

October 7, 2018

Dear Friends,

When I saw the headline yesterday morning that the “inevitable” had happened, that the U.S. Senate had confirmed a credibly accused sex offender, I was heartsick. As the day wore on I began to notice periodic spasms of sadness and anxiety as I went about the normal activities of the day. It wasn’t until I stood at the grocery checkout, barely controlling an overwhelming irritability with the person behind the register, that it dawned on me—I am grieving. Over and over the morning’s headline struck its sinister blow. My heart ached. Tears loomed. I felt the onslaught of hopelessness, anger, depression, helplessness, and rage against the descending darkness. Distractions came and went, but the shadowy specter of a malevolent presence surfaced again and again with visceral force. The irritability was a physical clue pointing toward a sense of profound loss. I seemed to be in the belly of a monster feeding on my life while, at the same time, this ugly behemoth was completely oblivious of my existence. And it wasn’t just “I” it was “we,” all of us in the belly of this monster. The ensuing rage was followed by waves of despondency. It was helpful to put a name (grief) on what was happening. It was helpful to realize I am far from alone in my deep sense of horror and betrayal as a woman, as an American, as a Catholic, as a person who decries a post-truth ethic in public life. But what helped return me to my spiritual center was Richard Rohr’s reflections on “the path of descent” from the Conspire 2018 conference designed by the Center for Action and Contemplation. “[With] the horrible state of our government, the scandalous state of our Church, the sad state of our planet as we allow it to die right around us and pretend it isn’t happening,” he said, “how can we talk about anything but descent? Humanity and this planet are going through a major, major purgation. The path of descent is the path of transformation. Darkness, failure, relapse, death and woundedness are our primary teachers, not ideas or doctrines.” Our frail human egos want the opposite to be true. We not only want to believe but we live as though achievement, success and the pursuit of perfection are the gateways to transformation. These, in fact, do nothing more than bolster the narcissistic ego. It is the emptying of that false self, the process of descent into the soul’s dark night, that takes us beyond our personal and collective narcissism, beyond idolizing security, status and fortune, back to the bedrock of an all-inclusive REALITY, back to the one and only Absolute, God-the-only-God (Mk 10:18). “The Spirit is taking the smugness of our collective narcissism away from us,” Rohr says. We can resist, deny or accept the path of descent. We cannot stop it. This is a planetary time of change, a cosmic reset, a global period of spiritual transformation. As we collectively lose faith in institutions and belief systems we have given our life-blood and our souls to building, maintaining and empowering to “keep order” for us, we feel adrift, unmoored, angry, terrified. We grieve the many layers of loss, fight against losing, pretend we aren’t losing, try to make losing feel like gaining. We wail, lash out, hide, avoid. God is purging the smugness from our minds and hearts. Transformation has begun. More than ever we need community to help us brave the night ahead.

**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, **October 13**, 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, **October 14**, at **First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23<sup>rd</sup>**, 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:

#### Our 'Annual Meeting'—November 17—and Call for New Council Members

**Once again I invite you to consider whether you are being called to serve on the Council.** Helping guide our communal journey in this new Sophia Christi decade is an important ministry in itself and the Council needs people with vision and a variety of skills to discern Spirit's guidance and forge a path forward together. Please prayerfully consider this invitation and come to the next meeting if you can. If unable to come, please give your thoughts to Council members before the November weekend Masses. Portland Council members: Kathy, Mike, Joy and Jim. Eugene Council members: Judith, Carol, Bruce, Dianne and Jessica.

#### Annual Retreat 2019 – Save the Date

Ash Wednesday is March 6 next year and we will begin the Lenten season with our annual Retreat on Saturday, March 16. We are excited to announce that Sr. Carmel has again accepted our invitation to be the facilitator. For those who have experienced her creative energy and grounded presence leading retreats in the past this is welcome news. Her familiarity with, and deep understanding of our community is a special blessing. More details about location and costs will be provided as they are finalized, but please mark your calendar now so you are free to participate in March.

