



Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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Autumn: The Season of Letting Go

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on OCTOBER 27, 2014

It is autumn where I live—here in the northern hemisphere. As the earth gradually tilts away from the sun, the change around us is quite dramatic: the days are getting shorter, the temperatures are going down, and (most amazing of all) the leaves have turned bright colors and are falling from our trees. Autumn is the season of change, of letting go—letting go of light, warmth, and lush green foliage.



For many of us change is not easy. And the change that involves a *letting go* is the most difficult change of all. That's because for some of us, the phrase *letting go* has negative connotations. We equate it with giving up or surrendering. And surrendering is for wimps. Yet our Christian tradition tells us that letting go plays a vital role in our spiritual life. It is anything but wimpish. On the contrary, letting go demands great

courage and resolve. And although letting go can look a lot like dying, it can actually be life-giving for ourselves and for others.

What are some of the things we have to let go of on our life's journey? Sooner or later we all have to let go of our childhood, our adolescence, our youth. We also may have to let go of certain relationships, a cherished home, a particular job, an accustomed way of doing things, past joys, past hurts, good health. Death, of course, is the ultimate letting go. All the other letting go's we do in life are "rehearsals" for that final great yielding of ourselves into the hands of God.

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend, poet,
farm girl.



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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality—the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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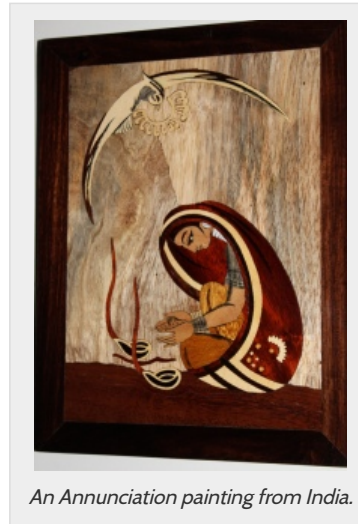
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But why is letting go so difficult at times? For one thing, we like to be in control, and every letting go involves a loss of control. Secondly, letting go entails uncertainty. We know what we have now, but if we let go of it, who knows what will happen to us in the future. Thirdly, it takes energy to let go of the known and move into the unknown. And we simply resist the exertion required to let go. It's often easier to stay put.

But our faith tradition is filled with individuals who let go in dramatic ways and surrendered themselves to God and to God's designs. By doing so, they found new life for themselves and others. Moses, for example, surrendered himself to God at the burning bush and went on to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Jonah surrendered to God in the belly of the whale and saved the vast city of Nineveh from destruction. Mary surrendered to God at the Annunciation and brought forth the Savior of the world. Paul surrendered to Jesus on the road to Damascus and was transformed into the great apostle to the Gentiles. Ignatius surrendered to God on his bed of pain and went on to found a religious congregation that has served the church for over 450 years. In 1843 Sojourner Truth surrendered to God's plan for her and became one of the most influential voices against the evils of slavery.



An Annunciation painting from India.

Letting go is not always neat. It is seldom once-and-for-all either. For our God is a God who calls us again and again to continue on our journey, to move forward. What helps us to let go is not so much the belief that things will turn out exactly the way we want them too. No, it is rather the conviction that no matter how things turn out, *God is with us through it all*. And even if we let go and tumble and fall, we will be caught and held in the tender arms of our loving God.

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What are some of the things you have had to let go of in your life?

What helps you to let go?

Have you ever experienced new life after letting go?

PS: Thank you for the prayers for my retreat last week. I held all the readers of my blog in special prayer....I noticed that my blog is approaching 2,000 responses from readers like you. I expect response #2,000 from one of you within the next several weeks. The person who writes response #2,000 will receive one of my books as a gift. It's a small way of saying "thank you" to you for reading and interacting with my blog.

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Kathleen Magiera October 27, 2014 at 7:04 am



Beautiful reflection Sr. Melannie during this time of the year.

I have had to let go of a work colleague who has moved on to other projects. Right now, I am approaching a time of flux and allowing God to work in me is scary.

Thanks for your prayers. Glad the retreat went well.

Kathleen

REPLY

cynthia October 27, 2014 at 8:49 am



Beautiful and true writing. Particularly love your insight that surrendering is not “always neat” and it is a continuous unfolding or laying down of the self; that surrendering to God is ongoing faith and practice that He is with us through everything. No matter how things have turned out or will not turn out the way we want, He is with us, will carry us when we need most to be carried gives us heart on our faith journey. Thank you for this reminder to let go and step out of our small self's confines onto the water of faith, into Him. God Bless....

