

December 1, 2013

Blessings of the First Sunday of Advent,

We begin the season of Advent today, a season characterized by waiting—in hope—for the birth of an infant who represents the emergence of a new and gloriously peaceful world. The readings from Isaiah proclaim these dreams for a nonviolent and grace-filled earthly life, for a time when “nations shall not raise arms against each other nor will they train for war ever again.” From ancient times to the present humans have echoed the cry for peace, envisioned and worked toward the goal of peace, maintained belief in the possibility of peace. In Advent we bring these dreams and hopes to the forefront of consciousness and, for a time, live “as if” peace and justice can be realized through opening our hearts, recognizing and meeting the needs of others, giving generously to the poor and to organizations serving the poor, “preparing the way of the Lord” in our own lives and in these times. It is a critical annual exercise of hope and generosity, a significant yearly invitation to recognize and respond to vulnerability in all its forms with renewed commitment and resources designed to build a just and peaceful world.

Jesus represents a radical transformation in how God is to be perceived and a subtle shift in how we are invited, even expected, to share in God’s life. Relating to God as a vulnerable infant, completely dependent on mother’s milk, parental nurturing and protection, we are immediately drawn into a radically new relationship with the Divine. No longer are we relating to an all-powerful Being, but rather to an extraordinarily vulnerable newborn whose only hope for survival is our enduring, conscientious care and guardianship. Seeing God in this way calls us into the Mystery of Divine life, a life in which we participate, a life for which we have no choice but to assume a portion of responsibility because we are inextricably woven into its fabric.

This perception of God sits at the heart of liberation theology’s “preferential option for the poor,” an option Pope Francis continues to demonstrate so profoundly. It calls us into the Mystery of Motherhood, into those built-in responsibilities for vulnerable humanity that are primal, visceral and instinctually present at the core of a maternal response to human life and its struggles. The requirement of putting one’s own desires second to the survival needs of another, and the inevitable sacrifices this involves, calls us further into the Good News Jesus brings to a world crying out for compassion, mercy, justice and peace.

As Christians prepare for the birth of God’s saving presence on earth, as we wait in hope for the arrival of the Prince of Peace, we must also take our place as mothers, ready to receive vulnerable humanity into our hearts and nurture it with the tenderness and vigilance an infant God requires and a maternal God entrusts to our full participation in the Life of the Divine.

Our readings for December Liturgies: December 8 – Is 11:1-10; Ps 72:1-2,7-8,12-13,17; Rom 15:4-9; Mt 3:1-12. December 14 – Is 35:1-6a,10; Ps 146:6-10; Jas 5:7-10; Mt 11:2-11. December 22 – Is 7:10-14; Ps 24:1-6; Rom 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24. December 25 – Is 9:1-6; Ps 96:1-3, 11-13; Ti 2:11-14; Lk 2:1-14. December 29 – Sir 3:2-6,12-14; Ps 128:1-5; Col 3:12-17; Mt 2:13-15, 19-23. The direct link to daily lectionary readings can be found on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website:

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/>

Mass Schedule This Month

Mass in **Eugene** will be Sunday, **December 8, at First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23rd, at 4:00pm.** Plan to stay for the potluck after Mass. Bring an entrée, salad, veggie dish or dessert. If you are interested in being part of the choir as a musician or singer, please come at 3:00 for rehearsal.

4th Annual Christmas Eve Mass in Eugene, December 24, 9:00pm at the home of Dianne and Amanda. Directions will be available after Masses this month.

Mass in **Portland** will be Saturday, **December 14, at Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2823 N. Rosa Parks Way at 5:00pm.** Stay for the potluck after Mass and bring an entrée, salad, veggie dish or dessert. Choir rehearsal begins at 4:00 and all interested singers and musicians are invited to come and participate.

Christmas Mass in Portland, December 29, at the home of Kathy Glover. Directions will be available after Masses this month or by contacting sophiapastor@aol.com.

