

I don't know about you, but one of the things that I really like is control over my plans and the future. For instance, I usually travel alone as nature photography is my main hobby, so I don't really have to plan for anything other than my schedule to be dictated by where I think the birds are or the best photos might be that given day. Traveling alone I can stop where I want when I want.

As we all know though life does not quite work that way. Even when I'm seemingly in control of where I'm going to go take pictures, there's a whole lot that's out of my control. The road may be under construction. The weather might change. The birds might not be there. Plans may change due to something coming up at the parish. Or something else may come up preventing me from getting the desired outcome. I've also learned that there's so much I'm still learning too, meaning over the years I've learned some spots are better than others, how I take a photo has changed, and I need to rely on the advice of others to help me get the desired results. Even still though plans have changed many times, and I've had many disappointments as a photographer, what I've come to learn is that much simply isn't in my power to control. I can do my part, but I also need to be

patient and keep trying when things don't work out on any given day, and listen to the counsel of others as I strive to become better.

The same is true in life. I want to consistently improve as a photographer, but much more so as a human being. And doing so means that one has to let go, and let God.

Francesca Lang, who today is married and works with the YMCA in Florida, years ago found herself in a situation where she had to learn this.

She begins her story by writing "Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It's been one hour since I grabbed the reins and took control...again."

She describes herself as a planning, anal-retentive, organizing perfectionist who likes to make lists and be in control whenever possible as a type A personality.

She wasn't sure where it began, perhaps when she was 7 and learned she had a learning disability, or throughout grade school as she taught herself how to overcome and cope with her learning disability until it became

barely noticeable. Or maybe during high school when she graduated in the top 10 percent of her class. As she puts it, her life is a variable breadcrumb trail of experiences that point to her excessive effort to control life's situations and circumstances, in her own effort to find peace and comfort. What she knows is that her life though spiraled out of control during her freshman year of college.

Discounting the plethora of changes that occur during that transitional phase in a young adults, life, she developed a severe eating disorder. She was unhappy with her campus life and what little school family she had was wrapped up in her rowing team. Life was perfect, until she blew out both her knees during a placement test that determined boat position. She ignore the pain at first, wincing through the training sessions and competitions. She couldn't lose this, what would she do she thought. Besides, she reasoned, she could overcome this. It wasnt until she couldn't make it up the stairs that she had to face the problem. After months of therapy, doctor consultations, and cortisone shots, it was determined that surgery was out of the question, it wasn't severe enough, and she would no longer be able to row. She was devastated. The coach let her stay on as a

coxswain, but it never felt right. She began her lengthy descent into the valley.

It wasn't long before the eating disorder started to take control, although she thought she was the one holding the reins. Eventually Francesca had to admit that she needed help. She called home, withdrew from college and entered rehab. It was one of the most awful times of her life.

Rehab she says was worse. Of course, she says she was completely and utterly out of control. It was a nightmare. She had no say in what she ate, when she ate, what she did, when she did it, or free-time activities. She couldn't even work out, which she needed for her sanity. But just when she thought things couldn't get worse, a yearning developed from deep within, and a faint light began to glow in the distance.

It was then that Francesca says she saw Jesus and met Him again, although it felt like the first time. During her 60 days in rehab, she was alone, truly alone for the first time. She had no choice but to look within herself. She began to relish her daily time of reflection, and soon began to pray and foster her newfound relationship. And, before she knew it, she

was out of the valley and back on the mountain path. But this time, she had a travel guide.

Francesca says she has been through various other mountains and valleys over the years, and they haven't always been easy or pretty. As she puts it, our relationship with the Lord isn't a promise of smooth paths; in fact, sometimes they are rockier. But what He does promise she says is that we will never travel it alone or in complete darkness. There will always be a lantern, map and guide to traverse the winding and shaky terrain with us.

She admits now much older that she still likes to be in control, but these days she has an easier time recognizing it and calmly, although sometimes half-heartedly, she hands the wheel back over to God. As the tried and true analogy states: you are driving in a car with Christ. he is at the wheel, and you are in the back seat, taking it all in. Worries, troubles, headaches and problems come and go, but with Christ in control, you never have to worry because He knows exactly how to run the show. And, what Francesca has found is she likes the back seat, for she knows that the driver will safely get her where she needs to go.

