

April 5, 2020

Dear Community,

I needn't tell you we are in a surreal time as we enter Holy Week today. Palm Sunday without palms, without processions of any kind, without Mass and none scheduled even through Easter and beyond. We are advised not to gather with friends and family, let alone as a community seated around a common table sharing Eucharist. Those of you who participate in Sophia Christi activities in Portland and Eugene are already aware of the cancellations we've weathered since the last community letter was published. The Eugene Mass on the 8th of March happened as planned, but without sharing the cup, without holding hands during the Lord's Prayer, without sharing hugs and handshakes at the kiss of peace. The virus hadn't upended our lives entirely on March 8th; no 'stay home' order had been declared. But in the week that followed measures of physical distancing were first 'suggested' then clearly implemented by Governor Brown's Covid-19 Guidelines. On March 13 she advised faith communities to gather in groups of no more than 10. After consulting some members of the Portland community I made the hard decision to cancel our Mass the next day. In the meantime, during that same week, questions about the upcoming Lenten retreat scheduled for March 21st were emerging. By Sunday the 15th it was clear that at least half of those registered, including our facilitators, felt uncomfortable about going forward. By Monday our annual retreat was cancelled. In the days that followed the Archdiocese of Portland announced the cancellation of Easter services throughout the diocese, but we had already made the same decision within Sophia Christi.

I have read that a number of Epidemiologists and Virologists have been predicting the possibility of a pandemic for some time, but I don't personally know anyone who even remotely expected a crisis such as this in my lifetime. It is staggering in its scope. It is both frightening and deeply unsettling as it upends routines and life as we've known it. But here it is, here we are, and faith tells us God uses all things, all conditions and experiences, to transform us into the truth of who we are. So how can we look at this global pandemic through spiritual eyes? How can we see in a way that will allow us to be steady anchors of "Easter light" as we face into these dark days of Covid-19? This is a question Holy Week 2020 invites us to contemplate.

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

Mass Schedule This Month and Following

Until such time as both the CDC and Oregon Health Authority determine that it's safe for us to gather in groups again, the churches we rent space from will remain shuttered, and Masses, including Easter, are cancelled indefinitely. The Council, however, is working on a plan to experiment with offering **Easter Mass online** next Sunday. You will be notified if we are able to make this happen. In the meantime, continue to pray and stay connected to each other, family and friends, that all may experience God's grace and mercy during this unprecedented pandemic.

Pastoral Update:

Lenten Retreat Cancelled – Consider an In-home Retreat

Our Lenten retreat was one of the casualties of the Coronavirus when it hit Oregon in full force last month. A few people have asked whether we might re-schedule the retreat at a later date, perhaps finding a time post-Coronavirus to spend a day in prayer, celebration and gratitude. Unfortunately there is no way to predict or plan ahead. In the meantime perhaps Sophia is inviting us to use these “stay home” measures as a kind of **in-home retreat**. To do this, set aside a period of time this week (Holy Week) to explore how you’ve been living your life until now. What values have influenced your comings and goings? What values have you perhaps neglected or forgotten? Have you allowed busy-ness to distance you from friends and loved ones? Has your relationship with Spirit taken a back seat to the pursuit of goals that now seem questionable or even empty? What do you need to realign yourself with your deepest purpose? Talk to God about these things. Write in a journal, draw, paint, sing, make a collage, read Scripture or an inspirational book, meditate. Take time to establish or re-invigorate a spiritual practice. Prepare for Easter knowing God is with you, and with us all.

