

May 3, 2020

Dear Community,

We are on the other side of Easter, walking through this season of “joy in the resurrection”, “joy in the greening of the earth and the blossoming of spring” while we continue to shelter in place, maintain physical distance, wear masks to the grocery store, and wash our hands thoroughly when arriving back home. The advent of spring snuck into our lives even as we watched infection rates mount and death tolls rise. Some of us have been thrown into mourning as we helplessly watched loved ones become ill from the virus then tragically die. Easter season, 2020, has been an ongoing experience of loss, confusion, sadness, anger and anxiety. Hope, when extended one minute, has often been summarily withdrawn the next. Even the experts don’t have solid data. I’m reminded of Jesus’ first words in Acts (Acts 1:6-7) as he addresses his disciples for the last time. Still hoping his life-purpose had been to restore the autonomy of Israel, they asked: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?” His answer lands in our time and shakes us awake as it did them: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons that God, the Author of Creation, has established.” In their fear these early disciples desperately wanted answers, just as we do. Were they safe? The Romans and religious authorities had joined hands in putting Jesus to death, afraid his words and his radically inclusive behaviors would inspire others and erode their own fear-induced power. If his way of speaking and being caught on it could upset the status quo and undermine their mechanisms of control—separating folks into haves and have-nots, into “clean” and “unclean,” into “loved” and “spurned” by the very God Jesus knew as his Abba, unconditional Love Itself! It was an upside-down world, one that rang false in his ears. God to him was an all-encompassing, Mothering-Presence, who cherished each and every person, every being, ever created! His call to compassion and love of neighbor, his demonstrations of acceptance, forgiveness and healing were threatening the world order of the powers-that-be and their self-serving intentions and goals. It is the same world order we’ve inherited and that our political and economic systems sustain to this day. Note that the disciples weren’t interested in demolishing that system; they just wanted their nation, Israel, to be in the driver’s seat. Without recognizing that their own religious authorities had handed Jesus over to be crucified, they mistakenly thought things would be better if the kingdom of Israel was restored! Jesus sees their blindness and knows the road ahead of them will require deep change. They need to be opened to the guidance of an interior Spirit, the Spirit that had been clearly alive and active in him, a Spirit they did not yet know that yearned to also come alive in them. This Spirit would lead them through deserts, trials and crucifixions of their own as they gradually learned to let go of ego-needs and live lives of humility and mercy as he did. His parting words to them sent them into the storm of Spirit’s gift, promise and invitation. “You won’t know and don’t need to know the times and seasons,” he tells them. “These are held in the silent Wisdom of the One Who Orders All Things in the Universe. But, be assured, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem (the very place of my death, the place of religious and political “power”), and even to Rome and the ends of the earth.” Having said this a cloud took him from their sight and they returned to the upper room and devoted themselves to prayer.

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

### **Online Mass Schedule Continues This Month**

**Mass via Zoom** will be Saturday, **May 9<sup>th</sup>**, at **5:00pm**. It is the vigil of Mother's Day and the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. We will remain with the "vigil" theme and continue this every 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday-of-the-month schedule while online gatherings remain in effect.

We continue to pray and stay connected to each other, family and friends during this pandemic, that all may experience God's presence, mercy and grace.

### **Pastoral Update:**

#### **Mass Participation via Zoom**

Until such time as both the CDC and Oregon Health Authority determine that it's safe for us to gather in groups again, Mass each month will be celebrated via Zoom. If you have regularly participated in Sophia Christi liturgies either in Eugene or Portland during the past year you will automatically receive a Zoom invitation this month. It will be sent to you Friday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, for our May 10<sup>th</sup> Mother's Day vigil celebration. If you have not been involved in these community gatherings, but would like to participate in the online Mass, let Toni know by responding to this email no later than Wednesday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, and a Zoom invitation will be sent to you Friday as well.

#### **Easter Vigil Online—A Joyful Experiment**

After the Council meeting on April 4<sup>th</sup> a question lingered—what about Easter? Every year, for eight years, Sophia Christi has celebrated Easter Mass in Eugene reaching out to the larger community through an ad in the Register-Guard alongside other churches in the area. This year would have been our ninth. We hadn't yet experimented with an online Mass but the desire and inspiration to celebrate with the entire community grew stronger every day. Ultimately, it was the Vigil itself that drew us into the core of the Easter Mystery. The door between life and death, darkness and light, labor and birth is prominently visible in the iconic figure of Mary standing before that empty tomb, weeping—until she hears his voice, and the veil between the worlds is torn away. Between crucifixion and resurrection, between Good Friday and Easter Sunday—the Mystery at the heart of all experience—is that still-point at the heart of the Easter Vigil. This became the focal point of our first online liturgy. Through the creativity, patience and expertise of our three newest Council members—Jessica, Josie and Rachel—our Zoom Easter Vigil came into existence. It radiated the energy and spirit of Sophia. Members from Eugene, Portland, Salem, Corvallis and Stayton celebrated together that night. It was a truly joyous gathering of the regional Sophia Christi community.

