

December 3, 2017

Advent Greetings to all of you,

As we begin leaning toward winter, the title of one of our Advent hymns comes to mind: "Waiting In Silence". I find myself "waiting in silence" this rainy afternoon, happily sitting with a cup of tea, peering out my living room window at the now leafless maple and gingko trees lining the street. The quiet descends with the cold and the rain, and I am all too aware of both gratitude (being warm, dry, indoors) and grief (sisters and brothers out there on the chilled, damp ground). It is difficult holding these two realities side-by-side. My heart aches and my mind turns inward as I allow the fragrant tea to work its soothing magic on the tension surrounding my heart. I am struggling with the abysmal news cycle as tragic old scripts play out yet again on the world stage. I am tempted to disbelieve I have any power, or that I have a voice. I tend to forget about the power of groundswells and that many voices are needed to create a chorus that generates a wave of such force that it finally turns the tide. I forget that the overwhelming majority of citizens on this planet truly, and more and more deeply, yearn for and struggle toward equality and peace. I will myself to remember that Advent's promise and confident message is, as Richard Rohr says in his essay by the same title that "Life is Headed Somewhere Good This Advent." God is not 'out there somewhere' but right here in this messy and often constricting tangle of life, prompting selfless deeds of courage and tirelessly eroding the hardness of hearts by the very force of that Living Spirit within us all. "Stay awake," Jesus tells the disciples in today's Gospel. "Be watchful. Be alert!" As we face into the personal, social and global losses of this critical 'God moment' in our history, Advent invites us to stand fast in hope, to live as people who, trusting God, are alert to God's appearance in ordinary events and news of the day. This alertness cuts both ways. Walter Brueggemann, one of the most influential Old Testament scholars of our day, says: "Advent puts the hard question. It shatters our presumed worlds. It meets us precisely where our hurt and our hope converge around the person of Jesus. It asks if we are bold and sharp enough to speak the hurt that belongs to us and to our weary world. It asks if we are ready and open enough for a newness to be given. It asks if we...trust [God/Christ] enough to relinquish the old world." It asks whether we can "lean into an ending," a dismantling of all we treasure, "and affirm that the dismantling is not done by an enemy" but by our beloved and ever-faithful God? In his essay on Advent Rohr says: "The descent into darkness is necessary to all life, to transformation, and to fresh expressions of God. Creation begins with the Spirit hovering over a formless, dark deep to bring forth light and life. When we demand any completion to history on our terms, when we demand that our anxiety or any dissatisfaction be taken away, saying as it were, "Why did life let me down? Why didn't I get what I wanted or expected?" we are refusing to say "Come, Lord Jesus." We are refusing to hold out for the full story. Foundational hope demands a foundational belief in a world that is still and always unfolding." The Advent mantra 'Come, Lord Jesus,' says Rohr, "means that...perfect fullness is always yet to come; we do not need to demand it now. This keeps the field of life wide open to grace and to a future created by God through our surrender and creative participation."

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, **December 9**, 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, **December 10**, 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.

Christmas Eve Mass in Eugene Sunday, **December 24 at 9:00pm**. This will be our 7th annual Christmas Eve celebration at the home of Dianne and Amanda. The address and directions are posted in the member portal of the Sophia Christi website. You may also request directions from Toni by responding to this email or by calling 503-286-3584. All are invited and welcome!

Upcoming Events:

Annual Retreat 2018 – February 16 and 17

For those of you who have not yet penciled in the date of our Lenten Retreat on your calendar, this is yet another reminder. Strange as it may seem on this first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of Lent is just two months away! As we leave fall behind and enter the season of winter we are invited to wake up to the gift of darkness and silence, to find peace and joy in the transformative stillness, and nurture our hope in the promise of new life and a new age. Then, as we begin to leave winter behind and cross the threshold into spring we are offered another opportunity to reflect deeply on our lives, listen for Spirit's direction in prayer, uproot restrictive habits and attitudes, and turn our hearts again toward the demands of the social gospel. We move into and out of the winter months here, in the northern hemisphere, through the 'bookend seasons' of Advent and Lent. Take time this Advent to consider participating in our annual retreat this coming Lent.

Pastoral Update:

Summary of November 18 Annual Meeting

The Sophia Christi Council Annual Meeting was held on November 18th in Salem. We currently have eight members including our newest member Mike Newton who was voted in at this annual meeting. We are so pleased Mike has joined the Council! It is always amazing to hear

Toni's Pastoral report and the connections that are occurring in both the Eugene and Portland communities. The Council passed the 2018 annual budget and it is very similar to last year's budget. Thank you to everyone who has donated to ensure this vibrant Catholic community continues to make a difference in the lives of those searching for a truly inclusive spiritual community. The Council also discussed various locations for our 2018 retreat, to be held Feb 16th and 17th. A decision will hopefully be made by the dates of the December Masses so we can start to have interested folks sign up. As always, if you find yourself called to more intimately participate in Sophia Christi please speak to any of the current Council members: Portland: Kathleen, Joy, Jim and Mike. Eugene: Judith, Bruce, Dianne and Jessica. –Dianne T.