Summary of April 4th Council Meeting

The April Council meeting took place via ZOOM. All eight of us were present, and we talked for our usual two hours. What was not usual was the Coronavirus Pandemic, which seems to affect everything we do and say. Toni brought a central concern: how to remain connected during this unsettling time. We agreed that Toni's newsletter is more important than ever. We looked at possibilities for getting more input from Parishioners, providing a place to gather (virtually) and share experiences, feelings, etc. Perhaps we could create a Sophia Christi “Happy Hour!” Jessica reported on our financial situation, which is solid. After our Retreat was canceled, some who had paid to attend needed a refund, while others donated the fee to Sophia Christi. Jessica volunteered to call everyone who made a pledge last fall to discuss whether circumstances have changed for them financially due to the pandemic. If they have, and fulfilling the commitment may not be possible, she will make adjustments to our 2020 budget. Since we won't be meeting for Mass until it is safe to do so again, if people feel they can still meet their pledge but need help with alternative methods of delivering their donation she can talk them through it. Jessica will also ask if people are interested and willing to try new online ways of staying connected during this time of physical isolation. We are wondering if it might be possible to have a ZOOM Easter Mass. –Judith Manning, Council Secretary

Message from Our Council Treasurer

Hello Fellow Parishioners. Who could have imagined we would be cancelling Masses due to an epidemic rather than a snowstorm? These are such strange times! During our council meeting this weekend, we discussed our budget and the potential impact of cancelling Mass over an extended period since most contributions arrive via the basket passed during our liturgy each month. Very few arrive by way of PayPal or bill pay. But we know people have lost jobs and income, and the future is uncertain. We understand it may not be possible for some of you to continue your monthly pledge and want to assure you we have some reserves and will be okay. Your generosity has helped bring us to this place of financial stability and we deeply appreciate what you have already given. For those still able to meet their pledges, and those who have contributed each month without making a pledge, we are grateful for your continuing support as we work to keep the community connected through online tools in the months ahead.

If you are able to continue your pledge, and have questions about how to get it to the right place, the information below should help.

1) Mail a check, made payable to “Sophia Christi Catholic Community” to: 5658 N. Denver, Portland, OR 97217

2) Debit/Credit Card: Go to our website <http://www.sophiachristi.org/donate/>, scroll down to the bottom of the page and click “Donate.” This will take you to the Paypal website where you can

donate directly to our account. Enter an amount and click "Donate with a Debit or Credit Card." You can then enter your card information on a secure webpage, and ask that the donation recur monthly if you choose.

3) Automatic bill-pay: You set up the automatic payments through your bank's website. If you need Sophia Christi's bank account number call me. Most banks allow for recurring, monthly payments, but if yours doesn't you would log in and create a payment each month.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 541-521-1136. –Jessica Katon

Unprecedented Cancellations—A Council Member Reflection

"I'm sure many of you are bummed that we had to cancel our Lenten retreat, and that we won't be able to come together for Easter—I know I am. But I'm trying to remember that even if we can't all come together in the same physical space to celebrate, we're still a spiritual family, Sophia Christi, and so are strongly connected to one another despite the current, surreal situation we all find ourselves in; I know in my heart that we'll be together for Easter in spirit, if not in the flesh." --Josie Miranda

Council Member Reflection

In all my 77 years I have never seen anything like this, and I never thought it would happen, but here we are. What to do, what to think, what is on everybody's mind? Will people I know and love be ok? Will jobs go away forever? Is there going to be a vaccine soon? On and on it goes. I have taken STAY HOME very seriously and I have not left my house in more than three weeks. It's not much but it's something I can do. My friends are doing the same. If I were to be honest about this the real reason I stay home is that perhaps no one will need to make the decision to put me on a ventilator. No thanks. Mostly I watch TV, read and watch the birds. Good news - the swallows are back. So far there are about 10, but I always worry that their flight to Mexico and back will prove fatal. They zip along with such gusto and speed. It lifts my spirits. Yes, I know I have much to be grateful for. But that was not who I was. Before I became part of Sophia Christi I was mostly sad. I wanted to be a happy person but somehow my life had never given me the tools to do that. Sophia Christi and Toni have opened that door for me. I have met the most wonderful people who have had many more challenges in life than I could ever imagine. But their kindness and caring towards me is a real blessing, especially now. If you are feeling sad and overwhelmed please know that many prayers are being said on your behalf and that you are loved. We are in this together, and we will make it through. –Carol Zolkoske

Members Corner – Special Invitation for your Reflections

Is there something you are willing to share about your experience, your questions or insights as we move through these days of stay-home orders and collective uncertainty? Your perceptions, your story, can be so supportive and encouraging for others. Over the past several years members of the Council have shared their reflections here and will continue to do so, but Spirit speaks through all of us and we would love to hear from you. If Sophia nudges you to reach out to the wider community, please send a few sentences or a paragraph or two to Toni at this email address.

