

February 4, 2018

The season of Lent begins in just 10 days. I am both fascinated and delighted that Ash Wednesday falls on Valentine's Day this year and Easter lands on April Fools' Day. I suppose it is the child in me that finds this calendar detail so absorbing, but the juxtaposition of religious and secular observances in these early months of 2018 has been riveting my attention from the moment I first noticed it was happening. At the same time that I'm aware of this 'coincidence' in timing as a kind of happenstance occurrence, I am also intrigued by Spirit's invitation to see God at play in our world and in our lives. It isn't that I think God has orchestrated this arrangement of the calendar (though I'm also not saying God's hand isn't in it somehow, somewhere). What I am suggesting is that Sophia, Holy Wisdom, may be beckoning us into a playful game of hide-and-seek with God this Lent. We see God 'hiding' in the odd, even hilarious Valentine Ashes and Easter Fool details of the season while playfully challenging us to dive deep in our 'seeking' of a not-so-somber Divine Presence at the 'heart' of everything. A long time ago the Church forgot about 'play' and adopted an attitude of 'harsh discipline' and 'threats of punishment' as the chosen method of moving people toward change. 'Penance' became another word for self-denial and we were taught to 'give something up for Lent.' Then sometime after Vatican II the tide began to shift and we were invited to 'take something on' for Lent—a prayer practice, a social action project, acts of generosity, etc. But the idea of becoming childlike before God wasn't one of the options. Ashes on Valentine's Day and an April Fools Easter introduces a different way of approaching Lent this year, and I have a silly sense of God's desire to remind us all that we are 'children', that we are deeply and profoundly loved, that we are cradled in that Valentine Heart of Divinity and that nothing we have ever done or can ever do will change that very basic fact. So our task is to open our eyes, ears and hearts for that love to pour in. We are being urged to let go our judgments and seek the God of paradox, the God of surprises, in the messy incarnational reality of our world at this very time (2018) in our history.

I am also reminded of a sonnet by William Wordsworth: "The world is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; little we see in Nature that is ours; We have given our hearts away...!" It is time to take back our hearts and our powers as God's children. The 'April fool' and the 'ashes' remind us there are things that require our attention if we are to heed God's voice this season and return to the heart of what Really Matters. The 'world of getting and spending' pulls us away from one another and unravels the bonds between us. It also blinds us to the destruction of nature that underpins the 'getting and spending' cycles that fuel the world's economy. How do the myriad distractions bombarding us daily encourage us to be unconscious and allow the 'wasting' of our powers and resources? How do we reclaim our hearts and turn our faces once again in the direction of the One, central Divine Heart holding us all, and the world, in an embrace of love? Answers to these questions lie in prayer. It is through seeking the playfully hidden God, the God who would delight, lovingly challenge, guide and patiently speak to us in the deep chambers of our hearts, that we will find answers, or at least a direction we might turn to pursue them. It is a quest we are invited to embark on each Lent, but this year there is playfulness embedded in the journey. Coincidence? It doesn't matter. It is there...

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, **February 10**, 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, **February 11**, 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:

Annual Retreat 2018 – February 17

“Come away to a quiet place by yourselves and rest a little” (Mk 6:31)

Our Lenten retreat is less than two weeks away! Registration forms went out last month and are once again attached to this newsletter. You can mail the form to the Sophia Christi address listed at the bottom of the form (to arrive by Monday, Feb 12) or bring it to Mass next weekend. The retreat will be held at the Marian Estates in Sublimity, OR, and directions from both Portland and Eugene can be found at the bottom of the registration form. The \$50 cost for the retreat includes lunch catered by Trexlar Farm of Stayton. The menu is designed to accommodate food sensitivities, with vegetarian and gluten free options provided as well. The grounds of the Estate are easily walkable and the environment is safe and quiet. Please consider joining your community as we enter Lent together this year in a spirit of prayer and renewal.

Next Council Meeting – Saturday, April 21

Our next Council meeting will be Saturday, April 21, at Ike Box Café in Salem from 11:00 to 1:00. If you are unable to attend but have questions or ideas to offer, please give your thoughts to Council members at the January weekend Masses on the 13th and 14th, or email them to Toni or one of the members before the meeting. For carpool information contact Toni in Portland or Judith in Eugene. Portland Council members: Kathy, Mike, Joy and Jim. Eugene Council members: Judith, Carol, Jessica, Bruce and Dianne.

