

April 2, 2017

Dear friends,

As April begins the daffodils and tulips and many of the area's flowering trees are in full bloom. Buds have appeared on the ginkgo trees, dogwood and maples, and the earth is bursting with new life. As I clear dead canes from the raspberry patch and tie back the new, green growth, I notice the seamless connection between death and life that gardening teaches in such a profound way. Somehow those plants that die back, winter over, then return with vibrant gusto each spring can be so taken-for-granted that their teaching role has become obscure, their lessons often overlooked in the superficial bustle of modern life. The first, and singular, set of scriptures all of humanity shares in common rests in the folds of Nature. We see the patterns of creation in the cycles of death and resurrection written in those 'books' and available for all to 'read.' We find there the unfathomable mystery of life itself, whose origins and destiny have intrigued countless philosophers, theologians, scientists and explorers throughout the ages and still call forth the best minds among us to delve deeper and deeper into realms only now being named. Nature speaks in languages both limited and infinite in scope just as God is in the particular (the individual, the particle) and in the universal (the cosmos, all-that-is). Like the man born blind in last week's Gospel we are born into and blinded by 'the world'. In our case that world is circumscribed by technology, mechanized industry and corporate greed. The natural world becomes background scenery for major segments of the population while corporate interests race to exploit those natural resources as though entitled to "own" and reduce them to capitalized commodities. We are caught up in the commotion of these ravenous pursuits, even when it rankles, because making a life in an artificial world is next to impossible without being woven into the web of its system. In the process we become increasingly blind.

Today's reading takes us a step further. It not only mirrors the tragic blindness of a cultural mindset in free fall, but it also states the obvious conclusion: uprooted from Nature and Nature's life-lessons, we are virtually dead. Not only are we 'born blind' we are rendered insensitive to the Divine Reality infusing all we see and know, all that exists in the world of creation. We are isolated from that Reality and therefore, we are effectively 'dead.' The irony, of course, is that within that 'grave' we believe we are alive. We are trapped in ways of being that have deadened our senses, paralyzed our movements and now enslave our spirits. The grave is real, and made more real by the fact that we don't know that's where we are. God sees the tomb humans have created and sends someone to help us first SEE where we are, then call us and empower us to exit that stifling tomb and come into the open air.

The first 'Bible' given to us is specified in the first chapter of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The entire chapter describes the creation of Nature—its waters, plants, sunlight, living creatures of every kind and finally, human beings. We are meant to read and respect this 'bible' first of all, because the lessons about life in this created world are inscribed there—in all of nature and in us. Our eyes have been opened by the soil of the earth combined with the saliva of a divine/human being who told us to, "go wash the mud from your eyes so you can SEE." Now he returns and shouts toward our newly opened graves and commands us to "Come out!" Afterwards he tells the grave hands to untie us and let us go! The choice is ours—return to the grave or have the courage to wake up, stay awake and SEE?

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, **April 8**, 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, **April 9**, 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.

Easter Mass in Eugene will be Sunday, **April 16**, at **First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23rd**, at **4:00pm**. Please bring an entree, salad, veggie dish or dessert to share for our Easter potluck meal. 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 will be Sunday, April 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 April weekend Masses on the 8th and 9th. For carpool information contact Toni in Portland or Judith in Eugene. Portland Council members: Kathy Glover, Joy and Jim Learned. Eugene Council members: Judith Manning, Carol Zolkoske, Bruce and Dianne Turner.

Summer Picnic—Date changed to Saturday, July 15

Our annual Sophia Christi Picnic will again be at Carol's house near Stayton this year. Last month the Council minutes, as reported in the newsletter, gave the date as July 29, but the date has been changed to July 15. The potluck picnic begins at 1:00 and ends at 4:00, with ample time for relaxing, visiting, and walking through Gary's amazing forest.

Pastoral Update:

Report from the Lenten Retreat

The retreat began with a welcoming dinner on Friday night where participants got to visit with each other and set a tone of friendship for the weekend. Our first reflection that evening helped us recognize the presence of God and become conscious of that beautiful, all-loving presence in our midst, in one another, and in ourselves. Our facilitator Evelyn led us through a reading of the Samaritan woman, which was used as a guide during the weekend. We shared our thoughts about this story with each other then

reflected on the question, "Where am I in my life right now?" After a closing prayer, we headed off to our cabins for a restful night's sleep.

