

LETTING GO...

Written by Angela Anno

Ask anyone who knows me and they'll tell you that I like order, predictability, and—let's be honest—things my way. I'm not exactly a control freak—at least I don't think so—but I'm a lot more comfortable when I know how things are going. You think I would have learned by now. My life is far from the script that I had planned. I married late, became a single parent, remarried and then buried my husband 5 ½ years later. It definitely isn't what I envisioned—the growing old together like my parents who shared 68 years of married life.

But I do have wonderful children, grandchildren, and friends and though the ministry at St. Leo's is far from predictable, I love it. When I really take time to consider it, I realize that I'm exactly in the right place and my life is good—different from my plans, but in many ways far richer than I could have imagined. Then why is it that I, like so many of us, keep trying to control things, when, as a wise friend puts it, control is just an illusion?

I found myself struggling with this at a deeper level this past Advent when I followed an on-line Ignatian spirituality suggestion to prayerfully choose five words to pray with during that season of anticipation. I'm still praying with them this Lent. I'll share mine and encourage you to take some quiet time and see what words the Spirit raises for you.

My first word is “trust.” Somehow, even though I know differently, I have a hard time doing my best and trusting the rest to God. I guess maybe I figure God is too busy and I'll help by taking up the slack. Or maybe, if I jump into the unknown, God may not catch me. Or if I'm not doing something, it won't get done and that will be a disaster. When I say this out loud, it sounds silly and egotistical, but I struggle none the less.

“Expectancy,” a sense that something wonderful is coming, I'm not sure what, is my second word. It's kind of like being pregnant, sensing the new life, feeling the kicks and jousts, not yet knowing this new little person, but loving it beyond anything I'd ever known. It's the excitement of a child wanting for Christmas—but so much more.

My third word, “letting go” is the toughest of all. I want to hold on, keep things as they are with no change, just the way I like them. Of course my life tells me that change brings opportunity, but I'm still more comfortable with things my way. However, if I keep hanging on then I shut out the new and risk alienating those I most love. Hands open, not clutching, are ready to receive. I really do want to have open hands.

“New life,” my fourth word, follows the others. If I am willing to trust more, wait in anticipation, and have open hands, new life surely follows. It may not be the new life of a child or grandchild, but a new life in the spirit that gives me courage to walk through new doors and see the challenges and gifts God is offering if I will accept them.

Finally, there is “tenderness,” a deepening awareness that God cares for me, as psalm 131 says, like a nursing mother cares for her child. It’s understanding that God has “pitched his tent” among us as the first chapter of John’s gospel says, and wants to be as intimate with us as the branches are to the vine “Remain” in Me. That’s mentioned more than a dozen times in the 15th chapter of John. “I am the Good Shepherd... I know mine and mine know me” (John 10) And God is the rejoicing father who lavishes love on the wayward prodigal son (Luke 15). Jesus says “come to me, all those who are weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11) God is no scorekeeper, but gentle, tender, and loving. Sometimes I forget that and need to be reminded.

These are the five words I continue praying with. What five words will God give you this Lent? Open your heart and see where God is inviting.