### Pastoral Update:

#### Summary of September 15 Council Meeting

*The Council met on September 15, at IKE Box in Salem. We've enjoyed that meeting place for a couple of years, but they will be closing at the end of the year. So we're exploring other possibilities, like churches that belong to The Community of Welcoming Congregations. Our beloved Treasurer, Carol Zolkolske, has resigned and our new Treasurer will be Jessica Katon. We're so grateful to Carol for keeping our financial records all these years, and to Jessica for volunteering! We're actively planning our 2019 retreat. We've set the date--March 16 (or, alternatively, March 23). And we've begun exploration of where it will be held. We're so grateful for everyone's participating in the survey, and have decided that a day retreat will work better*

*than an overnight for most of us (especially financially). Our facilitator, Carmel, got good reviews and has agreed to facilitate again next year. The Council continues to relieve Toni of tasks, as she has been shouldering more than is comfortable. Our Annual Meeting is November 17, and we are hoping new people will step up to become Council Members. We'll also be asking for donation pledges in October and November. We are a financially viable and a spiritually nourishing community. Council Members are pleased and grateful! If you have questions or comments please talk to one of us! Portland Council members: Kathy, Mike, Joy and Jim. Eugene Council members: Judith, Carol, Jessica, Bruce and Dianne. –Judith Manning, Council Secretary*

### **Financial Health and Pledges**

Each fall we ask you to begin, upgrade or renew your monthly pledge to Sophia Christi. Our base-line operating expenses of \$1500.00 per month include rent on church facilities in Portland and Eugene, website fees (domain names, server, updating and maintenance), printing, pastor stipend, advertising and outreach, office and liturgical supplies, insurance and state (non-profit) fees. I would like to quote the words of Carol, our Treasurer, regarding Sophia Christi finances: *"We are managing to cover our financial obligations because of the commitment that many of you have made by filling out pledge cards last fall and following through with your pledges. As treasurer I am happy to report that at our present giving levels we will end the year in the black. Thank you all. For those of you who choose not to pledge but to put what you can in the collection basket thank you as well. Perhaps some would say that talking about money is a turn off but for myself I feel so strongly about how important it is to spread the message that Sophia Christi brings to people who are in need of compassion and understanding, as well as spiritual support and encouragement, that I'm happy to talk about the financial commitment needed to make this happen. If we want to make a difference it will take not only love but also money. Please give serious thought and prayer to making Sophia Christi a priority in your giving plan in 2019."*

I extend a **special invitation** to those of you receiving this newsletter who are unable to participate in our monthly liturgies, annual retreat and social events. If you have visited the website, believe in the mission of Sophia Christi, and/or simply want to support what we are doing, please consider making a one-time, monthly or yearly contribution. By clicking the "Donate" button on our website homepage you will find our mailing address (5658 N. Denver, Portland, OR 97217) as well as a portal for PayPal. Thank you for being part of our extended community. We see you, appreciate you, and hold you in our prayers.

### **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](http://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.

"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" Jesus tells us in next week's Gospel. The youth who runs up to Jesus asking what s/he can do to share in God's

eternal life wants what most of us want—to put skills and resources to use, to achieve a goal, to create something wonderful and receive recognition. When Jesus tells the youth to sell everything, give proceeds to the poor, then come back and follow him, the young one is crestfallen and goes away saddened and dejected. A “young” spirituality is one that has not yet developed depth, and depth grows over time through the integration of transformative experience. Being enthralled with the “things” of the world is natural. It is a fitting response to the beauty and intricacy of our planetary reality. We have minds that enjoy manipulating ideas and concepts, hearts that are attracted or repelled by other hearts, an entire array of sensory experiences that captivate our attention and a psychology that compels us toward connection, belonging, safety, expression, freedom, creativity. All of this is good. The impulse to develop the many layers of our human potential is Spirit’s own desire manifesting in the world through us. “Young” spirituality often stops at this material level, though, believing that following rules and obeying commandments is all that’s required. But life tends to push us beyond laws and rules. It takes us into undiscovered territories where old answers no longer work and new questions are hard to formulate. It upsets all our preconceived ideas and turns the tables on our assumptions. We can easily get lost since we lack the basic tools for recognizing, let alone reading, the signs we will eventually learn to see and decipher. This is the spiritual territory St. John of the Cross called “the dark night of the soul” and Rohr calls the “path of descent.” It involves letting go of what we have acquired, detaching from our natural focus on safety, security, reputation, acquisition of property, and the many “things” the world has to offer. It is the transformative journey leading from that “young” spirituality into the depths of the heart of God where Wisdom’s spiritual gifts reside. Barbara Brown Taylor tells us we are “in the middle of a living thing” like the belly of Jonah’s whale. Faith takes us under the surface where the seeds of Wisdom can be nourished and grow. “What looks like down is where God is hiding and exploding wide open,” says Rohr. So have courage and dare to search those dark crevices where God’s Spirit is longing to be found.

Peace and blessings to all of you,

Toni