

September 1, 2019

Greetings and peace to all,

The end of summer and beginning of the school year always takes me by surprise. I suppose I'm not alone in being attuned to the rhythms of an academic schedule despite being outside of it for decades. It seems to be a cultural phenomenon ingrained in my bones like so many others, but perhaps this one is easiest to see. Most are as 'natural' as the air I breathe, unobtrusively influencing what I see, what I hear and don't hear and, of course, what I feel. I have biases inherited from a midwestern upbringing and from both immigrant and farming grandparents who survived 'the Great War' and the depression. I am aware of a snobbish religious mindset implanted during eight years of Catholic education in the 50's that still rears its head at times much to my chagrin. The influences of ancestry and culture, of family dynamics, societal expectations, economic factors, as well as personal features such as temperament and health, all play a role in focusing the internal lens and triggering particular responses. All help create blind spots for me and others I see suffering under similar kinds of baggage, often as unable to recognize those veiled influences as I am while still being governed by them. It's tempting to think the 'answer' to this dilemma would be for others to share my viewpoint. Propaganda of all sorts is built on this theme. It's one way of dealing with the extravagant diversity of viewpoints and the resulting route each takes in responding to everyday events. On this technology-rich and hyper-connected planet such diversity is increasingly overwhelming, confusing and exhausting. What else should we expect from a cosmically inspired growth spurt in human evolution? Consciousness is expanding rapidly in concert with an expanding universe. As a species we are struggling to keep up with the energies unleashed in our world, energies that feel destructive and are, therefore, terrifying. When I bring myself back to that place of 'faith' I've been writing and talking about lately, I can re-align with the God-process that encompasses the whole of the cosmos and all life that I know, and can imagine. I have no idea what it's all about but when I'm able to take my anxieties, anger and grief to the altar of God within my own heart and lay them there before the only God I know—the one who loves us all and Creation as well—I often feel calmer. I am somehow encouraged to adopt a long view of history and to note those passing incidents when God drops the veil, ever so slightly, enabling me to glimpse a Divine heart working behind the scenes.

Readings for Liturgies can be found on the USCCB website at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/>.

Mass Schedule This Month

Mass in Eugene will be Sunday, **September 8, 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.

Mass in Portland will be Saturday, **September 14, 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.

Upcoming Events:

Next Council Meeting – Saturday, September 21

Our next Council meeting will take place via teleconference from 11am to 1pm on September 21. If you have questions or ideas to offer the Council, or would like to be part of the process as a Council participant, please speak to or email one of the Council members or Toni. Portland Council members: Kathy, Mike, Joy and Jim. Eugene Council members: Judith, Carol, Jessica, Bruce and Dianne.

Pastoral Update:

Our 'Children's Missal' Is Available

The new Children's missal has been printed and is now available. We hope this small booklet will help parents answer their children's questions about various elements of the Mass, and also help children understand what happens during the liturgy. Once the missals are in your hands, we would love to hear your feedback.

Website

Remember that the newsletter and current homily are posted on the website each month, as are all upcoming Sophia Christi events along with directions to those events. If anyone has skills to offer in maintaining the site, please contact Toni. 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.

Last night I watched the Documentary "American Factory," the first film from Barack and Michelle Obama's production company, Higher Ground, in partnership with Netflix as distributor. It is an intriguing portrayal of the effects of culture on viewpoints and decisions arising from how one person, or one society of persons, sees the world. It is especially timely this Labor Day weekend, helping us reflect on the earlier advances and most recent losses experienced by factory workers across America. The film focuses on the closure of a General Motors plant in Dayton, Ohio that left over 2,000 people without jobs just before Christmas in 2008. Then six years later, in 2014, a Chinese investor re-opened the plant promising to hire over 5,000 workers. Less than 2,000 American low-paying jobs were actually created, and the end of the film whispers that many of those will fall victim to profit-motivated automation in the very near future.

The clash of cultures revealed through the eyes and experiences of Chinese supervisors and American line-workers is riveting. The expectations on both sides of the cultural divide are tenaciously held and members of both groups believe their way of doing things is the right way. What begins as an optimistic enterprise of collaboration eventually breaks down as Chinese management assumes more and more control over the factory's internal functioning and style. Willingness to learn from and incorporate diverging viewpoints diminishes over time for most members of both groups. Only a few are able to maintain an openness in the face of a variety of pressures, yet the voice and humanity of each person is honored throughout the film.

The challenge of this time in history has much to do with a fierce clinging to an entrenched belief that 'our' way is the 'right' way, and the threatening nature of other viewpoints that require us to change. It seems we humans want to believe we know what's 'right' though that determination is based on what seems 'good' for us. The Book of Wisdom will remind us next week that "human thinking is unreliable and our intentions unstable; that it's hard enough for us to understand earthly things and laborious to know even what lies within our reach." When we become entrenched in our own viewpoint we miss what God is moving us toward. We end up resisting what is in our best interest. Our blind spots are real. Familial, cultural, political and ecclesial blinders hinder everyone's view of God's underlying reality. Jesus offers a way forward in the Gospel next Sunday, though at first it may sound like family-bashing. He says: "If any of you come to me without turning your back on your mother, father, loved ones, sisters and brothers, indeed your very self, you cannot be my follower." He's telling us to stop clinging to the specific ways our families and communities think and operate, to let go the belief that they are somehow "right" or "the way things are supposed to be". This can feel like a betrayal of all we hold dear but, in reality, it enlarges what we are able to hold dear. It allows our vision to open and expand so we can set foot on a wider vista and enjoy a larger perspective. Taking up "my own cross" often means exercising patience with other viewpoints and the biases they both reveal and exert. The politics of our nation underscores this point. As a follower of Jesus I know where the cross leads. My own biases and preconceived notions must be crucified, my viewpoint released from those blinders that crush my soul and, through me, the souls of others. All those destructive mental and emotional 'possessions' comprise the cross I carry. Jesus asks us all to carry that cross consciously, to renounce every debilitating obstruction, and to allow our paths to be straightened by Wisdom. We are all co-conspirators in this Divine physical reality we call life. All viewpoints are valid. Each of us stands at a unique location with a myriad of factors operating every given second. It's a complex web of reality we are barely able to articulate in any kind of meaningful way. Nonetheless, it is real. And the task is to learn to see the WHOLE by honoring all eyes, all hearts, all stories. Only then will we see 'rightly,' and "the paths of those on earth will be straightened by Wisdom" (Wis 9:18).

Labor Day blessings to all,

Toni