Masses in **Battle Ground** this month at the Umphrey House Church, Helen presiding:
Sunday, **December 8, at 10:30am** – Feast of the Immaculate Conception
Sunday, **December 22, at 10:30am** – 4th Sunday of Advent
Tuesday, **December 24, at 4:00pm** – Christmas Vigil Mass

Upcoming Events:

Annual Meeting of the Parish Council

The annual meeting of the Parish Council will be held **Sunday, December 15, from 2-4pm at Goudy Commons, Willamette University in Salem.** All members of Sophia Christi are welcome to attend. Salem was chosen as a meeting place because it is approximately the same distance from Eugene and Portland. If you would like to come please talk to me or to one of the Council members (Joy Wallace, Leanne Kerner, Danielle Bastien, Carol Zolkoske, Judith Manning) so we can work our carpooling. Directions are also available at

<http://willamette.edu/about/visit/directions/index.html>

Save the Date – Lenten Retreat

The Parish Council is in the process of planning a Lenten Retreat for all members of Sophia Christi on Saturday, March 29 at the Silver Falls Conference Center east of Salem. The site was chosen because of its natural beauty in addition to being approximately the same driving distance from both Eugene and Portland. More details will be available in the months ahead, but save the date and plan to participate in this spiritual retreat opportunity on the eve of the 4th Sunday of Lent, midway through your Lenten journey. For those of you who might like to stay overnight at the Conference Center, there are six cabins available, each with three beds. More information will be provided regarding this option in next month's newsletter or by visiting the Conference Center website itself at www.silverfallsconference.com. Information will also continue to

be posted on our new website! To stay informed about everything happening in our community visit www.sophiachristi.org.

Pastoral Update:

Annual Report

The Parish Council has created an Annual Report for the year and it will be available at all Masses in December. The report provides a snapshot of our activities in 2013 and a brief view of our financial status. I encourage you to pick one up and review the year with an eye toward 2014. What ideas are brewing within the community that might wish to unfold in the months to come? I look forward to hearing these ideas as well as your thoughts about their implementation! You can send them along via the Contact page of our website <http://www.sophiachristi.org/contact/>.

A Message from the Parish Council

Each month a member of the Parish Council will be writing a short piece for the newsletter. This month, let's take time to ponder these words from our newest member, Danielle Bastien:

Saint Francis of Assisi said, "Pray without ceasing. If necessary, use words." I take this statement to mean that our beliefs and our values should come through everything that we do: the way we carry ourselves, how we spend money, the words we choose to speak, and how we treat others. Yes, professions of faith and explanations of beliefs can be powerful, but the everyday choices - or way of proceeding - may carry even more weight. I believe the same is true for organizations, especially mission driven organizations such as Sophia Christi. I think that our way of operating and proceeding says just as much about who we are as a community as our mission statement.

Though gathering to share in a justice-centered, inclusive liturgy is what brings the community together, there are many other actions that allow the community to live out its prophetic voice. This belief in the importance of "the way of proceeding" and how it reflects the values of an organization are what motivated me to join the pastoral council. For me, the pastoral council is not something "extra" or "separate" that I do for Sophia Christi, it is an inextricable part of my belonging to the community. For me, the meetings are a form of prayer - perhaps less meditative or poetic than other ways - which allow me to consider how the mission is lived and how each decision reflects the community's commitment to inclusivity, spiritual healing, and the social teachings of Jesus. In sum, the way we pray and the way we make decisions together are essential parts of living out our mission. So pray with the community. Attend a pastoral council meeting. Donate your time, talent, and treasure. Be spiritually fed by the community. I invite you to find your role in Sophia Christi's way of proceeding.

Website

I am excited to report that our new website was launched November 23! We are up and running, and the new features vastly expand our ability to quickly pass along information as well as allow us to exchange ideas and interact with one another in a new way. As you tour the site you will see a page titled "News & Events." If you explore that page you will notice an option that allows you to add comments to any of the items posted there. Everyone is encouraged to participate, to exchange views and discuss topics of

interest. Upcoming events will also be posted on that page so activities that have fallen outside the monthly newsletter deadline can now be forwarded in a timely manner, keeping us all better informed about happenings of interest in our various areas.

You may also notice you can access the current newsletter from the “Welcome” page of our website. You will continue to receive the newsletter as usual via your email address, but those outside our community will be able to see it as well and learn more about Sophia Christi if they are interested. We will also be adding a Facebook page very soon so that everyone can interact quickly using this social media tool. The designer is a member of our community and is taking precautions to insure that we have an optimal and safe experience as we share information in this accessible format.