REPLY

JoAnn Welch October 27, 2014 at 8:33 am



Thank you, Sr. Melanie...letting go is difficult but worth the effort!!

REPLY

Kristel October 27, 2014 at 9:19 am



How did you know this is just what I needed to hear today. Have a wonderful week and enjoy God's CREATION

REPLY

mary james October 27, 2014 at 9:48 am



Right on target! I need to let go DAILY! of –you said it –control. You beautifully showed how surrender is anything but wimpy. As usual—it's a paradox: Surrender to win!

REPLY

Patricia October 27, 2014 at 9:50 am



Today is the first time I have received your Monday e-mail. LOVE IT!

Your message was right on target for me.
The saying “You know the devil you got, but not the devil you are gonna get”

resounds with me.

I have a hard time letting go and giving into change...but as I look back over my life, I can see that all the times I resisted change and it happened anyway God was with me and let me through it. Thanks for the reminder

REPLY

Patti October 27, 2014 at 10:03 am



Letting go... how appropriate! My daughter is dying of cancer at 43... I have tried to bargain with God, trade her illness (I am a 16 year survivor of breast cancer) and yet she suffers daily... I know we are not supposed to question, just believe... He is in charge and will take care of my girl... It's just hard... Truly this was an inspirational message today! Thank you for directing me on the right path... You are a blessing!

REPLY

Kathi S October 27, 2014 at 11:29 am



Patti, my heart goes out to you. You and your precious daughter will be in my prayers.

REPLY

Jean Shott October 27, 2014 at 10:03 am



As we age, we let go of a lot of things – our children to others in marriage, our strength (to be replaced with pain!), aging friends and relatives who have “let go” of earth. But it’s also a time of new adventures – “letting go” of clutter and unused things to downsize to a new start in a different home or location. We can only go forward, and that, too, is a blessing!

REPLY

Chris Keil October 27, 2014 at 10:13 am



Well, I'm going to have to let go of my children so they can be independent contributing members of society, which is of course what we raised them to become. One is married and has a baby, one is joining the Navy next month and the other is close to getting married.....a lot of letting go happening here.

Soon we'll be empty nesters!
Thanks Sr. Melannie.....

REPLY

Marilyn t. Sabatino, S.N.D. October 27, 2014 at 10:23 am



Mel, inspiring message on letting go...thanks for all the times you helped me to let go and let God be God.....take care!!!Marilyn

REPLY

Linda Gilmartin October 27, 2014 at 10:39 am



There is peace after letting go!

REPLY

Dae October 27, 2014 at 10:41 am



Thank you for encouraging me to continue to let go of my impatience and control of situations and to let God take care of things for me. I need to always remember that He is in control of my life and that I need to rely on Him for all things.

REPLY

Diane October 27, 2014 at 10:49 am



Hi,
This is my first Monday Sunflower seed. I just found this blog last week on my new journey through life, with lots of hopes to let go and to grow.
Thank you!

REPLY

Suzanne Sayer October 27, 2014 at 11:03 am



I had to let go of my husband who wanted a divorce—but eventually The Lord sent me a better man! His time! His will! I love autumn—I have never thought of it as a letting go—I guess because it is so glorious. I saw a quote from Albert Camus: “Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower.” Just a different kind of spring!

REPLY

Mary Schneider October 27, 2014 at 11:13 am



Sr Melannie: Not only do I “let go” in autumn, I actually rejoice in it! I love the colder weather (I can always put on a sweater). I do, also, hope I am improving my letting-go so as to let God in more and more. Thank you!

REPLY

Tricia Phillips October 27, 2014 at 11:17 am



Your blog and newsletters etc. are wonderful...much to reflect on and very often as a spiritual director myself I find them helpful to incorporate some of your thoughts into programs that I prepare. I do not use them word for word and I always give you credit and suggest to others that they may want to check out your website....Thanks and blessings

REPLY

Ann October 27, 2014 at 11:24 am



Thanks, Melannie. I broke my dominant arm recently and immediately had to let go of numerous ordinary things I do every day. I have become very dependent on others. I'm learning and keep wondering what God is saying to me through it all. I'm trying to listen.

