Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Anuja Tilj)

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I have a friend who lost a son in a car accident when he was 20-years-old. That was 37 years ago. This summer her 6-year-old grandson and his mother were struck and killed by a school bus while crossing the street on the last day of school. How much suffering, I asked myself, can one family bear?

"It never leaves you," Rita told me. "But eventually you learn to dance in the rain."

Along the way she discovered a prayer that comforts and guards her: The Surrender Novena. She says it every night. I think it is helpful not only for living with unbearable grief, but for navigating the inevitable troubles that sweep like tides through our daily lives. I've been saying the prayer of surrender every morning since Rita shared it with me.

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Each prayer in the brief nine-day novena takes about five minutes. It begins with words from Jesus urging us to put our trust in him. We then say 10 times, "O Jesus, I surrender myself to you, take care of everything!"

I may not have yet learned to dance in the rain, but I've experienced scales of worry falling from my brain like dead skin peeling off the face of the leper healed by Jesus. If that were not miracle enough (and it is) I have more often than not found my problems solved or dissolved by day's end. My problems do tend to be trivial, like distress over losing my internet and not knowing how to get it back, or thinking I may have said something to offend someone and not knowing what, if anything, to do about it. But sometimes they come tied in a knot with my heart's well-being, like experiencing a loved one's pain that I can't make go away.

Jesus says to us on the first day of the novena, "Why do you confuse yourselves by worrying? Leave the care of your affairs to me and everything will be peaceful. I say to you in truth that every act of true, blind, complete surrender to me produces the effect that you desire and resolves all difficult situations."

Why must we say 10 times, "O Jesus, I surrender myself to you, take care of everything?" Isn't once enough? I think it's like having to forgive "seventy times seven" times (Mt 18:21-22). It takes repetition to get it right. We may not really mean it the first time. By the 10th we do.

"O Jesus, I surrender myself to you, take care of everything!"

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We can also say that we surrender but continue to fret and try to fix things. We are then like the proverbial monkey with our hand stuck in the jar holding on to the peanut. We'll only be free of our anxiety when we let go of the peanut. The Surrender Novena puts our problem in God's hands.

Jesus describes our frantic efforts this way: "It is like the confusion that children feel when they ask their mother to see their needs, and then try to take care of those needs for themselves so that their childlike efforts get in their mother's way. Surrender means to placidly close the eyes of the soul, to turn away from thoughts of tribulation and to put yourself in my care, so that only I act, saying, 'You take care of it.' "

Play it again: O Jesus, I surrender myself to you, take care of everything.

The Surrender Novena is not a "giving up" but a "giving to." Jesus showed us the way in the garden of Gethsemane, when stricken with fear for tomorrow and sweating blood, he prayed, "Father, not my will but thine be done." And what happened next? An angel came to comfort him. He did it again the next day, when nailed to a cross and feeling forsaken, he forgave all those who tormented him and surrendered his life to God: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!" Then found himself in the place he had never really left, seated at the right hand of his Father in heaven.



(Unsplash/Jon Tyson)

Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father," not my Father but our Father. "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:20). To surrender to Jesus then is to surrender to our one Father who will send his angel to comfort us, too.

God, our Father, our Mother, our Source, doesn't want to hurt us. His will for us is good, pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:2). "Thy will be done, not mine," is our antidote to despair. It puts control where it belongs, in the hands of all-knowing, all-powerful Love. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

Perhaps you, like me, worry about many things, like Martha in the Gospel, rather than sit at peace in the presence of Jesus like her sister Mary. Or maybe you suffer the grief of unfathomable loss like Rita and so many others do. This Christmas is as good a time as any for us to consider Mary, the mother of Jesus, and try something completely different: total, blind and true surrender to God.



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When the angel told Mary she was with child, she was greatly troubled. "How can this be?" she wanted to know. "I am a virgin." What will people think? She had to wonder. She was betrothed but not married. Would Joseph abandon her? What would she do? Where could she go? The angel told her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy — the Son of God."

Mary couldn't understand what all of this meant, but her trust in Yahweh was great, and she surrendered her ego to God's plan: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:26-38). The mystic Meister Eckhart wrote 12 centuries later, "We are all meant to be mothers of God."

Today we say, with all the trust we can muster: O Jesus, I surrender myself to you, take care of everything!

Repeat nine more times.