Website

As we move to virtual gatherings and online conversations our website could be a great tool for staying connected. If you have skills in managing websites, and would like to become more involved as we move into a new kind of future, please contact Toni. And please remember that the newsletter and current homily are posted on the website each month, as are all upcoming events. Our web address is www.sophiachristi.org

A pastoral invitation—In the normal course of life I have the opportunity to meet with you personally when a pastoral issue arises or you want/need spiritual support. But we

are somewhere outside the range of 'normal' now. Please let me know if I can assist you in this strange time we are living through. I am still available by phone (503-286-3584) and you can still reach me through this email address. Feel free to use either one.

The first reading from Isaiah today, Passion/Palm Sunday, is taken from Isaiah. "Morning after morning, God awakens me, to hear as disciples do. God opens my ears; I was not disobedient, I did not turn back." And morning after morning all of us awaken to the reality of a virus that moves, unseen, through our cities and neighborhoods. I imagine few of us consider what God is inviting us to hear in all the chaos. What is God hoping to awaken us to—as disciples of the Compassionate and Merciful One? Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem in our liturgical tradition today, yet none of us were at Mass to hear the story re-told. It is Passion Sunday and the churches are closed. How bizarre that journey to Jerusalem must have been for Jesus, even as the journey we are on together now is so very bizarre! In going about his 'normal' life Jesus was also choosing to walk toward his own death, eyes open. It must have felt both 'normal' and surreal to walk among friends while leading them toward a place he surely, as a human being, did not want to go. And he knew they were in denial. How many times had he tried to tell them where he was heading, and they always changed the subject? He was obedient to his own, personal calling, his own destiny. He did not turn back, though praying in the garden, he asked that the cup be taken from him. We are asking, praying, begging the same today—God, please take this virus away! What's hard for us to accept is that we can't get to Easter without passing through Good Friday. The Resurrection doesn't occur without a transformative journey through the cross. And the entire human race is inevitably involved in a transformative journey that, through this virus, has become starkly manifest in a way that we can't help but see. "God opens our ears." We disciples, like our ancestors of old, don't want to hear or see that where we are is where we have to be. In normal years, we can almost pass through Triduum with our ears closed. The story is so familiar we barely listen unless it is dramatically performed. It is the longest Gospel "reading" we ever hear, and usually we sit comfortably in chairs and pews to listen. But this year...this year is drastically different. This year we can't sit together at all, let alone sit in church listening while someone reads. This year we are exposed to new statistics of worldwide and national deaths daily as tallies mount. This Lent has been an exposure to disease and death on an unimaginable level. And we thirst for an end to a plague that is terrorizing the planet while, at the same time, deep down, we know the disease was already here, hidden like a cancer, eating away at the core of our humanity as we scurried from here to there and back in our busy-ness, attending to production, consumption and basic survival, while invariably neglecting the Spirit who always invites us to slow down and breathe, so we can listen—so we can hear what's actually real. God awakens us now, in this time, to hear as disciples do. We may recoil. We may wail, shout, rage, collapse exhausted and grieve. But let's not turn back. Let's carry the cross of transformative longing embedded within us, within humanity, as Jesus did. As disciples of Hope, let's carry hope. As disciples of Light, let's carry light, and move toward the portal between old world and new (which looms in the form of a cross) trusting, as disciples do, that Life ever changes its form, but never ends.

May Holy Week bring acceptance and peace,

Toni