#### **Formation of Communications Team**

*During this time of sheltering at home, the Pastoral Council is concerned about how Sophia Christi members may best stay in touch. For this reason we have created a survey to better understand your needs and preferences around maintaining connections, participating in online conversations or community gatherings, and sustaining lines of communication. We want your input and ideas! Stay tuned for a link to an online survey in an email from Pastor Toni later this month. Thanks! - Rachel Wheeler & Josie Miranda, Communications Team members*

### Care Team Announcement

*A similar desire to identify and respond to Sophia Christi members' needs during this time of sheltering at home was expressed at the last Pastoral Council meeting. Members of the council are hopeful that we can form a team that might call and check up on Sophia Christi members and coordinate a response to members' needs. If you are interested in being a part of the Care Team or you have a need that the Care Team might respond to, please let Rachel Wheeler or Pastor Toni know. Rachel can be reached at [rastonwinchel@hotmail.com](mailto:rastonwinchel@hotmail.com) --Rachel Wheeler*

### Council Member Reflection

*Last Christmas I gave myself a copy of the parallel gospels—the four gospels printed in chronological order—which I wanted for a long time. I have been reading them slowly, intentionally slowly. Over Easter I read the Easter narrative, again. Throughout the reading of the gospels, I have been impressed with how kind and loving Jesus' language is. Like Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb, when she realizes that the resurrected Jesus is standing right in front of her. She hugs him and his response is to ask her to let him go, because he has to go the Father, and then he reassures her that he will come back. Or the woman at the well who has had five husbands—Jesus is not the least bit judgmental. He obviously cares about her. There are no guilt trips here. Had I continued to worship at evangelical churches, I doubt that I would have ever noticed how loving Jesus really is. Because while I heard that Jesus is loving, so much time was spent on sin that it really left little time to talk about His love. And that is one reason why I am thankful to Sophia Christi for leading me to think about, to notice, Jesus' love. —Mike Newton*

### Members Corner – Sharing 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. The 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

The recently formed Communications Team is focusing on the website and other tools for connecting us with each other while in-person sharing is necessarily restricted. As we move to virtual gatherings and online conversations our website can be a great tool for staying connected as well as for reaching out to our neighbors, to people who want a sense of oneness with Spirit who are also looking for hope. This outreach has always been part of our mission. We are grateful for the website monitoring and management skills showing their faces at this much-needed time, and if you are interested in being involved in this project please contact Toni. Also remember that the newsletter and current homily are generally posted on the website each month, as are all upcoming events. Our web address is [www.sophiachristi.org](http://www.sophiachristi.org)

**A continuing 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.

As the “cloud” of a virus covers the earth and the sense of security we’ve entrusted to our recent “world order” begins to vanish, it is time for us, the disciples of this Age, to return to our own “upper room” and devote ourselves to prayer that we might see and let go of everything in which we have placed false hope. The “system” that was out to get Jesus back in first century Jerusalem is the same “system” falling into ruins around our feet. It is being discredited and dismantled by an invisible invader of the global body-politic. It’s ultimate purpose, if we can discern a “purpose” here, may be to bring us to our senses and motivate us to change our ways. Like the mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers before us we must begin to take the long view of history, envisioning the future out to the seventh generation. The failing health of Earth is forcing us to adopt this long view and allow exploitive and oppressive systems that stifle creativity, exhaust our personal energy, undermine families and cultures and destroy natural resources for selfish gain to die from suffocation, so that all that is life-giving can be revived. It is time to let our hearts do the thinking, says Wisdom. It is time to see what needs to fail, painful though that is...frightening and terrifying though it be to our physical selves...and let it go. We have a promise from the One we claim to follow that the Spirit is “coming.” In this Easter season, while we wait for the “time and season” of Spirit’s arrival, we are sheltering in our own “upper room,” and making ourselves ready to bear the influx of an energy we have never yet experienced in this world. The Spirit that resided in Jesus also resides in us. It is being re-kindled at an even higher temperature and ignited in all hearts that are quietly opening in this time of physical isolation. While the virus moves stealthily among us, there is very little else we can do except adopt a patient and humble attitude, then devote ourselves to prayer for each other, for the earth, for the rising of a new world order that includes and values every being on this planet. God uses all things as grist for the mill of our spiritual growth. Even this virus serves its purpose in the realm of unknowable Divinity. The One Who Orders All Things is with us, holding us with a Mother’s arms, cherishing each and every one, chiding, leading, directing us through the Divine Wisdom that resides within, and encouraging us to hold each other’s hearts in our own. We are, at our core, a people of peace birthed from the womb of Love. It is who and what we are. Jesus knew this. The Spirit in us knows. May She rise within us and renew the face of the Earth.

Easter blessings to all of you,

Toni