

April 7, 2019

Dear Sophia Christi,

As I prepare for Passion/Palm Sunday, then Easter the following week, I'm both aware and pained by the world's suffering while reveling in the earth's dazzlingly fresh colors of spring. At this point in the seasonal cycle the planet's life force is surging here in the northwest, lilacs and azaleas are blooming, trees are donning their leafy wardrobes, and some grasses are begging for a first-time mowing. Warm bursts of sunshine alternate with soaking rains to jumpstart the growing season, and light increases day-by-day. Yet in the human world we witness pockets of increasing darkness with institutions of every kind in disarray and whole populations suffering the effects of disastrous policies over which they have little, if any, control. The 'Passion' we commemorate next Sunday is seen in the faces of children torn from their parents on our southern border, in the faces of mothers and fathers fleeing death squads in Honduras, in the bodies of malnourished infants and children in Yemen, in broken limbs caused by a proliferation of minefields in South Sudan. The list of atrocities runs long and deep. The desecration of bodies—whether four-footed, two-footed, winged or finned, and the ravaging of the body of the earth itself—is the present-day face of the passion, crucifixion and death of the Body of Christ. A modern-day 'stations of the cross' held in many cities and sponsored by an ecumenical assortment of local churches brings this awareness front and center. We Christians must move beyond a theology that isolates Jesus from the rest of humanity, as though his suffering and the politically motivated injustice of his tortured execution, is/was somehow worse or more egregious, than that of those who are being deprived of dignity, molested, intentionally harmed and killed today. Jesus stands in for all of us and shines a light on the brutality inherent in selfish interests far from any recognition or concern for the intrinsic worth of every individual as well as the interdependence of the human community and the ecosystem of the planet as a whole. We symbolically move through this excruciating awareness of depraved cruelty, personal and communal agony, gruesome death and uncontrollable grief as we lower our triumphant palms next Sunday and listen again to Luke's rendering of the passion and death of Jesus. Listening once more to this story, let's hold in our hearts the millions of crucified bodies in our country and world today and recognize, in it, the Body of Christ. That Body, which is all of us, suffers. And as we yield to the reality of death at story's end, let's not give up. The disciples of Jesus' time didn't know what we know, that Easter follows Calvary. We don't know how to turn the world around and get to Easter from where we are. But we've learned a few things about our own attitudes and behaviors as we've journeyed through Lent and, hopefully, we've become a little more compassionate, a little more open and accepting, a little more peaceful. Easter arises within the community as we make these changes. The Jesus story is a template. Trusting its challenge and its lens we embrace Easter's promise. Life resurges from the bleakness of the grave.

### Mass Schedule This Month

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

**Easter Mass in Eugene** will be **Sunday, April 21, 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:

#### 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 Cafe 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. If you are unable to attend but have questions or ideas to offer, please give your thoughts to Council members at the Masses next weekend 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:

#### Retreat Comments:

“Everyone is so welcoming.” “People were so willing to share.” “The facilitation was excellent; such a gracious leader.” “The format was excellent.” “There was time to listen to each other, ourselves and our God. Thanks to all organizers. Food and community was wonderful.” “There was a chance to hear from everyone, in large and small groups. I especially liked and gained from the range of experiences and ideas shared.” Some of the words participants used to describe the retreat were: “healing, replenishing, joyful, revealing, re-grounding, uplifting, enlightening, inspiring, reflective, opening, softening, restorative,” and it was a “reminder to think ‘compassion’ first.” These simple comments provide a tiny window into Sophia Christi’s annual Lenten Retreat held March 16<sup>th</sup>. Someone remarked it was the first year we had sun and no rain! The weather was mild enough to allow for walks and reflection time outdoors. We also enjoyed the participation of the pastor of Stayton’s Methodist Church, who joined our circle for the entire day. The church was a perfect fit for us and we were treated with wonderful hospitality from members of the congregation when we arrived. Thank you to Council members who made the day such a seamless success, and to Carmel for her excellent facilitation.

#### Eugene Funeral for Our Eldest Member

On March 22<sup>nd</sup> we had a lovely funeral service for Rosemary Johnson who, at 93, was our eldest member. Twenty members of her family joined us for Mass. Family members participated as readers, candle bearers, gift bearers, speakers, etc. The family was so appreciative of everything we had done to make this celebration meaningful, accessible

(most are not Catholic) and supportive of them in their loss. The reception following Mass was well attended and gave family, friends and members of our community time to mingle, share stories and get to know one another. Heart-felt gratitude was expressed by many members of the family, most of whom came from Louisiana, San Francisco, Chicago and Georgia to honor their mother, grandmother, aunt, and friend. Her son-in-law Kevin said to me, "I don't know what we would have done without Sophia Christi. You did so much for our mother and meant so much to her."

Carol, our former Treasurer, writes: *The service for Rosemary was truly a wonderful occasion. I have always been proud of Sophia Christi and never more so than yesterday. The service showed the heart and soul of what Sophia Christi is all about. It is why I truly believe that my connection remains so strong. The congregation welcomed Rosemary's family, all of whom were strangers to us, with open arms. We were there to celebrate a life well lived and the role each of us had in that life. I truly believe Sophia Christi played an important role in Rosemary's life and she played an important role in ours.* —Carol Zolkoske

### 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](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.

Today is the Fifth Sunday of Lent. In our first reading God speaks through the prophet Isaiah saying: "Forget about past grievances, and don't keep going over old history; see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" I don't believe we are being told to forget history altogether. We know from experience that unless we apply what we've learned from mistakes we've made we are bound to repeat those mistakes. But it's another thing to hold on to grudges and endlessly replay old injuries and resentments. In our day it promotes tribal identities and keeps our communities polarized. It can lead to war and war-like behavior as is becoming all too evident in this nation and around the world. Instead, we are asked to let go the tendency to create a defensive wall by blaming and maligning others. We are invited to open our hearts and allow ourselves to breathe the newly fresh air of every moment, watching for that spark of God's presence to reveal itself no matter the circumstance. It is an apt reminder as we plunge into the darkness of Passion Sunday and Holy Week. There is evidence of God doing something new in Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples. There

is evidence of God doing something new in Jesus' defense of the chief priest's attendant whose ear was cut off by one in the crowd. Not only did he defend; he healed the attendant's ear. God was doing something new in Jesus' humility, his quiet honesty, his acceptance of an agonizing ordeal that was beyond the pale of justice yet one he recognized as part of his destiny. There is a song in our hymnal by Dan Schutte that begins: "Holy darkness, blessed night, heaven's answer hidden from our sight." This is Passion Sunday and Holy Week's lesson. It captures the experience of being blinded by that darkness, unable to discern any light, feeling abandoned by God and abjectly alone. It is Jesus' experience in the garden and our experience in those times of extreme anxiety, sorrow and fear. The fourth verse of the song offers a touchstone of hope in the midst of such hopelessness and pain. It reads: "In your deepest hour of darkness I will give you wealth untold. When the silence stills your spirit, will my riches fill your soul." God is there, reviving the spirit, kindling new life in the barren ground of our souls. Easter follows, springing forth in some way often unnoticed in the midst of sheer relief. This season primes us to become and remain aware. We are ever invited to strive to perceive the light in the darkness, and to rejoice when it bursts out of the bleak gloom of desolate ground with buds opening to the rising sun.

A blessed Holy Week and joyful Easter to all of you,

Toni