Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



Sr. Viktoriia Estera Kozun, a Sister of the Order of St. Basil the Great from Ternopil, Ukraine, poses at the summit of Mount Petros in the Carpathian Mountains in Ukraine's southwest, near the Romanian border, Sept. 9, 2023. (Courtesy of Viktoriia Estera Kozun)



by Sr. Viktoriia Estera Kozun

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"*Show me your way, Lord, and lead me along a level path.*" *(Psalm 27:11)*

To set off on a journey — is there anything more exciting and adventurous? A person needs enough courage to venture where they have never been before, and to set aside all their important daily tasks.

While traveling, my backpack holds only the essentials. I lose my familiar surroundings and the things I rely on in everyday life. All that I have is my own personality, and my attitude toward the surrounding environment. The further I walk or travel, the simpler and more open to the world I become.

In German, there is a word for the longing and yearning for travel — fernweh. Literally, it means "distance ache" or "farsickness." It describes the urge to leave familiar places and explore the vast world. Living each day at a measured pace, in familiar circumstances, in a cozy home arranged to our liking, we miss the chance to encounter something extraordinarily beautiful — the novelty that the Holy Spirit gives us when we leave our habitual, comfortable way of life. Inside each of us, there is this ache, this longing for the distance of new cities or countries, but also, a longing for God.

When my life falls into the familiar groove of daily routine and obligations, prayer itself can become routine, leaving little room for a fresh encounter with God. At such moments, I begin to realize that it is time for change — time to move forward into the unknown, both on the road and in spiritual experience.

Traveling alone, I experience most fully the presence of God, who walks beside me, cares for me, shares my enthusiasm and wonder, and witnesses my surprise, my racing heartbeat, my deep breaths, and my smile as I watch the sunrise or sunset, wash my face in a crystal-clear stream, or catch sight of a squirrel, a wild hare, a fox or a roe deer.

Once, sitting on the seashore, praying at dawn and watching the sunrise, I noticed a pod of dolphins swimming toward the sun. At that moment, I understood this was a gift for me from the Lord, for there was no one else on the shore. He created this world for humankind, so that together with the vast universe, we may praise His supreme wisdom.

When I pray with the Book of Psalms — which rightly belongs to the genre of poetic books — I notice and seek the beauty of creation. Psalm 19 is one of my favorites:

> The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.
>
> Day after day pours forth speech; night after night reveals knowledge — without speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

The sun, the wind, the landscapes, the sky — these revive, fill and inspire wordlessly. The forces of nature have an incredible ability to enliven what seemed to have died long ago or to have lingered in the darkness of despair. Creation's silence speaks powerfully and directly. When I gaze upon the beauty of nature, I never feel alone, for it reveals God's majesty, his power, his perfection and his presence.

Walking through a forest, for instance, I breathe in the crisp, fresh air as if the Lord's grace were filling and purifying me from within. Or when the warm rays of sunlight touch my face and body, I feel tenderly embraced by God's love. Yet to reach such breathtaking places in nature, one must journey across a certain distance — a path that often brings surprises and turns into a wondrous adventure.

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On the road, unforeseen moments often happen, especially with transport. More than once, I have missed my train, boarded the wrong one, or mixed up train cars that later separated and went in different directions. A mistake on a journey is not a catastrophe. Instead of turning back, I simply continue onward wherever the train carries me.

Fascinating and meaningful things begin unfolding the moment I step across the threshold toward a new adventure, offering a path of movement, interaction, growth, departure, synergy and action.

I usually take this as an invitation to trust and open myself to a new perspective on the journey. My plans may have changed; the grace God wants to give me has not. In this way, I come to see that God's will and God's plan for my life is not a linear,

predetermined project, but a branching network of roads, trails and paths along which I can move freely to reach the destination.

> " … so that you might go and bear fruit — fruit that will last …" (John 15:16)

Exploring and discovering new horizons, I yearn to share the joy of my experience with those around me. Thus, I try either to organize a joint trip or hike myself, or to join an existing group.

Five years ago, a cherished dream came true: I earned my driver's license. Since then, I have sought to organize trips with our sisters, young people and children. I am deeply convinced that time spent traveling together brings people closer, offering a fresh perspective on one another. It not only strengthens interpersonal relationships, but also unites an entire community on a far deeper level.

And so, having traveled dozens or hundreds of kilometers by foot, vehicle or plane, having visited many beautiful corners of this planet, and having conquered demanding mountain routes, I gather in my heart's treasury moments and impressions to revisit in everyday life. My hope is to awaken in others a spirit of adventure and a longing not only for mountain peaks, but for spiritual ascents — where the good and unfathomable Lord God awaits every one of us.