Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



Sr. Ana González's mother, Ana Michel, makes piñatas (Courtesy of Ana González)



by Sr. Ana González

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I learned behavior and attitudes from my first teacher, my mother. She instilled in me a joy of life, my love for my faith, and quirky expressions that I cannot shake off. She also modeled an urgent need to get things done quickly or de volón pimpon. Grass never, ever grew under her feet, and she was always doing something.

Naturally, the behavior modeled by my mother became an ingrained trait in me. Always doing and going from one thing to another was helpful at one point in my life. It seems to me that society celebrated my mother's and my busyness. I think our society places unrealistic expectations to be defined by our actions. To start, many Americans tend to ask a follow-up question after learning a person's name: "So, what do you do?" After entering religious life, I began a lifelong journey of transitioning from doing to being in the presence of God.

I must be honest. As much as I try to be in the presence of God and live a life defined by being, I struggle. The last weeks of December tend to be the hardest for me. The time comes with so many activities, cooking delicious meals, neat events, and so much that "needs to be done" before Christmas. This can be overwhelming, and I am not alone in feeling stressed with the last weeks of December.

A couple years ago, the American Psychological Association reported that for Americans, the holidays provide a chaotic tension between joy and stress. To me, that sounds horrible! A few days ago, I was scrolling on Instagram and came across the following rules for holiday gatherings from Christmascountdown.uk.

- Don't go into debt trying to show people how much you love them.
- Do not visit people if it damages your mental health.
- If someone comments on your weight gain, eat them.

Christmasscountdown.uk is getting closer, yet misses the point. In my opinion, this season is not supposed to be chaotic, stressful and filled with unnecessary expectations we put on ourselves. We are missing the point.



Mother Mary waits in hope during Advent. (Courtesy of Ana González)

As a Catholic, the point for me is that we are in the season of Advent. This season encourages the people of God to slow down, be still and be in the presence of God. It is here that I turn to Mother Mary for inspiration and guidance. Like my birth mother, Mother Mary also models behaviors and traits for all of us to follow as we live in the presence of God.

Our faith tradition tells us that Mary was a very prayerful woman. During the season of Advent, I find comfort in Luke 1:26-38. Here, I experience a prayerful Mary being in the presence of God. I like to think that Mary paid attention to the message of the Lord because she embraced a contemplative prayer in her day-to-day life. Mary teaches me that prayer is how I must engage with God. Prayer can be structured, like praying the rosary, or simple, like taking a contemplative walk or being still and aware of the presence of God.

Theologian Fr. Thomas Keating shared that he learned from Mother Mary the way of saying yes to God's plan. He points out that by saying yes to God, Mary demonstrated complete trust in God. Her "yes" is a model of countercultural living, defying societal expectations and embracing God's will. Mother Mary models how to surrender to the ultimate mystery.

Like Mary, this Advent I want to be attentive to my invitation to partake in God's plan. Mary brings to light that we, the people of God, are loved by God. God journeys lovingly with us, and like Mary, God is inviting us to contribute to the kingdom of God. The surrender and openness that Mary models to me is resilient, radical and full trust in God's will. Mary's fiat ("let it be done") had profound consequences in her time and surpassed the human realm of possibilities. Mary believed that God is beyond limits. I must not put limits on a God that is unlimited. Mary shows me how to radically trust in God, especially when things appear impossible.

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The season of Advent is also a time when Mexican Americans and many Latinos celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It is only proper that during Advent, we celebrate La Virgen de Guadalupe. She reminds us that she is the mother of God and our mother.

One of the main lessons that I learn from Our Lady of Guadalupe, my Mother Mary, is that she is pregnant with the Word of God. She is expectant, waiting in hope. In her anticipation, she provides consolation. Mother Mary points to God and offers hope to the marginalized, the sick and the poor.

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Mother Mary calls me back to the expectant hope that defines the Advent season. With Advent concluding soon, Mother Mary tells me, "Mi hija, slow down." Like my birth mother, Mother Mary reminds me to fully trust in God and hold steadfast in prayer. Like Mother Mary, I need to be expectant, holding on to the word of God alive in me and in the world I live in.

This Advent, I long to be like Mary and be present to the gift of the now, to be present to the presence of God in nature, in my interactions, and say yes to the invitation to participate in the wonderful promise of the kingdom of God.

I pray we can live out our Advent in hope like Mary. May she be our guide to Jesus, inspiring us with her courageous trust in God, especially in times of doubt and despair. May we follow her example to say yes to God in our lives now and always.

This story appears in the **Advent** feature series. View the full series.