Voices of Sisters
Spirituality

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by Sr. Mudita Menona Sodder

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On Aug. 28, 2025, I suddenly began experiencing pain in my right hand, which has lymphedema. By afternoon, the pain had intensified to the point that I could not use my hand at all. I panicked — not at the thought of dying or paralysis, but because I was scheduled to give a talk to a secular group on Aug. 30. I wanted to keep my commitment.

I applied Dukh Daba-v Lep, a pain relief ointment, with someone's help as I was alone in the community that day. Pleading with the Almighty to help me fulfill my commitment, I went to bed. The next day, my hand was better, and on Aug. 30, I was as fit as a fiddle. *Deo gracias*!

On deeper reflection, I realized that physical pain can be a great blessing. It serves as a protective mechanism, alerting the body to harm and preventing further injury. In my case, it made me aware that I was not being kind to my body, which I see as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

St. Benedict advocates the motto *ora et labora* — pray and work. Body, mind and soul all need to be cared for and nurtured appropriately. In conscience, I know that I take good care of my soul and mind. As a religious sister, I am faithful to daily prayer, meditation, the Eucharist, spiritual reading, retreats and silence. As a voracious reader, I make every effort to learn something new and to share that knowledge with others. My mind is always active and engaged.

However, with sincerity and honesty, I must admit that I have neglected my body. I have given in to unhealthy eating, put on weight and overworked myself — burning the candle at both ends to satisfy my intellectual pursuits and my taste buds. Exercise and nutritious food have often been last on my daily to-do list.

When I was transferred to Patna and was teaching at St. Xavier's College of Management and Technology in Bihar, the imbalance increased further. I coordinated three departments — sociology, English proficiency and environmental studies — while also giving talks and workshops, judging competitions, organizing activities and serving in the parish to visit the sick, and much more. Being conscientious by nature, I remained faithful to prayer and ministry. The only area I compromised was my health — cutting into sleep, exercise and proper care.

The consequences were severe: knee replacements in both legs, double cancer, fractures and other health issues.

Miraculously surviving all these and many other health issues, Aug. 28, 2025, became a clarion call — loud and clear: do or die! Today I know, in the depth of my being, that caring for the body is prayer. Eating the right type and quantity of food is also prayer. Exercising, and massaging my numb feet and hands daily — especially my right hand with lymphedema — is my bounden duty to the Holy Spirit who resides in my body.

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"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27).

This awareness hit me hard and shook me out of my complacency. Abusing my fragile body relentlessly is a sin — amounting, in many ways, to slow suicide.

After surviving double cancer, I decided not to cut down on sleep, not to accept more work than I can manage, and to care more lovingly for my body. I often fail to maintain balance in body, mind and soul, but I pick myself up each time with greater determination.

My prayer each day is: "Lord, please help me to heal myself to wholeness. Make me a cocreator, helping you build your kingdom here on earth, if it be your holy will."

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Religious women and men usually do not prioritize care for the body. Prayer and ministry tend to overshadow all else. We do not realize that we are human beings first. Health is wealth, enabling us to serve the Lord better and longer in his vineyard, without becoming a burden to others.

On deeper reflection, I have noted that within patriarchal structures, women in general tend to neglect their health, as they are busy caring for their spouse, children or in-laws.

The pain I experienced in August was indeed a great blessing. It led me to deeper reflection and self awareness. It also helped me to grow in empathy with others and

with myself, and gave me a deeper appreciation for life.

My prayer is that all of us in religious life may receive the grace of the Holy Spirit to live a life of balance — caring for body, mind and spirit — especially when we are most tempted to neglect ourselves in the service of others.

A version of this column was posted previously at Matters India.