Lent—a time of reflection, recommitment and wonder
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I’m a convert to Catholicism, and Lent inevitably leads me to reflect upon my entry into the Church—now, almost half my lifetime ago. That first year, I thought the Vigil would never come! It was 1984, and Easter was about as late as it can be: April 22. But as time passes, I realize that the waiting—the time of anticipation and of preparation—is as central to the celebration as its culmination. That was certainly true of my entry into the Church.

For me, the path began as I started to study the history of American sisters, and it was through that exercise that I became profoundly moved by their lives and by their faith. I began to meet living sisters, too, including my future godmother, Margaret Ellen Traxler, SSND, and my mentor Ritamary Bradley, SFCC. They, like so many others I met in those early days of reading and exploration, have now joined the Communion of Saints; as a historian, how could I not be moved by that doctrine, since I’ve always spent so much time with those in the living past! I came to the Church largely through the examples and inspiration of these women, whose numbers are legion and whose examples continue to bless, to surprise and to challenge. Before long, I would become acquainted with those who have been so much a part of my spiritual path: the very many Monroe IHMs who (as an Associate) I now gratefully call “sister” in ways I could never have anticipated.

As Lent begins again, I welcome it as a time to reflect on the wonder of that first season of anticipation. In what ways has God surprised me this past year? What have been the challenges of this journey of faith? Am I open to both the comfort of the familiar and the astonishment of the unanticipated as God takes me in directions I can’t even begin to imagine? Can I continue to assent to the future with the same faith and enthusiasm that I had back in 1984?

Lent allows us all to recommit ourselves to the journey toward God, once again: with hope, and trust and a willingness to enter into the unexpected. As I said when I first came into the Church, and as I’ve said on many occasions over the years, my becoming a Catholic is absolute proof of the existence of God—because it never would have been my idea. And so I welcome Lent with the words of Dag Hammarskjöld, the diplomat and Nobel Peace Laureate: “For all that has been, thanks; to all that shall be, yes!”