After breakfast Saturday morning, Evelyn led the group in meditation on a short piece from the Book of Wisdom. We focused on a short phrase that resonated with us and carried that phrase in our hearts for the day. We also read an excerpt from Richard Rohr in which he affirms the wonderful goodness of humanity as created in God's image. This idea of being "very good" in the eyes of God was a new way for some of us to approach the season of Lent. We pondered how God did not "send" Jesus to die as "substitutionary atonement" for our sins; rather, Jesus' death shows us that love is always stronger than death and that God's love for us is greater than we could ever dream. We journaled on the question, "Where am I spiritually in my life now?" and followed with time for individual meditation and prayer, where we had opportunities to walk the wooded grounds, sit in silence, create mandalas or soul collages, or walk a labyrinth. Many of us walked the vast trails surrounding the camp. After lunch, we reflected on what the retreat had stirred in us. Where have we encountered God? How has God spoken to us? Who or what has helped reveal God's presence to us? We took these thoughts with us into our closing liturgy where, during the homily, we were invited to share how the retreat had touched us. Some people shared their mandalas or drawings while others shared personal poems, writings or lasting feelings. I felt greatly encouraged during the retreat for the transition I'm making. I am definitely inspired to bring the love of Sophia Christi to my ministry in California! Thank you again for your affirmation, your kindness, and your love. You know I will miss you all so much. --Annie

Ministry Partners:

Rose Haven—Update

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 still need waterproof items and clothing that can be layered.

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

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 we gather for Mass next weekend we enter the final week of Lent as we celebrate Palm/Passion Sunday. Holy Week begins here and takes us on a walk with Jesus as he courageously enters Jerusalem for the last time. Once there, palms still fresh in our hands, we plunge directly into the story of his passion and death on the cross. It all

happens so quickly that it can feel abrupt and out of sync with reality. But isn't this often true of life, especially in times of crisis or tragedy? Jesus and his disciples walked into Jerusalem amid great fanfare surrounded by people jubilantly celebrating their arrival. And then tragedy struck. Even if Jesus had an idea of what would happen during Passover, it's pretty clear the disciples did not. They were stunned and terrified. We who raise our palm branches next weekend also know what's going to happen. For one week we reflect on the Paschal Mystery—Jesus' life, death and resurrection—which will culminate with Easter. It is the pivotal point of our calendar. It portrays the foundational lesson Nature has been teaching humanity from the beginning of time—life is cyclical. Life emerges from death. Death is not the final reality.

Holy Week recounts the tragic drama of Jesus' capture by the authorities in Jerusalem during Passover, followed by his trial, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. The human elements of this story—the motivations of the authorities, the betrayal Jesus suffers at the hands of his friends, the humiliations inflicted out of spite, the degradations of his humanity and the torture itself—all of these reflect the worst in human nature, especially when we humans perpetrate horrific injustices against each other and the natural world. These are the tragic elements of Jesus' life and death. This is where his teachings about Love are paramount and what makes his life the model of human transformation and evolution. It is the reason for his death and the human cruelty of his executioners that identifies this story as tragedy. And it is his resurrection that calls us back to Nature's role as teacher telling us once again, in human terms, that death is the transformational doorway to MORE life. Resurrection is built into the system.

As I look at my raspberry patch and the dogwood outside my window I see changes in form, changes in the configuration of raspberry canes and subtle differences difficult to describe. These are the same plants that were here last year, but they are also not exactly the SAME. Something is new. Something is different. Even here, in the garden, I can see something new has transpired through the death of winter. A truly 'new' life is emerging here this spring. Life, death, resurrection endlessly repeated—that is the Pattern our Creator embedded in the earth's DNA and in ours. Jesus is the human face of that pattern for those who have washed the mud from their eyes and dared to leave the confines of the grave.

May the blessings of Holy Week be with you all,
Toni