

Vocation Reflections

January 2023



School Sisters of Notre Dame

Blessed Theresa, foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, reminds us:

“May the dear God, who helped so well this year, be our help and strength in the coming year also; we confidently hope and pray for this.” (Letter #2688)

Leave Room for the Holy Spirit*

by Rebecca Ruiz (Click [here](#) for the original)

When I sat down earlier this month to think about my New Year’s resolutions, I wrote three columns: Mind, Body, and Spirit. As I was contemplating my Spirit column, I kept remembering Pope Francis’s frequent admonitions to leave room for the Holy Spirit. While I did want to include this in my list of resolutions, I struggled with how to fit this concept into the column. I’m accustomed to listing specific, concrete, and quantifiable actions like, “I will pray the [Examen](#) every night,” or, “I will help at the food pantry twice each month.” I just couldn’t nail down the specifics of, “I will leave room for the Holy Spirit.” How would one quantify this? What are the steps one would take to accomplish this? How could I fit the Holy Spirit into the box? Fortunately, [Pope Francis has shared his wisdom](#) about this very dilemma:



Newness always makes us a bit fearful, because we feel more secure if we have everything under control, if we are the ones who build, program, and plan our lives in accordance with our own ideas, our own comfort, our own preferences. This is also the case when it comes to God. Often we follow him, we accept him, but only up to a certain point. It is hard to abandon ourselves to him with complete trust, allowing the Holy Spirit to be the soul and guide of our lives in our every decision... The newness which God brings into our life is something that actually brings fulfillment, that gives true joy, true serenity, because God loves us and desires only our good. **Let us ask ourselves today: Are we open to “God’s surprises”? Or are we closed and fearful before the newness of the Holy Spirit?**

Pope Francis makes me want to tweak my list. Who can say no to fulfillment, true joy, true serenity, and “God’s surprises”?



If we are going to leave room for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, it’s not just about listing quantifiable actions. The spiritual life is a relationship between God and us—God loving us, God calling us, and God waiting for us to respond to God’s invitation. When we leave room for the Holy Spirit, we say yes to being an active listener to God’s whispers in our heart. We say yes to seeing with the eyes of the heart as we witness God’s love displayed for us throughout the day in countless small ways. We say yes to the grace of the Spirit that allows that complete surrender of which St. Ignatius speaks in the [Suscipe](#) and the [First Principle and Foundation](#). And we say yes to responsiveness, openness, and flexibility to the unpredictable stirrings of the Spirit—the Spirit which brings surprises that are greater than we could ever plan or imagine. The Holy Spirit just doesn’t fit in a box.

Fr. Alfred Delp, a German Jesuit martyr of the Holocaust, learned to abandon himself fully to the Spirit during his last months in a Gestapo prison. In his last writings, Delp called upon the Holy Spirit to fix a world seemingly beyond repair and advised his parishioners that: “Man facing the Ultimate, must be someone in a state of being shaken, with an alert, awakened heart that does not freeze up, does not become weary, or cramped, or deadened, but sees things as they are.” (*Advent of the Heart*, 92)

This year, I have resolved to pray for the grace to be the kind of person of whom Fr. Delp speaks—a person “in a state of being shaken, with an alert, awakened heart that does not freeze up.” And I think it’s a good year to welcome that fulfillment, true joy, and true serenity, and [God’s surprises](#) of which Pope Francis speaks. I want the kind of heart that is responsive to the whispers of the Spirit, a “Yes-Lord-I-am-listening” kind of heart. And, for that kind of heart, I need to leave room for the Holy Spirit.

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For reflection: How am I open to God’s surprises?

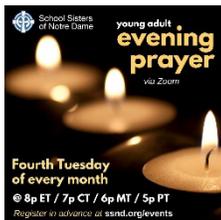
This month’s vocation resource:

A Woman’s Place: “Like those before her, Mother Theresa (SSND foundress) was challenged to be faithful to the Spirit and the hierarchy: a delicate balance. Her spirituality was rooted in prayer and strengthened by retreats. She had made the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* and both Bishop Sailer and Bishop Wittmann (two of her mentors) had been trained in the Jesuit tradition.” Read more [here](#).

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Looking ahead



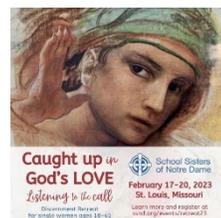
Online Evening Prayer

January 24, 2023
February 28, 2023
March 28, 2023
8 p.m. ET / 7 p.m. CT



Joyful & Alive Conversation

January 19, 2023
8 p.m. ET / 7 p.m. CT



SSND Discernment Retreat

February 17-19, 2023
St. Louis, MO



God's cause
is the *only* concern of
our hearts



Vocation Reflections is a monthly newsletter for those interested in learning more about discernment, prayer, and other topics related to the consecrated/vowed life. For questions, comments and subscription information, please contact sisters@ssnd.org.