Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



A view of the construction happening at the building next door to Sr. Nancy Sylvester's home (Courtesy of Nancy Sylvester)



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Clank, bump, crash, bang, clash. Like an alarm, these sounds wake me up every day at 6 a.m.

Plaster, debris, rubbish, trash, fragments come tumbling down the chute attached to the fourth floor of the building undergoing reconstruction. This building is next to my house and the deconstruction site is directly across from my bedroom window. Whatever the workers have excavated the day before comes flying down the four stories into very large trailer bins. Periodically the constant beeping of trucks' backing up signals the removal of the containers only to be replaced by others.

This occurs during the same time I engage in my contemplative sitting. It is an interesting juxtaposition of silence and constant noise. However, following the presidential election, I'm choosing to stay in this environment as it resonates with how I'm feeling and possibly holds an insight as to how to be in the months and years to come.

I'm still in the process of learning from the results of the election reading the various analyses of the why and the how people voted. I reflect on the opinion pieces that try to describe the multiple causes as to why as a nation we see things so differently.

I try to silence my internal screams as I read about the president-elect's appointments, which only confirm that what the candidate said he means to fulfill even though many thought it was only his style of speaking. He wants to clean house — get rid of who and what stands in his way and dismantle the current governmental structures that challenge his power.



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As I bring this to prayer, I see a parallel to what is going on next door to me. There is a major reconstruction of a 100-year-old building happening. And this stage may be the easiest. You know you have to get rid of most everything. Tear it down and throw it away.

I have no idea what is being disposed of down that chute, but it is no longer deemed necessary. The building is being gutted for something new to emerge. But that is a different process and in the distant future.

As I read about the newly elected president and his appointees for the top government positions, I sense that they are those who believe their task is to gut the building. They know how to throw things away — slash programs, cut regulations, dispose of inefficient personnel. They are draining the swamp. They are shoving things down the chute. They are making noise.

However, that is the easy part of renovation. It is the repairing and rebuilding which are the difficult and more time-consuming challenges. It is deciding what will replace what one has taken apart. That doesn't come so easy and has to involve many different kinds of people who hope to inhabit the newly transformed structures for the next centuries.

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I'm sensing that sitting in contemplation with the noise will be my situation for quite a while. I'm challenged to create space within myself even in the midst of the cacophony of deconstruction. To expand the scope of my vision beyond the immediate to the larger evolutionary time we are living in. To acknowledge what is being thrown away and to imagine with others what can replace it. To remember and truly know that there are almost an equal number of persons in this country who do not want to just destroy but want to create possibilities in similar ways to me. To believe that the spiritual energy we are sending forth coalesces in a wider and stronger energy field.

Divine energy is immersed throughout our universe. We are not alone in this moment. Fr. Joseph Donders, a member of the Missionaries of Africa, reflecting on Mark 13:24-32, wrote:

> Jesus teaches us how to look at the crumbling of the old world around us, at the falling away of so many things we are accustomed to. Jesus tells us how to interpret conflicts, wars, and starvation. He explains: "Be careful. Don't get confused. Don't let them frighten you! Don't worry! Keep going. In the end, all will be fine!"
>
> Let us live with this vision: humanity in labor to give birth — through distress and pain — to that human and divine organism of whom he is head. Alleluia.
>
> —Praying and Preaching the Sunday Gospel

And I can't help but end with one of my favorite poems by Adrienne Rich, "My Heart is Moved," from The Dream of a Common Language:

> My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
> so much has been destroyed
> I have to cast my lot with those
> who age after age, perversely,
> with no extraordinary power,
> reconstitute the world.

Right now, deepening my contemplative practice to respond out of love to all that is going on is my commitment. I hope it will be yours as well.

Author's note: *Journey-Faith in an Entangled World, which I just wrote, is a helpful resource to do this kind of contemplative work in the midst of what is happening today.*