Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



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by Sr. Sophia Park

Contributor

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This year, I have found the Lenten journey to be very compelling. We live in tumultuous times, filled with sad news of harsh immigration policies, continuing wars, global economic and ecological crises, and much more. It is sometimes difficult to remain hopeful. However, during my daily evening walks, I observe the trees working hard to bear flowers and bud leaves, dreaming of the new season to come. The little buds emerging from the bare trees remind me that life continues even in darkness, and we should embrace the life that comes through death.

In these moments, I feel invited to learn about the mystery of life through our Lenten journey.

Often, we ask each other, "What is your chosen abstinence during Lent?" We tend to think of this season as a personal time for cultivating virtues or withholding vices. While these are worthy endeavors, Lent is also a communal journey to overcome the severe symptoms of alienation and loneliness amid our world governed by late capitalism.

This time, I have little ambition to purge my weaknesses and become perfect. Instead, I wish to participate in this mystical journey with a community. In this special season of walking through the paschal mystery, I look forward to finding shelter within the community, where I can confess my weaknesses and regain my strength, in order to continue this faith journey and overcome alienation.

In the Gospel, Jesus clearly warns that we cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:9-13). Interestingly, the Greek texts use the term *mammon* for money, signifying material value or materiality. During the medieval period, mammon was considered an evil demon or god. Today, mammon or material fetishism has become almost divine, seemingly directing our actions and behaviors.

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In this limbic capitalism, humanity often prioritizes efficiency and productivity, manifesting as entrepreneurship and leading to overworking. As the philosopher Byung-Chul Ahn indicates, in current society, humanity is no longer the "subject,"

but rather has become a "project." In this economic structure, people become their own slaves, to worship mammon.

Given this reality, I wonder about the best way to spend my time during Lent. For me, metanoia, changing or redirecting the way of living, means embracing a simple life, not calculating output but rather focusing on the process of a life in love, and negating effectiveness and productivity.

We hear of Abraham's faith beginning with his willingness to leave for the unknown lands that God will show (Genesis 12:1). By embracing uncertainty, rather than productivity, we reorient our lives toward mystery. When we stop the attitude of maximizing capital, we become holy fools who simply trust in God's love.

Today, many people have strayed from the church, finding it stale and lacking the courage to embark on an unknown path. Additionally, many Christians, along with others, feel lonely and lack a sense of community or belonging.

Perhaps our calling in this special season is to be surprised by the beauty of encountering the most unusual and unexpected people. As one French poem puts it, it is "as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table."

As a journey can lead us to an unexpected encounter, we can savor the beauty of the ordinary within a community.

We are all busy people. When asked, "How are you?", so many often respond, "I am too busy." During the Lenten season, I would say, "I am not in business, but in the process of learning to love," thereby rejecting the principles of a capitalist culture.

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Community living can be challenging for those accustomed to an individualistic lifestyle. However, I believe that it is time for us to create some form of community to anchor our faith and learn how to share our lives with one another.

When I talk about the importance of community, many good Christians express discomfort with the idea. Spiritual life, they often say, lies in silence and deep personal prayer. While that is true, I believe the most authentic spiritual life should

be rooted in community living, which is never productive, and our prayer should be noisy contemplation, which is less effective.

For me, beyond any effectiveness and productivity, I find great joy in my Korean diaspora parish, where I listen to stories of life journeys and share meals with parishioners. Their stories of immigration, like Abraham's, accompanied by the aroma of Korean food, provide me with deep life lessons and remind me of the late Pope Francis' words that "faith is always handed on in dialect," and his reminder that we always journey together, because "on the road of life, we never walk alone."

There are many religious men and women, including myself, who work hard to run ministries successfully. However, I fear that we might be operating our vocations solely for effectiveness and productivity, aligning it with the values of capitalism.

For me, the blessing of the Lenten season is that it is a journey beyond productivity and effectiveness. It challenges the supremacy of mammon and shares our daily ordinary life as a journey toward an unknown and uncertain path of love within community.

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