As with all new web ventures there are a few glitches still needing attention, and there will likely be others in the future as we continue to add features to meet the needs of our expanding community. What we now have is a solid foundation on which to build for years to come. Please take time to check out the new website! Under “News & Events” if you click on “Pastoral Update” you will see an item titled *New Website*. Add your comments to that post and let us know what you think! It will be wonderful to hear your thoughts about this new and exciting work-in-progress! The address remains the same: www.sophiachristi.org.

Pope Francis' New Apostolic Exhortation

There is already much discussion about Pope Francis' latest 50,000 word document, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Joy of the Gospel. The full English translation can be found at

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html

Francis' strong encouragement that Christians take seriously the Gospel mandate to care for the poor and marginalized, as well as his clear example of what caring looks like, is a breath of fresh air in a church that had become an embarrassment of pomp and finery during the last two pontificates. There is much to be grateful for in this amazing shift of papal priorities. And yet there is a continuing sadness among women who stand on the ecclesial sidelines waiting to be seen and heard, waiting for their moral agency and vocational callings to be respected and welcomed in the sanctuary of public worship and witness. A Gospel interpreted so as to exclude women from sacramental ministries to which they are called is not a Gospel of Joy nor does it speak to the continued marginalization and oppression of one half of humanity. Some say Francis is just laying the groundwork for farther-reaching changes he plans to make in the months and years ahead. Some say he is trying to unite left and right into one, unified church, and must take his time confronting litmus-test issues of the two former popes. The “hottest button” in the church, as it is in all traditionalist and fundamentalist groups, is that of women's rights, agency and power. There is no escaping this issue, and merely calling for a “theology of women” without listening to the Holy Spirit as She summons women into pastoral and sacramental leadership roles within the church is an evasion of that issue. We have a right to expect more from the Church into which all are baptized as full members of the Body of Christ in which, Paul says, there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free.

Make Your Voice Heard in Rome

Pope Francis has called an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops to be held in October of next year. Its theme is the *Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization*. In preparation for this global conversation, Pope Francis has asked that a questionnaire be circulated as widely as possible to gather input from Dioceses, deaneries and parishes so that local people can respond. The Vatican preparatory document can be found at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/180575701/Vatican-questionnaire-for-the-synod-on-the-family>. A coalition of 15 church reform groups, most of them part of COR (Catholic Organizations for Renewal) created and posted a survey online for Catholics in the U.S. This survey can be found at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SynodOnFamilyUS>. The survey will remain open until December 15 in order that results can be collated by Dec. 31, the date chosen by U.S. bishops as their deadline to conform with the Vatican's need for a summary by the end of January 2014. For more information visit our website at <http://www.sophiachristi.org/news/>, and make your voice heard in Rome.

A pastoral reminder--if you or someone you know has a pastoral need that isn't being met, please don't hesitate to give me a call. You have my email address in this mailing, and my office phone number is [503-286-3584](tel:503-286-3584). Feel free to use either one. You can contact me anytime for conversation, home visitation, sacraments of reconciliation or anointing, home Masses, weddings, funerals, memorial services or other pastoral care needs.

Food for the St. Andrew Episcopal Food Pantry

Please remember to bring food and personal hygiene donations for the Food Pantry when you come to Mass next weekend. **Look for the basket at the entrance to the sanctuary when you come for Liturgy on Saturday or Sunday, and please be as generous as possible.**

You will likely notice this newsletter has expanded since last month. In part it reflects an increase in news items of interest to members of the community. It also reflects the reality of our new website and the expansion of our capacity to participate in issues relevant to the local and global Church through new interactive capabilities. As we begin the 2014 liturgical year and enter a time of hope and grace this Advent, it seems timely that we embrace the season's transformative energy, crossing the threshold from darkness to light, from former ways to new beginnings. Much of what you see here represents those new beginnings. As we wait in hope, prepare our hearts and minds to give birth and nurture new stirrings of life in our world and in our community, I invite you to ponder your hopes and dreams for the future of Sophia Christi, and to deepen your commitment to nurturing the people of God as participants in the life of the Mother of all Creation.

Toni