

March 5, 2017

Dear friends,

What is it about Ash Wednesday that fills churches to capacity making it third in attendance only to Christmas Eve and Easter? Do we crave inner change, renewal of heart and mind, a reason to prioritize prayer, fasting, generosity? Paul would tell us, as he once told the Corinthians, that it is the Spirit within each of us that longs for God. It is that very spirit yearning for union with the Beloved that reaches for Ashes, reaches for something to mediate and assist an experience of connection with Christ, with Mystery Itself. As physical beings we seek tangible, sensual, touchstones of contact. This is why rituals and elements such as bread, wine, oil, water and ashes, have been used in traditions across time and culture to elicit and anchor a sense of deep interaction with God's presence. Whatever promotes and supports openness and receptivity to God's love, God's invitation to love each other, including enemies, and to extend forgiveness for harm done, mercy toward transgressors, generosity toward the ignorant as well as the poor—whatever promotes and supports a deep change of heart and a genuine relationship with God—we humans tend to both crave and resist simultaneously. Lent encourages us to confront the tension between those two poles. It asks us to make the spiritual life a priority for six uninterrupted weeks, and it provides broad guidelines to help us navigate the continuum between interior prayer and exterior engagement with the world. The critical struggle to grow in love of God and neighbor, including our most easily overlooked neighbor, mother earth, is the Lenten challenge. We are just five days into Lent and the season stretches before us. These six weeks will go quickly, as all do, and we must beware the tendency to focus on outcome, to measure “progress” in the spiritual life according to a particular result we've determined as our goal. There is no objective other than growing in love, which is a life-long learning project. We aren't setting ourselves up to bask in a sense of accomplishment when Easter comes, having met our target, outcome achieved. This is an all-too-human approach, or possibly a very Western approach, to life's challenges. The challenge here is simply stated (though never measurable) in the reading from Joel on Ash Wednesday. “Return to me with all your heart,” God tells the people. Turn your face toward me and come running. Come without a second thought. Just come back! Whatever will help you turn toward God—embrace that! Let God love you so you can learn more deeply, and practically, how to love.

Lectors: Sunday Mass Readings: If you are interested in accessing the readings for our weekend Masses they can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/> which is the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) website. We use the Sunday readings for both Saturday and Sunday Masses. Though the Church designates the New American Bible (NAB) translation to be used at liturgies, Sophia Christi uses the translation created by Priests For Equality because of its commitment to inclusive language. Lectors will find some differences between the two but are still encouraged to prepare using the USCCB site since variations are somewhat minimal.

Mass Schedule This Month

Mass in Portland will be Saturday, **March 11**, at **Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2823 N. Rosa Parks Way** at **5:00pm**. Please bring an entree, salad or veggie dish for

our potluck meal. 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 12, at First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23rd**, at **4:00pm**. A potluck follows our celebration. Please bring an entree, salad or veggie dish to share. If you are interested in being part of the choir as a musician or singer, please come at 3:00 for rehearsal.

Upcoming Events:

Next Council Meeting—April 23

Our Council meeting was Sunday, February 23, at Ike Box Café in Salem from 11:00 to 1:00. Please consider coming to the meeting or give your thoughts to Council members before the February weekend Masses on the 11th and 12th. For carpool information contact Toni in Portland or Judith in Eugene. Portland Council members: Kathy Glover, Joy and Jim Learned, Annie Hayes. Eugene Council members: Judith Manning, Carol Zolkoske, Bruce and Dianne Turner.

From the Facilitator of Our Upcoming Lenten Retreat

We enter this Lenten Retreat with the surprise of the Samaritan Woman. “Who am I that you speak to me?” As Lent unfolds we are given the grace and the opportunity to awaken, to change our hearts. This retreat will invite us to reflect on the truth of who we are as individuals, as a community and as members of a nation in today’s world.

- ❖ **Friday evening** we will enter into the theme and the intention of the retreat through presentation, guided meditation, prayer and connecting as community
- ❖ **Saturday** we will explore Sophia Christi’s history as a community against the backdrop of the Samaritan woman’s question. Throughout the day her conversation with Jesus at the well will frame our personal time and our communal sharing. We will each have time for reflection, creative activities such as soul collage, meditation, personal conference, mindful walking or rest. Materials will be available to guide and assist exploration and expression.

*Group sessions will provide threads of continuity with times to pray, listen, share and look toward Easter and beyond. We will close with **Eucharistic Celebration** including a ritual closure as a group. –Evelyn Wemhoff*

Retreat begins Friday evening, March 17, at 7:30pm. Dinner at 6:00pm. Retreat will resume Saturday morning, March 18, at 9:00am. Breakfast at 8:00am.

NOTE: Registration forms INCORRECTLY state the retreat is March 18-19. The correct dates are March 17-18.

Pastoral Update:

Council Meeting Update

We met at Ike Box in Salem, with eight of us present. Toni submitted her Pastor’s Report, including visits to our Eugene congregant, Rosemary, as she nears her end time; and arrangements with Evelyn Wemhoff for facilitating our Lenten Retreat March 17-18. The retreat will be fun and spiritually nourishing! We finalized our 2017 budget, with a very tight balance between expenses and revenue. We count on our congregations for support, as we have no other sources of income. Our annual Sophia Christi Picnic will again be at Carol’s house near Stayton, and we set the date: July 29, 1-4:00. We are also members of the Community of Welcoming Congregations (CWC), that fosters inclusivity using networking and coalition

building. They are perfectly positioned to represent us in all areas of protecting human rights in this perilous time. Our next meeting will be Sunday, April 23, 11-1:00 at Ike Box in Salem. All are welcome to join us!