REPLY

Kathi S October 27, 2014 at 11:24 am



Since my Mom's passing last month (letting go of light and warmth), I feel like the autumn leaves being blown about by the wind. Your words today really

touched me. I feel it's time for me to let go of trying to control being "blown about" and ride the wind, to be brave enough to perhaps tumble and fall. You reminded me that those "Tender Arms" will catch me. Thank you for your much needed words.

REPLY

Cathy Baier October 27, 2014 at 11:24 am



I love this time of year....the brilliant sunshine which makes the fall colors stand out even more. It becomes a melancholy time as we watch the trees become bare. I remember a beautiful book called 'The Fall of Freddie the Leaf' by Leo Buscaglio. Freddie has conversations with other leaves about letting go. It's true in our lives as well...letting go of fears is hard but God always fulfills His promises.

REPLY

Anne Busch October 27, 2014 at 11:35 am



I think as we age, we are asked to "Let go: more and more. You are right; sometimes we are asked to "let go" more than once. Fall is a good reminder as we watch nature change. I always enjoy the questions at the end of Sunflowers. It makes me think. Thank you.

REPLY

Carolyn Shalhoub October 27, 2014 at 11:38 am



This fall has challenged and reminded me about letting go. Three friends have been diagnosed with serious cancer recently, another friend died of cancer recently, and another just completed chemo and radiation. Good health is something we take for granted until we don't have it and there is a whole new and often unpleasant "normal". And completely without warning. Fall is the perfect season for these ruminations. It takes effort to remember about resurrection and spring right now. Thanks so much for this blog.

REPLY

Sr. Celeste Albers October 27, 2014 at 11:54 am



Melannie, just a year ago I let go of my pastoral ministry in parishes to become our motherhouse liturgist and only musician. I was feeling that it was a time to move on after being in the parish for ten years. It was also the time when our motherhouse liturgist who was an ordained minister of the Church of the Brethren had decided to move on. Our sisters were grieving because it looked like there would only be music at the Sunday liturgy. After several consultations, I felt it was a call from God to minister to my motherhouse community, which I began in August of 2013. The hardest part was giving up my ministry in RCIA which I had done for 27 years. It was a difficult call to "let go". But just a month ago I was graced with a call from a friend who had worked with me in RCIA the last year I was doing it in the parish. She said her pastor had just asked her to start the RCIA in her parish, which is just 10 miles down the road from us. She asked me if I would serve as a consultant and teacher on her team. We have met twice now and I now have a new energy! I continue to discover that even very difficult times of "letting go" can provide wonderful new surprises if we are willing to wait for them. Your weekly blogs are such a GIFT to me! God bless you!

REPLY

Marjorie Lewis October 27, 2014 at 12:27 pm



Thank you, Sister! Beautiful reminder for all of us, no matter our age. As a senior citizen I can attest to this journey of having to let go. Knowing God is in control and is there to lead us through each one is a comfort and brings such peace.

REPLY

Nona Higgins October 27, 2014 at 12:28 pm



I so look forward to Sunflower Seeds each week. They are inspiring meditations for me whatever the topic. This poignant autumn season of "letting go" is another gift. Thank you!

REPLY

Sister Gladys Marhefka October 27, 2014 at 12:50 pm



Hi Melanie,

I enjoyed the reflection on letting go very much. I have just experienced the passing of my dear friend Jesuit, Paul Lucey on May 3rd after a long long friendship. Of course, faith tells me he is still close and only a breath away according to Josh Groban.

Enjoy the beautiful season of Autumn.

REPLY

Rita October 27, 2014 at 1:05 pm



Our sisters are having to “let go” of their home in the next few years and move to a place we don’t yet know. The journey is a mystery but we know that God is with us in it and God is in us with it.

REPLY

Stephanie October 27, 2014 at 1:20 pm



I liked how you emphasized that letting go not only benefits the one letting go, but others as well. Sometimes I resist letting go because of how I believe it will impact others. Your post reminded me that when I let go, it often opens the way for others. Thank you!

REPLY

Annette October 27, 2014 at 1:29 pm



Beautiful essay on an important “matter of life”.

REPLY

Helen Kemper October 27, 2014 at 1:31 pm



Thank you Sr. Melanie for this beautiful reflection. In my 88 years I have had to “let go” many times and God has always been there for me. As you said ,it is not a one time thing but happens over again many times. Thank you for helping me understand this in a different way.