Pastoral Update:

Summary of January 20 Council Meeting

We had a conference call from 11:00 to noon. Finances were discussed and refinements in our reporting forms were made. We're deep into planning our February 17 retreat, to be held at the Marian House in Sublimity. We can guarantee a pleasant, comfortable retreat with opportunities for deep spiritual exploration. We're sad to report that both Ministry Partners (Rose Haven in Portland, and Catholic Worker House in Eugene) have failed to live up to our hopes and are not partners any more. We are happy to report that the three Council Officers have volunteered and been re-elected for 2018 terms: Bruce Turner, President; Judith Manning, Secretary; and Carol Zolkoske, Treasurer. –Judith Manning, Secretary

Contemplative Prayer Group – Eugene

We've been meeting twice monthly for going on three years, and we continually get closer to each other and more spiritually expanded as a result. We agree on a book we all want to learn from, and at each meeting we read it, taking turns. It might take us a few months or a whole year to digest a book. We read, and we talk. We read, and we question, discuss, explore together. And we laugh! Sometimes we watch a video of a favorite author. Sometimes we take a foray into art, like Meinrad Craighead, a woman whose art blew us all away. Lately we've been reading Richard Rohr, and most of us have subscribed to his daily reflections online. We get so much out of his revolutionary striving for non-dual consciousness and spiritual maturity. I can't wait to see what we get up to next! Please consider joining us...you'll love it. –Judith Manning

Seeking new Ministry Partners in 2018

From the beginning of our existence over ten years ago, Sophia Christi has been collecting food and personal hygiene items for various small non-profits serving the poor and homeless populations in Portland and Eugene. We have partnered with these organizations through members of our community who have volunteered many hours of service, sometimes over the course of several years. We are grateful to have been able to extend our outreach to the poor and marginalized through our dedicated volunteers.

Through the years we have needed to make changes as our members have discontinued their volunteer services with a particular agency, the agency itself disbanded, or we recognized a need to shift our focus and priorities. In adapting to a series of changes over the last six months, **we will no longer be collecting items for either Rose Haven in Portland or the Catholic Worker in Eugene.**

This month we embark on a new effort by re-opening our **'Ministry Partner'** initiative. If you are currently volunteering with a non-profit organization serving the poor, homeless, marginalized or immigrant populations in Portland or Eugene, and you would like the organization to be considered as a potential Sophia Christi ministry partner, please respond to Toni via this newsletter or contact one of the Council members. In order to be considered you or another member of Sophia Christi must be a current volunteer with the non-profit and must continue in that capacity for the duration of our partnership. We hope to begin this new phase of our outreach ministry as soon as possible and to enter into a new and meaningful relationship with an organization that shares our values of service to the 'stranger among us' living on the edge of our society without a safety net.

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.

I had the great privilege of being on a silent retreat this past week in which I spent many hours sitting, resting, walking, praying. It was a graced time. Things fell together as if orchestrated by God's hand, and what I felt each day was pure gratitude. My reflections today are grounded in that quiet time. At various points in the journey snippets of songs or surprising phrases would pop into my mind. Some caused me to laugh out loud. Some left me pondering and sent me straight to my journal. Some came in filmy images that required colored pencils and felt-tipped markers to truly 'see' what was being evoked or 'shown.' Some left me deeply unsettled, even confused, while others remain dangling, like threads of a weaving that don't yet know where they belong. This, for me, is the mysterious, sometimes dry and sometimes awe-inspiring journey of life engaged through the medium of prayer. Lent is an invitation to this kind of journey. Silence is not a requirement, nor is time 'apart' from the changeable nature of normal life. All that is required is a practice of showing up at some appointed time every day to be 'at home' with God. It might take the form of a one-sided conversation at times. It might resemble a psalm of lament when 'the world is too much with us.' For the artist prayer might take the form of a drawing, painting or collage. For the writer, the poet, prayer might manifest in a poem or letter to God. For the musician it might be a time with one's instrument playing whatever melodies want to be expressed as prayer in that moment. There are so many ways to pray. Simply watching cloud formations move across the sky can be a form of prayer when you open your heart to God. May you be inspired as Lent draws near to embark on a practice of prayer. It can take as many forms as Spirit places before your mind's eye. It can be one thing or many. If you set the intention and show up God will take the lead. And if it seems like nothing is happening don't worry, it is. Just by the simple fact of you showing up something is happening in the deep recesses of your heart. God is present there, always, drawing you deeper into love, sometimes speaking in movements you can barely discern or have not developed the capacity, yet, to recognize. Have faith. That's what 'return to the Gospel' means—return to the good news of God's unfathomable and unconditional love. In your imagination place your hand in God's hand and trust the Love that will never let you go.

May you have a blessed Lent,

Toni