

March 3, 2019

Lenten blessings to all of you,

Lent begins on Wednesday, Daylight Savings arrives next Sunday and the first day of spring occurs in just two weeks. All of these significant dates happening within a span of just 14 days leads me to reflect on the energy required to meet an ongoing and insistent need for change. One person this week told me they feel 'bullied' by the fall and spring time changes "as if we don't have enough change to deal with already!" they said. I understand the anger and resistance underneath that comment. I also know those feelings aren't just about turning the clock back and forward. They speak to the reality of exhaustion, to the mental fatigue involved in processing more data than the human brain can hope to manage in a given day. Yet the word 'growth' is synonymous with change. What doesn't change doesn't grow; it's dead. The issue we face today is that change on a multitude of levels happens in such a quick and overlapping fashion that our heads are often spinning. Finding a 'still' space in all the noise and commotion has become a priority for many people. The search for 'stillness' can tempt us to shut down and block out inner promptings for self-reflection, for taking a deeper look at our lives, our values and our priorities. This sounds like work. It sounds like 'one more thing to do' that will likely lead to yet another requirement for change. So, rather than respond to the Spirit's invitation to dive into the stillness and have a look around, we may give into addictive distractions instead. The temptation to zone out is especially strong when our brains are over-stimulated with confusing and/or jarring input that is outside our control. Exhaustion is real. The gut wrenching 'news of the day,' the blaring calls for action, and the clamoring cries from advertisers can wear us down and wear us out. As citizens of the world and, especially, citizens of a democracy, we must remain informed and be willing, and ready, to act in the name of justice rather than ignore those cries and turn away. At the same time, though, being continually confronted with circumstances beyond our control can leave us drained and our hearts numb as media outlets ply our emotions for their own ends. Maybe we need to remember Jesus' example. He walked with the outcasts, listened to their pain, healed the sick, taught the crowds, confronted his own religious authorities—then he went apart from everyone to process it all by talking to God in prayer. His way of dealing with the pressures in his life provides a healthy example for us to follow. We all need that 'away' time—time to reflect on our lives, time to remember our values, to take stock of our mistakes, to make amends to those we've hurt, to rest, to listen for Spirit's direction, to renew our energy and willingness to live the Gospel, to renew our love for God and neighbor. The next six weeks provide us that precious time. May it be some of the most enriching weeks of our individual and collective life.

Mass Schedule This Month

Mass in Portland will be Saturday, **March 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, **March 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.

Upcoming Events:

Come to the Retreat! – March 16

“God is alive and well in Sophia Christi. I hope you are coming to the retreat. God who lives in the heart of our community will be present, helping and encouraging all of us to have a meaningful beginning to Lent.”
—Joy Learned, Council Member

Registration forms will be available at Masses next weekend. The retreat will be held at the United Methodist Church in Stayton, 1450 Fern Ridge Rd SE. We will begin at 10:00am and will end with Mass from 3:00 to 4:00pm. Our facilitator is Sr. Carmel and our theme this year is ‘Boundless Compassion’. Cost is the same as last year--\$50.00--which includes lunch provided by Trexler Farms, with vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free options. Scholarships are available if needed. No one will be turned away.

Next Council Meeting – Saturday, April 27

Our next Council meeting will be Saturday, April 27, from 11am to 1pm. There is a possibility that Ike Box Café in Salem (where we have been meeting for several years) will be closing before our next meeting but, at this point, the plan is to meet there. We will let you know if the location changes in our April newsletter. 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 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:

Contemplative Prayer Group – Eugene

The contemplative prayer group meets every 2nd and 4th Wednesday evening, and currently has space for one or two people to join. The group meditates for 20 minutes; then together read aloud and discuss a contemplative reading that supports and deepens the shared spirituality of the group — inclusive, dynamic, and wisdom- and incarnation-focused. If you are interested in joining please speak to Judith or Amanda.

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 gather as a community next weekend we will hear Paul telling us: “the word of God is near you, on your lips and in your heart.” What God wants from us, in other words, is already structured into our very being. God’s word, God’s life, and God’s desire for us—all of this lives in our heart. It is the life force pulsing through us that connects us with all living things. It connects us with one another in ways we rarely notice unless we establish a personal connection, unless we actually ‘connect’ with each other. And it connects us to God whose life enlivens us all. So when we come to the Gospel after hearing that reading from Paul, and witness the ‘devil’s’ attempt to lure Jesus away from the life force within him, we see what disconnection looks like. It looks like greed. It looks like selfishness. It has all the markings of disrespect for others that comes about through an exclusive focus on ourselves. None of us lives “by bread (physical goods) alone.” We have life in and through God’s Life Force made manifest in tangible forms we can see, taste, touch. All that has life is one with this Life Force. The purpose of religion, I believe, is to remind us of this basic truth and help us recognize we are connected to each other, especially when the ‘other’ is so challenging for us to accept. Religion is supposed to help us build and rebuild bridges over chasms of pain and misunderstanding. It is supposed to help us pray for those who have hurt us and be willing to ask for forgiveness and be forgiving of those same others. It reminds us that God is as near to our untrustworthy and disrespectful neighbor as to our beloved families and friends. As physical beings, entrenched in our own bodies, immersed in our own thoughts and swayed by a constant wash of emotion, we often feel so separate from each other we don’t want to accept we are “one in Christ Jesus”. It can be difficult to realize we are part of an ocean of Love that surrounds, fills and enlivens everything and everyone known and unknown. But we are. Jesus knew this and was not diverted from his sense of connection to the Whole of Being when he was tempted by ‘the tempter’ in the desert. Paul knew this. We can know this as well through taking our rest in the Spirit, making time to listen with the ear of the heart to the God who is nearer than our breath. Lent is designed for just such a purpose. Let’s make the most of it.

May you have a loving, prayer-filled Lent,

Toni