

March 2, 2014

Lenten blessings,

Ash Wednesday arrives this week and we celebrate the first Sunday of Lent next weekend. Time is passing so quickly I find the seasonal shifts almost jarring. To be honest, it was only last week I got around to taking down Christmas lights in the living room! I'm not quite ready for spring or for daylight savings time (next Sunday). I'm not ready for the pace of life to accelerate even more with the increase in daylight hours. Yet that peculiar spring frenzy that delights many and exhausts a supposed few is fast approaching. How to shift focus and prepare for the more outward-directed demands that come with the advent of spring?

Into this budding, soon-flowering world steps the reflective, justice-oriented season of Lent. It is as if the wisdom of ages provides a natural bridge between the interior focus of winter and the outward focus of spring. Helping with this transition, Lent invites us to listen more deeply to the stirrings of God within us and to prepare ourselves for greater service by practicing generosity, humility, forgiveness and compassion in these transformative days leading up to Easter.

In the first reading today God tells us through Isaiah that Her mothering heart will never forget us. Each of us is known thoroughly and loved tenderly, unconditionally. Nothing we do or fail to do can separate us from that love. The Psalmist urges us to 'rest in God'. The problem is we tend to forget how deeply loved we are. Like adolescents needing to discover or create an individual identity, most of us take off in a direction of our own choosing and neglect or forsake God's loving guidance and presence in our lives. Ash Wednesday calls us back, beckons us to remember. Through the prophet Joel, we hear God's eternal invitation: "return to me with all your heart...rend your hearts not your garments."

That never-ending love forms a bedrock for the Lenten journey. On top of that bedrock is layered human forgetfulness and obstinacy, as well as the ego's desire for control, for accolades, for status and power. The first Sunday of Lent helps us look at these temptations through Jesus' experience in the wilderness immediately after his baptism in the Jordan. We are encouraged to recognize and restrain the appetites of the 'false self' (Richard Rohr's terminology) while learning to cultivate the 'true self' which is "who you are in God and who God is in you," says Rohr. The spiritual practices of Lent are designed to help us learn the difference between the two so that we can live more authentically in the world as who and what we really are—Temples of the Divine, God's Beloved children.

Readings for Liturgies can be found on the USCCB website at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/>.

Mass Schedule This Month

Mass in **Portland** will be Saturday, **March 8**, at **Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2823 N. Rosa Parks Way** at **5:00pm**. In keeping with our Lenten tradition, please bring soup, salad or veggie dish for the potluck after Mass. Choir rehearsal begins at 4:00 and all interested singers and musicians are invited to come and participate.

Mass in **Eugene** will be Sunday, **March 9**, at **First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23rd**, at **4:00pm**. Plan to stay for the potluck after Mass. Bring soup, salad, or

veggie dish. If you are interested in being part of the choir as a musician or singer, please come at 3:00 for rehearsal.

Mass will be celebrated **March 29, at Silver Falls Conference Center**, to conclude the Lenten Retreat.

Masses in **Battle Ground** will be **March 2** and **March 23 at 10:30am** at the Umphrey House Church.

Upcoming Events:

Catholic Oregonians for Marriage Equality – Events March 5 and March 7

Attached to this letter you will find a flyer for two events next week focused on the issue of Marriage Equality in Oregon. Though 53% of U.S. Catholics who attend Mass weekly and 65% who attend less frequently favor marriage equality, our Catholic bishops have been helping to lead the opposition in every state where the issue has reached the ballot or wound its way through the legislative or judicial process. A heavily funded national campaign is now poised to surface in Oregon through a proposed ballot initiative that would give corporations and businesses the right to discriminate against LGBT couples in our state. Discrimination of every kind flies in the face of Catholic social teachings and polarizes communities. I urge you to read the attached flyer and attend these events if at all possible.

Lenten Retreat – March 29, 10:00am to 4:00pm, Silver Falls Conference Center

Many of you have already signed up for the Sophia Christi retreat at Silver Falls. If you have not yet done so please look for the sign-up sheet before and after Masses next weekend. You may also put your name on the list of retreatants by contacting me or a member of the Parish Council. There will be a sign-up sheet for those wishing to carpool, so please look for that as well.

Because Silver Falls will provide Sophia Christi with one invoice covering all lodging and meal expenses for the retreat, we will be collecting cabin fees from those of you staying overnight, as well as lunch fees (\$10.00) from all other retreatants, before and after Masses next weekend.

Members of the Parish Council and I will be happy to answer any questions. We are very excited about this retreat and are looking forward to wide participation by our entire community!

