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Religious Life



"The Pentecost," an 18th-century Spanish painting by Antonio González Velázquez (Artvee)

by The Life Panelists

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Sometimes we hold on tightly to what feels safe, familiar or comfortable, but life still calls us to let go, to trust, and to make space for something new.

As we move from the feast of the Ascension to Pentecost, we are reminded that even when we don't always understand those movements, the Holy Spirit comes and whispers softly into our hearts.

This month we invited our panelists to reflect on the question:

When have you had an Ascension or Pentecost "moment" when you had to stop clinging and let go? How did the Holy Spirit show up for you?



Angela Cameron is a contemplative nun of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptoristines), based in Dublin. Originally from Scotland, she holds a master's degree in theology with a focus on spirituality. As a Redemptoristine, her charism is to embody the living memorial of God's redemptive work through Christ. She is dedicated to a life of union with Christ, expressing her vocation through love, service and deep contemplative prayer. Engaging in silent prayer and praise, she lives out

the Redemptoristines' mission of reflecting Christ's paschal mystery in everyday life.

I remember reading as a young woman a quote from an interview with Mother Teresa of Kolkata.

A young woman asked her, "How do you know if God is calling you?"

Mother Teresa paused and said to her: "She knows. If God is calling her, she knows!"

I wanted to exclaim: "*BUT HOW* do you know?"

I was taking my first steps in discerning my own vocation at that time, and I mulled that phrase over quite a bit. Its truth came to dwell within me. The intensity — yet utter gentleness — of the call of God I experienced made it unquestionable for me. I had to follow it. It consumed my mind, my heart, my life. God had a plan for me. I knew …

The gentle promptings of the Spirit in my life come accompanied by an intensity — an appeal that rises from within to listen, and to listen deeply. While the intensity of feeling and emotion settles in the day-to-day living of a relationship with God that, through grace, grows and deepens gradually and somewhat uneventfully, in those moments when I have felt the Spirit call me in a bigger way —to move, to act, to let go — I know.

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>
> —Sr. Angela Cameron
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St. Ignatius Loyola, in particular, gives guidelines for the discernment of spirits. His approach involves a deep listening. It requires self-knowledge and a willingness to be open, to speak the truth to ourselves and to others, to ask hard questions. It means being in touch with God in our inmost being—and allowing him to speak.

If we live our lives like this, "we know," as Mother Teresa affirmed. This is not thanks to any merit of our own, but the Spirit's powerful gift within us.

This is how the Spirit shows up in my own experience—in the depths of my being.

After many years in an active community, I experienced that intense but gentle prompting of the Spirit again in my call to contemplative life. I had so many ideas of what fidelity and perseverance meant. I had said "yes" and I'd said it in this community, in this mission. How could I change? How could I let go of those relationships with the other sisters? Let them down even …? We were few. They'd be one less. How could that be of God?

But I knew. I knew I had to try. The Spirit moved me to go beyond all of those noble ideas and values and sense of commitment to what was being spoken in the depths of my being. And so again I could say "yes," in freedom and trust— and in the great vulnerability of letting go and risking all.

And I'll be forever grateful.



Sr. Anne Arabome is pictured with the women in formation for the Sisters of Social Service in Encino, California. (Courtesy of Anne Arabome)



Anne Arabome is a member of the Sisters of Social Service in Los Angeles with Nigerian origins and naturalized U.S. citizenship. She previously served as associate director of the Faber Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Marquette University. In 2024, she relocated to Windhoek, Namibia, where she founded and directs the Sophia Institute for Theological Studies and Spiritual Formation. She is also directing the project of theological studies and intercongregational living in Scotland under the auspices of CORLIN. A faith-filled Catholic woman religious, she is deeply committed to ministry, social justice and scholarship, focusing on the spiritual lives of African women and Ignatian spirituality. She holds a doctorate in systematic theology and a Doctor of Ministry in Spirituality.

In 2019, I was invited to create the prayer rituals and liturgical celebrations for my congregation's chapter during Pentecost. It turned out to be a remarkably successful experience. Although my sisters expressed sincere gratitude for my creativity, I found myself longing for one particular affirmation—from our general director. Her lack of personal acknowledgment deflated my ego. Despite the deep appreciation I received from many of my sisters, I clung to a need for more praise.

That unrequited desire lingered. So, when I was invited back to assist with the formation program, I demurred. Resentful and emotionally drained, I arrived at the Holy Spirit Retreat Center in Encino with reluctance, still brooding over the lack of appreciation I had felt the last time. I confided in the sister who led the formation program, that my heart wasn't in it. I listed all I had already done for the community, insisting that I didn't want to give more.

That night, everything changed.

Around 2:00 a.m., I had a vivid spiritual experience. In my dream, I saw a majestic and terrifying Lion emerging from the clouds, demanding, "Feed me! Feed me!" I ran, locking doors, but the lion kept coming—fierce, powerful, relentless. I woke up trembling and weeping, overwhelmed by a sense of shame and contrition. At dawn, I

confided in one of my sisters. Her response baffled and amazed me: "That was the Lion of Judah. That was Christo!"