From Newest Council Member, Annie Hayes

After much prayer and discernment, I feel God calling me to ministerial work in California. While this is the right move for me now, leaving the Sophia Christi community breaks my heart. This community has been a very special place for me, and every time I gather with you I feel refreshed in mind and spirit. The community has helped me feel more connected with my authentic self and feel closer to God than I do at any other time during the month. While I am thrilled to see where Spirit will lead me in this next season of life, I will certainly carry you in my heart. I will depart after our retreat, and hope to schedule any return trips to Portland around the monthly Masses. I am very thankful for the faith, the community, and the love that all of you have shared with me during my time with you. –Annie Hayes

Ministry Partners:

Rose Haven—Update

It's March and we are all hoping for spring, but we still have a few weeks to go. Rosehaven has been, and still is, very busy. Five days a week we have a great number of women and children who look to us for help with food and clothing. We are very grateful for the help you give each month. As usual, however, we always need clothes, shoes, and bath and hygiene products. Please continue your wonderful generosity and support as we attempt to serve the basic needs of our increasing homeless population in Portland. – Joy Learned

For a complete list of needed items simply go to <http://rosehaven.org/helping/donate-items/>

Rose Haven desperately needs new panties and socks (all sizes) as well as travel sized shampoo and conditioner! They also need backpacks, and paper grocery sacks. Women and children need waterproof items and clothing that can be layered.

Eugene Catholic Worker—Update

The Catholic Worker House continues to need donations of men and women's toiletry items; socks, hats, gloves, coats and blankets. The Catholic Worker House continues to offer daily hospitality to those on the streets. Individuals are invited in for a shower, rest and a hot meal, and are referred to social services for assistance as needed. If you are interested in volunteering with any of the activities at the Catholic Worker House, contact Anna Lankutis. 541-683-1936 or at lankutisa@gmail.com --Anna

Website

Remember that the newsletter, current homily, and Council minutes are posted on the website each month, as are all upcoming Sophia Christi events along with directions to those events. Our web address is www.sophiachristi.org

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, reconciliation or anointing, home Masses, weddings, funerals, memorial services or other pastoral care needs.

As I sit at my desk writing these words just days into the beginning of Lent, my mind turns to the baffling and discouraging news stories that fill our daily "briefings." My heart

still sinks each morning as I wake to the collective grief, disbelief and fear rumbling with tectonic force deep beneath the surface business-as-usual normalcy of life in America. We are a country whose collective spirit is shattered, the ground no longer firm beneath our feet. My own spirit quivers as I recognize the limits of my energy and clarity. What is being asked of me, of us, at this time of unparalleled disruption when every newscast heralds a cry of foreboding from some sector of the population, some region of our land, our world?

At the U.S. Regional World Meeting of Popular Movements two weeks ago in Modesto, CA, Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego stood before a crowd of nearly 700 community organizers and said this:

“President Trump was the candidate of disruption. He was the disrupter, he said. Well now, we must all become disrupters. We must disrupt those who would seek to send troops into our streets to deport the undocumented, to rip mothers and fathers from their families. We must disrupt those who portray refugees as enemies rather than our brothers and sisters in terrible need. We must disrupt those who train us to see Muslim men and women and children as sources of fear rather than as children of God. We must disrupt those who seek to rob our medical care, especially from the poor. We must disrupt those who would take even food stamps and nutrition assistance from the mouths of children.” Christianity is sometimes portrayed as a pleasant, mild way to live, designed to bring people comfort and let them rest easy at night. But authentic Christianity is radical. It is demanding.

As Lent unfolds I encourage all of us to commit ourselves to prayer asking for Spirit’s guidance in this time of turmoil and fear, asking for Jesus’ accompaniment and courage in facing the powers of wealth and empire in our own time. We don’t have to know what to DO during this season of generous listening. When Jesus takes Peter, James and John with him up the mountain in next week’s Gospel he goes to a place “where they can be alone.” Peter is so dazzled by the vision of Moses and Elijah conversing with Jesus that he immediately wants to erect three tents. He wants to DO something! But the voice that emerges from the cloud tells him to “Listen.” LISTEN.

How fortunate we are in the timing of Lent this year. It has come, perhaps, when we need it most, when we desperately need to take Jesus’ hand and go off with him alone for periods of time to allow him to set our bearings. There are as many avenues of disruption as there are ideas circulating through the best-intentioned creative minds, including your own. What speaks to you? What is in your heart? Does something tug on you, keep re-appearing in off-moments? How do you discern emotional reactivity from God’s prompting you to act? And if nothing is clear and your mind is swimming, how do you find your way to the still pool that will allow you to calm down enough to hear God’s voice in the storm?

We need to listen, deeply listen, to the stirrings of our own soul and the soul of the nation. We need to recognize the ways in which we have turned our faces from God in pursuit of normal, human security and pleasure, so that we can consciously take up the radical demands of an authentically Christian spiritual journey. We go off with Jesus to the ‘mountaintop’, the inner sanctum of our hearts, to listen deeply, seeking a transfigured vision. It is the gift and the hope of Lent. “Return to me with all your heart,” God tells us through Joel. Return. Listen.

May the graces of Lent be with you,
Toni