Next Council Meeting – May 3 or 4

Please check our website for the exact date. We need to consult Morningside Methodist Church before knowing which day will work in their schedule.

Pastoral Update:

Parish Council Meeting -- Update

The Parish Council met yesterday, **Saturday, March 1st** at Morningside Methodist Church in Salem. We were warmly received by two enthusiastic members of the church who showed us around and helped make us comfortable in their lovely space. This will be our new meeting location for the foreseeable future. Eight members of Sophia Christi were present: Judith and Carol from Eugene, Jim and Joy from Woodland, WA, and Leanne, Danielle, Joy W. and Toni from Portland.

Our first order of business was to review and finalize plans for the upcoming retreat on March 29. We are all very excited about the retreat and believe it will be a spiritually rich experience for everyone who participates.

We discussed the new 'members only portal' and had a peek at the draft page now being designed. There were also suggestions about enhancing our overall site with a new slant on 'who we are', proposed additions to our page of 'member stories' and ideas for changing the format of the newsletter.

We discussed the idea of contributing a percentage of our monthly income to a charity chosen by members of the larger Sophia Christi community. As we open our compassionate hearts to 'the cry of the poor', what can we do as a community to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world? Do we have a common desire to dedicate a portion of our resources to charitable organizations that more directly serve the suffering among us? The Council decided to begin this conversation and solicit your thoughts and idea during Lent, the traditional season of action focused on justice and generosity.

It was also decided the time has come to find out more about what the general community wants and needs from Sophia Christi. Everyone will be asked to complete a short survey at Mass next weekend in order to gain a greater understanding of where we are now and where we are going—and hope to be going—as a community.

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 we feature the comments of Judith, our Secretary:

I am a convert. My conversion was a powerful and immediate epiphany 11 years ago, when I traded in my vague "one with the universe, some kind of higher power" beliefs for full on Catholic faith. I keep my spiritual path bubbling onward with books, scripture reading, pondering and sharing with small groups, spiritual direction, and with my practice of prayer and meditation.

I have a close friend who is close with Toni and so I heard about Toni's ordination before it happened. When she began celebrating Mass in Eugene, I was there--enthusiastically! I love my St. Jude parish family, and I love the Mass, but Toni added richness and depth to my experience of the priesthood that has enhanced my growth in God.

My connection and trust in God bubbled along for years, and then I had an injury a year ago that rocked many aspects of my life and led to a period of spiritual dryness. Then God spoke to me through a reflection I read somewhere, about what to do when we become aware that we've disconnected. It said "acknowledge the disconnect and ask forgiveness." So simple. I ran to Toni for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Her kind and loving attention helped to bring my desired rebirth. I promised God to "come back, come back." The next morning I made time for prayer and meditation, and I'm also enjoying renewed interest in spiritual reading. I always pray to be aware of God's presence, to serve the world, and to TRUST. And I am so grateful. --Judith

Website

The question I posed last month regarding a 'members only portal' has generated no discussion or feedback, so it appears not to be an issue of concern within our community. As a result we are moving forward with the creation of this portal and hope to have it ready to launch by Easter, if not before. When it is ready a password will be made available at the retreat (if ready by then!) or at the weekend Masses. Bookmark

this page www.sophiachristi.org for easy access and check the website regularly for new information, announcements and updates!

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. 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.**

As we move into Lent I invite you to join me in setting aside 20 minutes a day for spiritual reflection, meditation, or prayer. Prayer can take so many forms, from acts of kindness consciously engaged in the service of love, to inspirational reading that opens the mind and heart to God's tender gaze. Scripture is a doorway into sacred conversation with the Divine for some, while others may create a collage or take up pencils, paints or pastels to open the heart's window so that God may enter anew. There are as many ways to pray as there are pray-ers. Perhaps the starting point is to realize that the *desire* to pray is evidence that God is inviting you into conversation! The ego, or 'false self' may *think* the initiative to pray begins with itself but that is not the case. God is constantly calling us into that deep communion. When we finally 'give in' to prayer, we are in fact simply responding to that continual, ongoing invitation. So I invite you to join me in giving up the struggle for false autonomy this Lent, and give in to God's invitation to spend 20 minutes a day opening yourself to God's loving embrace. Don't worry if you find yourself distracted for the entire 20 minutes! God understands what Buddhists call our 'monkey minds'. Come back again tomorrow. Set the clock for 20 minutes. Open your mind and heart to the Beloved.

Wishing you a holy and grace-filled Lent,

Toni