Sr. Anne Arabome is pictured with the women in formation for the Sisters of Social Service in Encino, California. (Courtesy of Anne Arabome)

In that moment, I understood—I had been inordinately seeking human affirmation when God was calling me to something deeper. The Risen Christ was asking me to feed his people, to offer my gifts freely and without counting the cost.

That morning, I led the prayer and encouraged the women in formation— and the sisters— to find Jesus and spend time with him. One of them shared that during her prayer in the chapel, the crucifix had transformed into a lion. I was stunned. She had no idea about my experience, yet her prayer affirmed it. The Lion of Judah had indeed come among us.

The rest of the formation week centered around the imagery of "Lion." The women drew it, prayed with the image, and reflected on its call. My own heart was

transformed: letting go of resentment, I offered myself fully. That was my Pentecost moment— when the Spirit came through for me and inspired a completely new and liberating outlook on life.

This encounter ended my need for praise and recognition. It propelled me into a new chapter of mission and ministry, including my call to serve in Africa. The Lion of Judah came not to flatter, but to call us—boldly and powerfully—into deeper freedom and generosity. That is the call of Jesus Christ in the Gospel.

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With a rich background in theology and psychology, Carrie Miller holds a master's in Christian spirituality from Creighton University and a master's in counseling psychology from Angelo State University. Initially formed with the Franciscan Sisters of Mary Immaculate, she transferred to the Sisters of the Living Word in 1980, where her passion for reflective writing and creative prayer began. Over the years, her ministries have spanned family ministry, trauma healing, ecumenical collaboration, and co-founding Families Forward, an outreach program for homeless families. After serving in community leadership from 2018 to 2023, she remains active in "extended leadership," immigrant support, environmental advocacy and spiritual direction.

One afternoon in a park, I met a homeless woman and offered her a pair of shoes. She accepted them with joy, then surprised me by saying: "That was swell of you to

bring me these shoes, Sister! But before I put them on, will you come with me?"

Her eagerness led us quickly to the other side of the park. We stopped in front of a family huddled together on the ground. My guide, holding her new shoes, leaned toward me and whispered, with beaming eyes and a radiant smile, "These shoes are great, Sister, but mine aren't really *that* bad — and look, the mother *has none*! Would you mind if I give them to *her*?"

Without waiting for a reply, the gift was given. The joy upon the faces of both women was glowing.



(Unsplash/Thomas Le)

From deep recesses within, I heard the echo: "Take off your sandals, for the ground upon which you stand is holy!" As my own shoes were then slipped off and set beside the eldest child of the family, I knew this was a sacred "Pentecost moment." I was witnessing the freedom of poverty, the true meaning of sharing. I knew I was standing (barefoot!) in the grace of kindness, trust and gentleness of spirit. Standing

in this grace of goodness, and sharing in this joy – I was standing, truly, in the grace of God. We were aflame with the love, joy and Spirit of God!

Soon after, I recalled how Pope Francis had repeatedly spoken about a major problem in our world today: *indifference*. I began to recognize more often that perhaps it is precisely *indifference* in our world that God uses as *the kindling* for a Pentecost fire — enabling us to recognize that the moment in which we stand is holy, moving "indifference" to "making a difference."

It happened that day in the park, and happens repeatedly in my life, as I become more attuned to the nudging of the Spirit.



Pope Francis greets immigrants at the port in Lampedusa, Italy, in this file photo from July 8, 2013. During his visit, the pontiff urged people not to be part of the "globalization of indifference" to the plight of the millions worldwide who are immigrants and refugees. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano via CPP)

Such transformative moments enable the acceptance of empowering grace — to be an instrument of God's Living Word, just as the first Pentecost did – for the transformation of the heart of the world. This begins with the transformation of *my own heart*, becoming a flame of compassion in the world upon which I have an impact.

This is both a humbling and awesome truth: a responsibility to be accepted, lived with wisdom and fortitude; lived through charity, with patience, understanding; lived so that *others may live* in peace, with joy.

Such moments may catch me by surprise. Who knows what "shoes" I will next be nudged to take off, what indifference called to confront, what ground to stand upon and see it as holy — aflame with the Spirit of God. Another Pentecost.

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Jean Fernandez, a member of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, served as a missionary in the United States for more than 30 years with the Province of Mid-North America. In 2021, she returned to Singapore, where she now ministers within the Singapore-Malaysia province. With a degree in counseling psychology, she focuses on spiritual mentorship and counseling, accompanying individuals on their faith journeys and offering services in mental health. She also serves as a supervisor and educator at Marymount Convent School in Singapore, dedicated to guiding both youth and adults.