Introduction of Newest Council Member

My name is Mike Newton and I have been attending Portland Sophia Christi since 2013 along with my partner, Ron Evers. We rarely miss a Saturday. Though my religious background is Baptist, I prefer Sophia Christi. A few of the things I like most about Toni's ministry is her emphasis on love, acceptance of others, and the social gospel. I also very much like the people that make up the Portland Sophia Christi group. Though small, it is a wonderful group of people. It is my hope to be one more godly voice on the Parish Council. --Mike

Contemplative Prayer Group—Eugene

The Eugene community contemplative prayer group continues to gather and the time spent in silent contemplation is a wonderful retreat from the business of the day. This practice fits in perfectly with the ideas Richard Rohr shares in his book "The Divine Dance". "Being part of this cosmic dance can only be known experientially. That is why I teach centering prayer and contemplation, and really all intelligent religious rituals and practices: to lead you to a place of nakedness and vulnerability where your ego identity falls away, where your explanations don't mean anything, where your superiority doesn't matter. If God wants to get to you, and the Trinity experience wants to come alive within you, these liminal moments are when God has the very best chance." Rohr also says these wonderfully simple words: "God does not love you because you are good. God loves you because God is good." –Dianne T.

Extending our Care for the Poor

Please look over the list of needed items and bring them with you to Mass this month. We will collect your donations and deliver them to the Catholic Worker House in Eugene and Rose Haven in Portland. The needs are even greater with cold weather approaching.

Rose Haven—Accepting Only the Following Items Until 2018

Rose Haven is currently accepting ONLY: coats (gently used ok); gloves; scarves; underwear; socks; blankets, rain gear, sleeping bags and tarps (all may be gently used); bras, leggings and practical walking shoes (all may be gently used); deodorant; shampoo & conditioner (travel size ideal); hand warmers/sanitizer; razors; pocket tissues; soap; backpacks (gently used ok); handled shopping bags; rolling suitcases and carts (gently used ok); brand new toys, clothing or gift cards for children's holiday gifts. For a list of items accepted after January 1st simply go to <http://rosehaven.org/helping/donate-items/>

Eugene Catholic Worker--Requests

The list of needed items includes: warm clothes and socks (including mismatched socks), travel size hand sanitizer, soaps, shampoos and grooming items. Articles always welcome as well are backpacks, blankets and sheets. If you have any questions please speak with Kathy Pekarsky, Rhoda Kirwin or Dianne Turner.

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.

When we meet as a community next week to celebrate the second Sunday of Advent Isaiah's first words are "Comfort my people, console them, says your God." In these times as in so many others we, the people, long for words of comfort and hope. Isaiah is speaking to the Jews who have been deported to Babylon and are now subject to the laws and customs of an alien regime and its discordant view of reality. "This text at Advent," Brueggemann says, "asks us to reflect on our 'home,' on our sense of estrangement and on our 'Great Refusal' to whatever regimes falsely claim our lives." It is not only political regimes that claim our lives, but economic systems, cultural mores, social expectations, psychological and spiritual blinds. We hear the herald's voice crying out in the desert of these false regimes: "Make ready the way. Clear a path for the coming of God into the world, into your life." Let go of the old ways and attitudes. Loosen your grip on your closely held belief that 'things should be a certain way' and that 'what you think should happen is also what God would want.' John's role is to prepare the way and give access to the new age of God's reign—first in our hearts and our everyday lives so that through us God's reign can extravagantly blossom in our world. Advent is a time of transition from old concepts to the threshold of an entirely new way of seeing things, one that we can't yet fathom and therefore tend to fear. We find ourselves on this very cusp in the geo-political realm of today's global reality and, for the most part, futuristic films and novels portray destruction and horror. The secular and consumer-driven mindset would keep us stuck in the old regime, trap us in its reductionistic view of humanity and the human spirit, and numb us with distractions that prevent the hearing of that still, small voice of creation anchoring our dignity in the very image and likeness of God. So we return to the Gospel, to the good news that will save us from our own fearful instincts, and lead us toward the tantalizing promise of new life with all its vulnerability and giftedness in hastening us forward into a new age. "What John knows," says Brueggemann, "is not the name of the person [for whom he is preparing the way; that is the Christmas proclamation] but that it is the work of the Spirit which will blow open the world and permit a newness that staggers." This is the Advent message.

Welcome to Advent,

Toni