Helen K Florida associate

REPLY

Julie Grote October 27, 2014 at 1:41 pm



Melanie, Your column is always an inspiration to me. I always look forward to it. Blessings and prayer, Sr. Julie

REPLY

Patricia M October 27, 2014 at 2:09 pm



Sister Melanie:

My husband and I were having our breakfast this morning when I decided to see what inspiration your column would offer so I could share it with him. It so happened that he was suffering a severe attack of the gout and was just saying how the pain was limiting his life and how distraught he felt. Well, after listening to your reflection, he was nudged into accepting this setback as a “letting go” – a letting go of the perfect health that we all take for granted. Thank you!

REPLY

Alfredo Jesús Rios Sánchez October 27, 2014 at 3:11 pm



Dear Melanie, please include in your daily prayers to My wife Susi who is struggling with CA in the lung, she is accepting and letting go the tomorrows and the best treatments for Her are the daily eucaresty and the Bible, among the best medical cares. We live in Mexico, city and we read sunflower seeds since the first issue, inspiring us to live a moré complete life.

REPLY

bozo October 27, 2014 at 4:15 pm



The worst “letting go” of my life was our son’s journey to adulthood and subsequent moving out and on his own, the empty nest. I really had a difficult time with that and it took me a long time to accept that he was no longer part of our immediate household but right where he’s supposed to be. I really had to pray about it and now I’ve learned to let him have his wings! And grateful for all that he’s achieved and still is achieving.

REPLY

Kelly October 27, 2014 at 4:45 pm



This was the perfect writing I needed to read today. As I am experiencing a recent time of letting go. I printed this out as a reminder of the process. Thank you!

REPLY

Joanne Bennardo October 27, 2014 at 7:28 pm



Dear Sister Melannie,
One of my most difficult letting go's was in regard to my mother's care. Until a few years ago, my 90 year-old mother lived on her own in a city where neither I nor my siblings lived. My sister and I drove in often taking her to doctor's appointments, getting groceries, etc. Then, with her advanced age and my own immediate medical needs, it was agreed that my mother should live in the same city where my sister is (quite a distance from me). Giving up assisting with my mother's care has left a void where I know God is planting something new and mysterious, yet the surrendering sometimes feels like I abandoned them.

Like Stephanie blogged earlier, I have to believe that in order for God's plan to come to light, I had to step aside allowing my sister's gifts and talents to do the heavy lifting.

Blessings and Wisdom of Change, Joanne

REPLY

Eileen Skutt October 27, 2014 at 9:07 pm



Lovely Mel! With every letting go God always has a lovely surprise waiting – we may need to wait awhile but it will come. Thanks.

REPLY

Marian October 27, 2014 at 9:53 pm



Hi Sr. Melanie

#1 tool I use for learning to let go are the daily scripture readings ...they help me begin my day in conversation with a Good Friend...

God is good all the time.

Thank you

Marian

REPLY

Kathy Hassink October 27, 2014 at 11:00 pm



Dear Cousin,

Thanks for the comforting words as I recently had to 'let go' my brother Marty after his battle with cancer. I know he is in a better place and thankful that his suffering is over. I appreciate your kind words and prayers.

Love – Kathy

REPLY

Deb October 27, 2014 at 11:03 pm



Sr Melannie,

Thanks again for an inspiring blog! I attended a meeting just yesterday for an Emmaus retreat I will be on as team member, I am giving a talk on Knowing God through Prayer and talk about a very hard letting go of a family member in a difficult situation, letting them go in God's hands, which two years ago was one of the hardest things I had to do. It is getting better, and my family member is returning little by little, with God's grace. I think it was preparing me for more letting go as my sister in law was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer as my husband recovered from a major back surgery. I also am watching my mother's memory fade more each time I speak with her. Journeys I do not want to take, so I have to let them go. It is hard. Thanks for writing.

REPLY

Annie October 27, 2014 at 11:14 pm



I often wonder how the trees do it; they let go of their leaves each year after having had them such a short time. What is that like for them? Is it like nurturing children and then watching them die? How do they manage to stand in the cold

wind and to remain bare of leaves for half the year (as happens here in Ohio)? What do they feel when their friends die and lie on the ground beside them? Does hope mixed with longing rest inside them during the winter? Maybe they live so long (compared to us), gently shading, accepting loss, graciously removing toxins from the air (that we put there), because they have learned the art of loving surrender and whisper it to each other on the wind.