In the Gospel this week which continues the farewell discourse from John, the disciples are worried about how they are going to continue when Jesus leaves them. He explains that He is not abandoning them. And the promise is the lantern that Francesca speaks of, the map and the guide that we call the Holy Spirit, or the Advocate, or Paraclete. Jesus was an advocate too, as the intercessor for us in heaven. We want to follow Him there, but the problem is if we are all on our own, inevitably we'll get lost. And so the Advocate or Holy Spirit comes to remain with the disciples to encourage, comfort, console and counsel. He is our teacher. And our task is to let God take the wheel, but also to remember that just as we grow up and learn to drive, the Spirit if you will helps us to drive too - but we need to keep listening to the directions that we are given. Doing this requires a few things. Namely 1) letting go of control; 2) letting go of fear and 3) listening to God and growing in our faith.

With respect to control, we ask ourselves do we truly as the saying goes let go and let God? Do we trust in others too to help us find our way?

Stubbornness can be a major obstacle to spiritual growth. Jesus says if you love me, you will keep my commandments and then that we will observe them. Sometimes though we want to do things our way, rather than God's

way. Or we may even try to control others too. Life brings with it many ups and downs and changes, and we have to be willing to open up our hearts and ask God what He wants us to do. We might not like the answer, because it might entail a lot of hard work and challenges. It might mean taking a risk. It might be something scary. But remember, we are not alone, we are not orphans. God will see us through, but we have to trust that He knows what's best for us. So ask Him and discern His will through prayer, through silence, through talking to others who are faith-filled people who will help you discern. That's what Philip does in the first reading, as he accepts help from Peter and John and isn't full of himself seeing them as rivals, but as helpers. For when we discern God's plans and let Him be in charge, He'll ultimately lead us to heaven.

Doing that though entails overcoming fear. It can be scary to not have the wheel; to always see where we are going. The disciples want to follow Jesus, but fear got in the way on Good Friday. Fear can get in the way. It's what caused Francesca to at first not see past her situation in rehab thinking just of how awful it was, and not knowing what the next day would bring. But the Holy Spirit, the Helper, also gives us courage. It's what causes the apostles to go to unfamiliar lands. The Holy Spirit gave

Francesca the courage to get through rehab and get her life back on track. So when we get afraid, we can look to the Eucharist and Christ, but we can also look to the Holy Spirit that is given to us to guide us, to see us through, and be reminded that God stands with us always.

And lastly, we grow in our faith. The Holy Spirit helps us to mature and understand the faith. Through the Spirit, we not only discern what we are called to do but how to do it, so we can, as we hear that second reading “give an explanation” to those who ask us about why we have faith. We can also understand how to keep God’s commandments. So with that, we again want to look at ourselves and not be stubborn or set in our ways about the things we find easy to accept and ignore those things that are more challenging teachings for us of our faith. Sometimes people who identify as Catholic are quick to spout off on social media or the Internet about doctrine or judge a pope or bishop, but the same people can be hesitant to change or listen. We want to listen to the Church and trust Her guidance by willing to be challenged, and being open to learning more about our faith through being an engaged Catholic, but also looking for ways to grow in our faith by learning it long past the time we are confirmed. As we do that, the Holy Spirit too will help us to testify to the faith and engage with others, not

through yelling or trying to force feed the faith to them but through patience and active engagement and talking about the faith with them. Growing in the faith is life long; we go from learning how to pray or learning the basics to learning why we believe what we believe and how to articulate it, while at the same time remembering that the Holy Spirit continues to open our minds and guide the Church to understanding the faith more deeply through Tradition with the capital "T." Through being open to the Holy Spirit, we can make sure we aren't stuck in a rut but that our faith really grows.

Some time ago when talking to my dad, we were talking about the day I was born. And he said one of his first thoughts was "okay, what do I do now?" I think every new parent feels that way, but we all feel that way too when we face new challenges in life. Certainly right now not having control over the virus but also not having control over other things it can cause a lot of anxiety, because we don't see the endgame. But Jesus knew that for His friends who would suffer greatly for the faith and the Church after He ascended, that they also needed help along the way and a light in the darkness. And so in this moment, when we need that light and a friend when there is so much uncertainty, let us remember the Spirit who "remains with and in you" is our comforter, counsellor and friend, for God

does not lead us in the darkness, but gives us the light and will safely lead us through the peaks and valleys of life to the heavenly kingdom. Like Francesca, let us just have that trust and let Him lead us home.