

Walking the Way of Jesus

When it come to spiritual/liturgical practices, I'm a fairly typical “involved in the church person.” My husband and I rarely miss Sunday morning Eucharist. We each have taken on responsibilities consistent with our gifts and talents. More than 30 years ago, I became interested in the topic of spiritual gifts and was involved and teaching workshops. One of my strong results was hospitality, which was no surprise. In the lay world, I was a professional food editor for a major magazine publisher. I have always loved planning and cooking for others, and meals at church were not different. It doesn't matter whether it's arranging for a caterer, creating a signup sheet, or cooking an entire meal for a group, I'm happy to be involved.

I serve on Altar Guild and love the concept of preparing the meal for the family of Jesus. In our parish the Altar Guild has baked the bread in the parish kitchen since the '80s. A few months ago a similar-minded friend and I took on the task of experimenting with gluten-free communion bread and managed to get the parish switched to “one loaf for all.” I felt so close to the Holy Spirit for weeks after that.

It never occurred to me that noticing and welcoming strangers into our services was a special gift until one day I was telling a friend about “that new couple who sat in a specific place last Sunday.” “ How do you always see new people?” my friend asked. I had no clue that everyone didn't notice strangers in our midst. Over time, I learned to use that gift, encourage others who seem to have it, and to my great surprise, it inspires

others to be more aware.

Some of my most instilled spiritual practices come from my 94-year-old mother who has always been, and still is, full of “mom-isms” Almost none are Biblical, but I find many translate into Jesus teachings and are helpful in trying to walk in His footsteps. I think they fit the definition of personal mantras and are useful guides as I try to walk as Jesus did.

One I call upon regularly is, “You never stop growing.” This challenges me, even in really small stuff like, “I’m tired, I don’t want to cook dinner.” More importantly it floated around in my head when I was writing about the continuing resurrection. For me to walk the way of Jesus means I have to keep accepting new challenges, like writing this paper. My initial reaction was: the description is full of big words, how can I ever fill 8-10 pages, is it really the deacon’s job to change the Church, etc. Then the mantra, “You never stop growing” started banging around in my head.

“You never stop growing” has been instrumental in my continuing discernment of the call to ordination as a deacon. At an age when it seems I should be allowed (?) to simply rest on a lifetime of wisdom and learning, I find myself in a position of learning more. I have grown into several lay ministries over time, but apparently I’m not done. I need to keep growing, into this ordained one. After all, at 94, Mom lives this mantra, too! She has been one of my biggest cheerleaders. Often over coffee, she is interested in hearing about the readings I’ve recently done for my classes. So she, too, continues to grow with me.

“Don't make little people make you small,” is another “momism” I try to live by. I can remember hearing it since my childhood. Although it is a kissing cousin of Michelle Obama's “When they go low, we go high,” I think of both statements as translations of the Golden Rule. Whatever phrasing I choose as a mantra, I am challenged! It certainly applies when someone treats me with pettiness, but as I try to walk the way of Jesus, I also have to resist the temptation to be petty first. In this age of social media and political division, the opportunities to be “small,” in writing as well as in person, are available daily. Looking back, I remember clearly situations where I managed to “go high” with great pleasure, and they give me a warm fuzzy feeling. Alas, there are many more memories when I was just as “small” as the person(s) I interacted with. Walking the way of Jesus means I have to keep trying. Maybe I should say, keep growing!

My experience is that flexibility is an important spiritual practice, both for me and for my Christian community. I'm not sure who else would agree that it is a spiritual practice, but it seems imperative to practicing my spirituality and to the spirituality of my community. Flexibility as a spiritual practice reminds me of the woman who was healed simply by touching the hem of Jesus garment or the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus was very flexible in dealing with people. I often get amazed when I find the flexibility to offer but a little and the Holy Spirit magnifies it.

One of the times when personal flexibility seemed most difficult was about 20 years ago. My husband and I found a parish between the births of our first and second