REPLY

Lynn Hones October 27, 2014 at 11:28 pm



I have lost a few loved ones to death in the fall. It is a hard time for me because of this and because I know that soon the days will be shorter, colder and darker. I love the sun and its warmth. But...my life is changing for the better now due to my re-commitment to the rooms of AA and the belief that my higher power is always on my side. Staying home and hiding from the world is not the answer, although I tried to make it be so. Serving others is the true test of faith, even when it's easier not to serve at all. Thank you, sister, for your blog!

REPLY

Julie October 28, 2014 at 10:44 am



So appropriate as the gloomy November days approach and just what I needed to read today! Perhaps letting go of some things in my life will lighten my load and brighten up the days and months ahead.

REPLY

Mary Fran October 28, 2014 at 11:58 am



Melannie,
Thank you so much for this reflection. It is the other side of Ann of Green Gables whose fall reflection was, "I'm so glad I live in a world that has Octobers."
You remind us that we are continually called to adapt in many different ways and a big part of adapting is letting go....
Mary Fran

REPLY

Barb October 28, 2014 at 6:07 pm



Letting go of some of the physical things we used to be able to do—climbing steps without pausing for breath, climbing ladders to clean out gutters, squatting or kneeling to work in the garden. Now I need to find new ways to do things. It is hard to admit limitations.

REPLY

MaryLou October 28, 2014 at 11:42 pm



It seems that, letting go in my older years is more difficult than previous. But, letting go, is like fall. Winter is that time to rest from letting go. Then comes new life, new growth, finally letting go again. Fall isn't "going down, but being lifted up, as we give control to God.

REPLY

maria October 29, 2014 at 7:49 am



So much letting go that needs to be done daily by all of us. When I find myself stumbling I pray for the strength to push thru, sometimes that's all I can do. As you said, Sr Melanie, thru it all we are comforted with the knowledge/faith that God is there with us. Thank-you to all who shared their own "letting go" and you Sr Melanie for providing the insight.

REPLY

Kathy October 29, 2014 at 8:53 am



Thanks so much for another beautiful reflection.

Like others, it has been hard to let go of my children, as each arrives at the age of moving into their own lives and taking charge of themselves, rather than depending on mom and dad. This is especially true right now, as one of my daughters is soon to graduate college, but has chosen to not pursue her area of study, but has applied to do mission work on college campuses. I've struggled with this, but I have to remember, I'm her mother, but she is God's child also, and is ultimately cared for in greater ways than I can even imagine.

Sr. Melannie, thanks again for your weekly reflections that help along the way.

REPLY

Evelyn Allen October 29, 2014 at 5:03 pm



It seems that I have experienced all the different scenarios of letting go – relocation, empty nest, illnesses of family and friends, deaths of parents, family members, friends, my spouse (nine years ago). It was never easy, yet through all the years (I'm 81 and counting), His presence allowed me to accept letting go. Why? Because God never let's go. He holds you tenderly through it all. We are blessed to be beloved children of God.

REPLY

Karen October 30, 2014 at 10:11 am



Wonderful reflection Sr Melanie! And from all the responses it is clear that your words have touched many of us. My husband and I had to face “letting go” of our business about 10 yrs go. As we did not have children, our business was our primary focus and really defined us. As painful as it was (financially & emotionally), we both realize now it really was a blessing in disguise, and we are both exploring interests and work opportunities we never before had time to do. Now we are undertaking a PLAN to let go of some of our assets to fund an education scholarship. Had we not experienced the former, we would not now enjoy and appreciate so deeply our ability to do the latter.

REPLY

Sr. Claudia October 30, 2014 at 3:11 pm



I read this blog...the first time that I ever read a blog from anyone!!! Just wanted to say thank you for the message of “letting go”. It has touched a cord within me that I need to “play”.
God bless you and your work of spreading joy and the message of God's love throughout the world!

REPLY

Sister Rita Marra October 31, 2014 at 8:49 am



Melannie,
Thank you for this wonderful reflection. It was just what I needed to read
God bless you and your work every day!

REPLY

Jan November 8, 2014 at 11:17 am



ugh reealy having a hard time letting go of a person.
Great food for chewing on

REPLY

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