ever lost or forgotten." This absence is filled with eternal echoes, the kind that call us to grow as we experience the mystery of *what* and *who* and *how* we remember.

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We remember not just with our minds but with our whole selves. Smells recall vivid memories; tastes transport us tableside to spaces of love and belonging; turns of phrases fill us with remembrance; and physical touches reminiscent of those who we've lost bring them back into contact with us but for a moment. In this way, we recognize that love knows no bounds, it is embedded in our being. And our love (and God's) as such is shared in the myriad of senses we can conjure to connect us.

Of course, this is also how our faith calls us to new life in this season of remembrance. Jesus' invocation to "do this in memory of me" at the Last Supper, calls us to be broken, blessed and shared in our everyday lives and in the memories we savor and share. This sharing brings new life. When we share the story of Jesus, the memory we hold faithfully, we invite others into relationship with the Christ. When we share stories of those who would otherwise be forgotten in our society and church, speaking of their faith and the life it stirs up in us, we preserve their memory and thus offer the love they embodied to all who listen. This is how we remember the radicals, the rebels, and our relatives, through storytelling and memory-making.

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"So long as we are being remembered, we remain alive," the Spanish novelist Carlos Ruiz Zafón famously remarked. That is because the act of remembering is an act of love. Luckily, this remembrance is not confined solely to us humans … God remembers and thus, there is eternal hope in the loving remembrance of God.

"Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb?" God pleads in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Even should she forget, I will never forget you." This remembrance carves us into the very being of God, never to be forgotten. Thus we find hope in a God who always remembers — not what we do but who we are — beloved children of God.

In this love, we are held and remembered like a rock firmly grasped by God. And it is in the spirit of this love that we are called to love (and remember) in return — so that no one may be forgotten, on earth or in heaven, but that together in love and blessed memory we may live forever in the heart of God and in the hearts of all those who we love and who have loved us.