News
Q&As



Passengers stranded by the closure of Dubai International Airport await assistance in the airport parking lot in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, March 1, 2026. (AP/Altaf Qadri)



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Contemplative Good Shepherd Sr. Edith Olaguer went to the Philippines in February to visit her family. Her return to Rome included a scheduled layover in Dubai.

On her return flight Feb. 28, the Dubai International Airport was bombed. Having no access to news overnight, she had no idea why the pilot announced a diversion for landing the morning of March 1.

The plane ultimately did land as scheduled but Olaguer found herself in a nightmare of chaotic events. An agent told her that for her safety she was being lodged in an airport hotel. But after a few hours, she found herself on a bus being evacuated to a hotel away from the airport.

Language issues and general confusion kept her in the dark until she finally sat next to a man on the evacuating bus. He whispered there had been a bombing in the city near the airport, and at the airport itself. She spent the next six days not knowing if she might be killed from the missiles that kept falling throughout the city or if she would get home safely.

"Being caught in a war zone all alone was frightening and not having the language added to the fear," she said.

Olaguer shared with Global Sisters Report that even in this chaos of danger, fear and confusion, God's intimate loving care found her and kept her in a deep peace, as did Our Lady of Guadalupe's mothering presence. Her human feelings and turbulence remained, but her experience of God sustained her beyond them.

***GSR*: Can you share the beginning of what happened on Feb. 28?**

Olaguer: The beginning was the announcement that our plane was being diverted for landing. This set me off worrying why, and if I would make my next flight.

So, no one said anything about the bombing?

No, nothing. Luckily, we did land at the right gate, and while waiting for my next flight I got absorbed in [Bishop] Erik Varden's book *The Shattering of Loneliness*. But I suddenly sensed being almost alone. Nearly everyone had disappeared. No announcement and no message on my cellphone was puzzling, but then recognizing

people from my plane moving away, I joined them, ending up in the Emirates Business lounge.

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The agent, a Filipina, informed us that everything was delayed. She told me that for safety she would get a voucher for me to stay in the airport hotel. I was confused about her concern for safety. Was something happening? She returned, handed me the voucher and said, "Just keep walking, you will find it."

So, you just started walking?

Yes, but when I got there, the clerk said he was certain there was no room but would check. He came back, handed me room keys, pointed out the elevator, and I found my room. I had my laptop, iPad, iPhone and passport but no clothes, toiletries or meds. I had filled my carry-on with treats for the sisters — Mary Grace cheese rolls and ensaymadas, so I ate one and, exhausted after 24 hours travel, I lay down and fell asleep.

I woke at 1 a.m. to *Boom! Boom! Boom!* Men were outside shouting and banging on doors, shoving and screaming, ambulances and sirens wailing. My cellphone squawked with alerts.

I grabbed my things to leave the room and got caught in a moving crowd of people sobbing and crying, some not even dressed. Men in long white dresses and turbans shouted urgently, "Faster, move, faster." We had no idea that the airport had been bombed.

It sounds like panic to me.

It was. We got pushed onto buses. No explanations. Finally, a young guy sitting nearby whispered, "Iran bombs falling since early morning." The airport was hit. We watched missiles plunging from the sky. My thinking went to nuclear war and I was really scared.



A plume of smoke caused by an Iranian strike is seen in the background as Emirates planes are parked at Dubai International Airport after its closure in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, March 1, 2026. (AP/Altaf Qadri)

The shock of it hit you hard!

It got worse as reality dawned. My heart was beating fast, my body tightened; I felt paralyzed. No one knew where I was!

You were scared by the isolation.

Yes, but at the same time, without knowing what, something changed. I was still feeling fear, but a different sensation crept in and fear disappeared. I kept repeating, "*Papa Dios, indi mo po ako pabayan*." "Most sacred heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you." And a sense of quiet and peace seemed to overtake me.

The words "Be still and know that I am God" began blurring boundaries and I was being embraced by a wholeness that protected me beyond harm. No matter what

might happen, this encircling arm of reassurance, calm and buoyancy remained, something fear could not penetrate. My body relaxed, my mind quieted even as the sky kept lighting up with bombs and the deafening noises of missiles.

Breathing deepened and words came from Our Lady of Guadalupe: "Am I not your mother? Are you not in the crossing of my arms?"

You seemed to deeply sense that "someone knew where you were" and that shifted something deep inside you.

This presence of "someone" I did know was with me was quieting. We reached the Carlton Hotel and registered. The faces around me mirrored my own of total fatigue, disbelief, almost stupor, but I got to my fifth-floor room, and gladly fell onto the bed.

By now, you knew about the bombing of the previous day and the attack on the airport.

Yes, the shock of knowing was still there, but the calmness and confidence in God's caring presence, no matter what would happen stayed with me.

I had a good sleep and went to breakfast. My paralysis was gone. I could talk. I found "neighbors" — people who were kind, helping me and one another. I came to understand more deeply how all our lives are all entangled.



Sr. Edith Olaguer (Courtesy of Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd)

No calls, but texting worked. One from Bendin, my sister, appeared with a question about my medications, and advice to "think straight." Another text came from the sisters — prayers for courage, love and hope.

The messages must have really helped. How did you manage the six days?

By setting a routine: waking to pray about 2:30 a.m. and reminding God of needed wisdom and pleading that hearts be changed to stop the bombing. I considered writing a "goodbye" letter to the sisters, but something stopped me. ...

I found being alone a blessing. One morning's silence, I was surprised by deep gratitude — God's plan is peace, not war, not disaster, but hope and assurance. Whatever is happening, God is near.

So much chaos, and still you experienced the gift of wholeness of God and peace. I am thinking it helped others, too — just that presence you brought.

Yes, peace and many kindnesses, but also disturbances, like having a room change the evening before. Then being startled by the 1 a.m. phone call the sixth day. The clerk telling me the airline had called got me shaking — "Go immediately to the airport. Be there by 4 a.m."

I cannot imagine the chaos at the airport.

Thousands of people in queues. After 45 minutes of waiting, another shock: "Your name is not on our list, go back to the hotel." The agent left me puzzled, then her supervisor appeared telling me to go to the "business class" desk. Here they checked me in and three hours later, I texted the sisters that I was leaving soon.

The flight went well and on arrival, without much hope I went to claim my bag. Surprise! My old battered suitcase was waiting!

I imagine you have pondered at length about the meaning of this traumatic time of uncertainty.

Images and stories from Scripture keep reminding me of my experience of deep peace. "I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you." "Know that I am with you always; yes to the end of time." Deeper awareness that God does not take suffering away — even in bombings. God is with us, if we pay attention.

This story appears in the **War in Iran** feature series. View the full series.