As I write this reflection, I realize again that letting go is never easy. It often feels like loosening my grip on something that brings comfort, safety or a sense of control. And yet, throughout my journey in religious life, I have come to see that even good and beautiful things sometimes ask to be released. Clinging too tightly

can hinder the quiet work of the Holy Spirit.

I remember a retreat some years ago on the theme of "*Letting Go*." During a quiet moment, I stood before a glorious sunset — the sky ablaze in gold and rose. I longed to hold that moment forever. I asked my retreat master, "Why should I let it go?" He answered simply, "Even good things need detachment. Let the beauty take root in your heart — but don't cling to the image." It was a Pentecost moment. Something shifted within me. The Spirit whispered: "*The grace of the moment remains, even when the image fades.*"



A shot from Raffles Marina in Singapore, looking toward Johor Bahru, Malaysia (Unsplash/Fuyu Yeo)

That memory opened a deeper truth: the need to let go of control, especially over my thoughts and plans. I often approached life with a full agenda, striving to keep things in order, hoping everything would go a certain way. But the Spirit would gently remind me: "*Your thoughts are not my thoughts.*" Slowly, I learned to pause,

pray and make space for God's vision, not just my own. In that surrender, I found peace.

Another invitation to let go came through time itself, how I guarded it, especially when tired or stretched from ministry. Yet grace often comes disguised: a sister needing support, a child's question, or a friend's phone call. These unplanned moments became sacred, inviting me to step away from my to-do list and simply be present to the moment.

And then there's the deepest letting go, when discouragement settles in. There are days I've wondered if what I do truly matters. In the challenges of community life, I have felt the pull to retreat, to stay hidden. But the Spirit never leaves me there. Sometimes, grace comes through a kind word, a warm smile, or simply the quiet assurance that God is still at work, often in ways I do not see.

Letting go has felt like an Ascension moment, watching something familiar rise beyond my reach. But that space left behind becomes holy ground. And then comes Pentecost, the Spirit's breath filling what felt empty.

I am not in control. I am held in love, in faith, in the heart of our shepherd God. And with each letting go, the transformative spirit finds new space to move and gently strengthens my heart.

> "The Spirit whispered: '*The grace of the moment remains, even when the image fades.*' "
>
> —Sr. Jean Fernandez
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Patricia Lourdes (Petite) Navarra Lao, a sister of Our Lady of the Missions from the Philippines, holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from Regis College,

Toronto School of Theology. She serves as the mission promoter and safeguarding lead for the Religious of Notre Dame of the Missions Philippine Region. With years of dedicated work among the Menubu Dulangan people on their ancestral land, she focuses on Indigenous rights, ecology, interfaith dialogue, and advancing digital educational technology to support her ministry. Her commitment reflects a profound dedication to fostering understanding and well-being in marginalized communities.

The feasts of Ascension and Pentecost speak deeply to my own journey of faith. When I reflect on the Ascension, I recognize moments in my life when I've had to let go — of roles, relationships or dreams I once held tightly. Like the disciples watching Jesus ascend into heaven, I've found myself staring at what used to be, uncertain of what lies ahead. The Ascension reminds me that letting go is not a loss but a movement toward something greater — a call to trust even when the future is unclear.

Then comes Pentecost—when the Holy Spirit arrives in power and surprise. The Spirit doesn't always come with dramatic fire or rushing wind. In my life, I've felt her presence quietly — in prayer, in community, and in unexpected clarity. These two feasts remind me that faith is both waiting and moving, both surrendering and stepping forward. The risen Jesus, through the Spirit, continues to guide, empower, and send me — just as he did with the first disciples.

> 'But beneath all the doubts, there was a quiet but persistent stirring that wouldn't go away. That, I believe, was the Spirit gently leading me.'
>
> —Sr. Patricia Lourdes (Petite) Navarra Lao
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One moment that I clearly identify as both an Ascension and Pentecost experience was when I joined the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions in 2002. It marked a significant transition and turning point. At that time, I was a civil engineering professor at a university, having just passed the board examinations. I had started teaching by accident — to fill in for a professor who had been injured—but my plan was always to pursue a career in civil engineering. After two years of teaching, I intended to return to the profession and excel in it. I was very career-oriented, so in

many ways, choosing religious life seemed completely unexpected — even to me.

I still remember the inner conflict and the sense of embarrassment when I made the decision. I couldn't explain it clearly to others — or even to myself. Letting go of a stable, promising future felt foolish. But beneath all the doubts, there was a quiet but persistent stirring that wouldn't go away. That, I believe, was the Spirit gently leading me.

The transition to religious life was not easy. I struggled to live as a consecrated person in community, especially after being used to an independent life. But over time, I was gifted with the extraordinary charism of the congregation, which gave me a deep sense of purpose and mission: the gift of sharing in the Divine Missions. Looking back, the career I let go of pales in comparison to the joy and grace of the life I have received. I have indeed gained more than I ever gave up or let go of. This moment taught me about faith, trust, and hope.

This story appears in the **The Life** feature series. View the full series.