Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality



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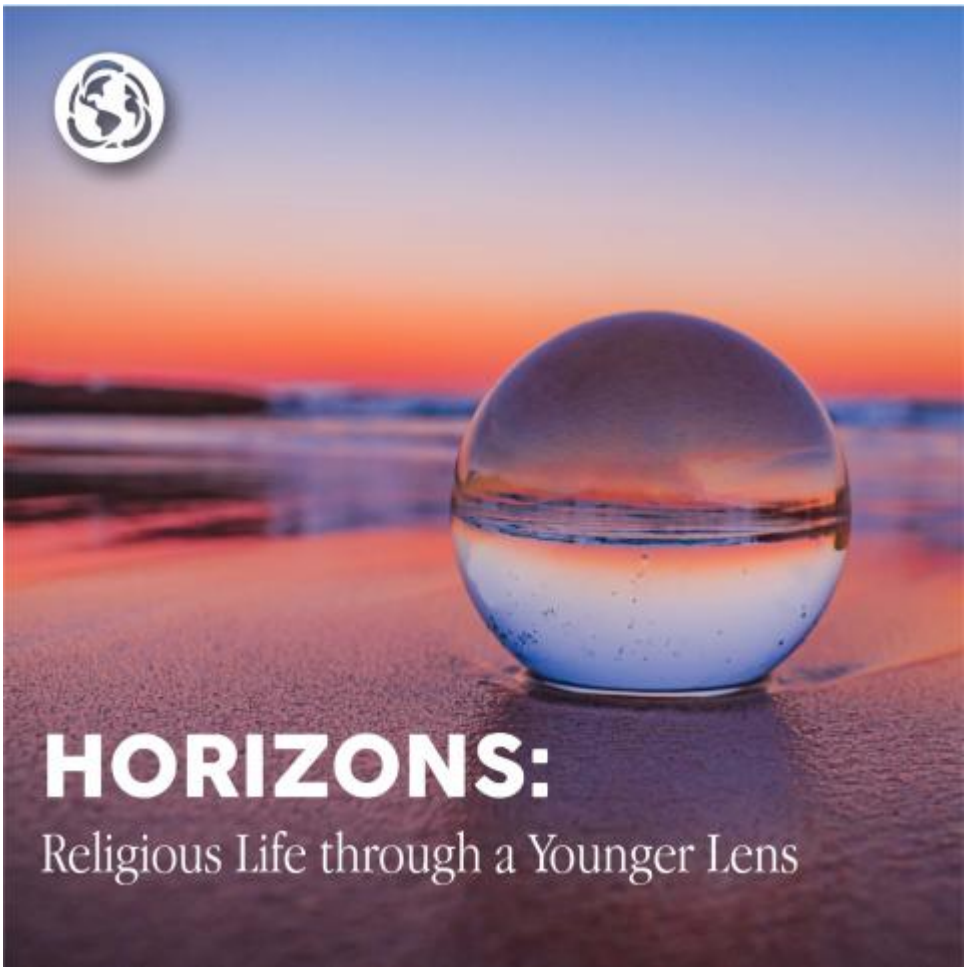
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I go out into the garden often. It is where I cultivate and tend hope.

There's a mulberry tree along the fence in the backyard. This tree, native to China, is invasive in North America. If cut down, it vigorously sends shoots out from the stump or roots. Removal requires one to dig out all the roots or paint herbicide on the fresh stump.

During one recent garden stroll, I approach this tree and notice fresh leaves bursting from stems cut back and left bare weeks ago. I go down stem after stem, pulling off these green growths. If not pruned, the tree will shade out our garden in the summer.

Hands busy, I feel again the presence of overwhelm and heartache. Beyond the management of my typical crippling pain and fatigue, I feel stripped bare and powerless by the hatred, violence and murder happening on national and global scales. The destruction is too aggressive — too much, too fast. How can we hold so much grief without withering?

The node, a place of life

Noticing I was caught in my mind, I refocus my attention to the present moment, on all the little spots from where I was removing leaves — countless, miraculous nodes. Nodes are points on a plant stem where leaves, twigs or aerial roots emerge. The node not only supports the structural and biological life of the plant, nodes are a place of healing — which is how grafting happens. This tree is loaded with nodes.

I look at the mangled trunk and take in all the tiny nodes. I can clip off as much as I can, but as long as there is a node, life will emerge.

This rooted-one I am pruning has life coursing through woody veins. And these nodes? They are places where the life within bursts through to life on the "outside." Despite my frustration with the location of this overgrown being, I see the node as a messenger of hope, an example of the hunger for life.

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Connecting to this amazing plant being, I considered how similar we are. As a person who has been "pruned" by a brain injury, I know this place of overwhelm and exhaustion well. I am friends with the fear that I won't make it through another season of destruction and burnout.

When I experienced loss of self after a TBI, I felt stripped. I turned inward and connected to the life energy below the surface while connecting to the nodes of my life.

Propagating

I recall the people, places and beings who hold and nourish me back to wholeness. They are nodes on the stem that is this life returning.

Another node in my life is my relationship with plants. The plants in my house and garden have been gentle companions. As I tend them, they tend to me. Plants have gently held space as I have grieved and dreamed.

I wonder, how can I be a node for others? How can we tend to hope in these heartwrenching times? How can I nurture life in the midst of endless and useless death?

I am the node of Christ

From my Catholic perspective one might say we are all nodes of Christ — places where life can burst into form. Think of the image of the vine and the branches. Am I a node of Christ consciousness, life, and energy? Any time I do the work of healing and reconnecting, am I not Christlike? I suspect that when I act compassionately and generatively, I am a place where Life (God) can break through and grow. I am a node of Christ-life.

Earth, my neighbors and nation, could use more love and life. Things look scary now. May I connect to the places of life around me. May I remember to connect to the divine life within. May I be a nourishing presence to my neighbors. May I be a node of the beloved community, the kingdom of God, already in our midst.