

July 4, 2021

Dear Community,

July 4th, the day of “independence” for this nation. Our history as a united people began when delegates from the original thirteen colonies came together to halt injustices they were suffering at the hands of Great Britain’s ruling monarch 245 years ago. Not everyone in those colonies believed independence was a good idea. Many didn’t feel ready to cut ties with the mother country for a host of reasons. But the aye’s prevailed, and the Declaration of Independence was finalized and signed, as we know, on July 4, 1776. Under no one’s control but our own then we, as a people, began to chart our own destiny. There was a time when it did seem we were “one nation,” notwithstanding numerous disagreements that eventually led to a civil war. But that phrase has long obscured the fact of a deeply fractured society. In our day we face a long history of exclusionary policies that have had, and continue to have, disenfranchising effects on thousands upon thousands of “fellow” Americans based on skin color, ethnicity, religious belief, gender, political affiliation, and multiple iterations of prejudicial criteria. For many “independence” means self-reliance and self-sufficiency. It’s easy to see where this can go and has gone when it becomes a national, and personal, identity. Free from outside control, and even outside support, U.S. interests have too often been the only interests that matter on the national stage, the only ones of concern. Where does responsibility for others enter the picture when self-sufficiency is practiced and expected in a society? What happens when we fail to recognize we are one people, interdependent with one another, with others around the world, and with the entire bio-system earth provides for our very survival? The social fractures deepen. Self-protective and self-promoting motivations have driven injustices of every kind in all parts of the world across centuries. The prophets of old acted on the world stage of their time to direct attention toward these fracturing motivations and the behaviors that followed. We hear God speaking to Ezekiel in today’s first reading saying: “Stand on your feet, Ezekiel. I’m sending you to the Israelites, a rebellious people who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. They are stubborn and obstinate and may not listen to you, but whether they listen or not they’ll know a prophet has been among them.” It is the people, operating as a unit, that need to hear the prophet’s words. It is all of us in our various self-protective groupings that have become obstinate, determined to safeguard, then fortify, the walls our ancestors built between “us” and “them.” Prophets challenge those walls. They serve God’s ever-present desire for liberation from the slavery of ideas and mechanisms of oppression. As we celebrate our independence as a nation today, I hope we can begin to recognize that we are not a free people when we erect walls believing they will save us from others’ actions, needs and ideas. Those walls constitute a prison. Throughout history God’s prophets have been sent to free us from those prisons. The obstinate and stubborn cannot be truly free.

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, **July 10**, at **5:00pm**. Our Masses are online every 2nd Saturday-of-the-month until everyone can gather safely in person.

Upcoming Events:

Zoom Invitations for July Liturgy

If you have regularly participated in Sophia Christi liturgies either in Eugene or Portland during the past year or have recently requested a Zoom invitation to our online Masses, you will automatically receive a Zoom invitation this month for our liturgy on the 10th. Invitations will be sent Friday, July 9. If you have not been involved in the past but would like to participate in the online liturgies, let Toni know by responding to this email no later than Wednesday, July 7th.

Join Us for Our Saturday, July 24th Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together

Our next **Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together** for 2021 is **Saturday, July 24th, from 5:00 to 6:00 pm**. These relaxed and informal virtual gatherings have helped to foster a strong sense of community between the Eugene and Portland groups. All are welcomed and encouraged to attend. Toni will send out the Zoom invitation a couple of days before the gathering. For more information contact Josie with any questions at Josephine.miranda64@gmail.com. --Josie Miranda, Sophia Christi Communications Team

Pastoral Update:

Summary of June 19th Council Meeting

The Parish Council met on Saturday, June 19 via Zoom. We shared regular reports and discussed new business. Highlights from the regular reports include desire to make sure members know that though we have been doing virtual Masses for over a year, we do have expenses; members who have made financial pledges will be encouraged to send in their contributions. Also, ongoing community-building is happening through the monthly Zoom social gatherings, through the Facebook group, and through Toni and the care team reaching out to members not able to attend Zoom Masses. Discussion of new business included when Toni would be taking vacation this year and when to resume in-person Masses. This part of the meeting was particularly open and honest as we shared hopes, ideas, and concerns for the future. There was heartfelt response to consideration of how exhausting the work of preparing for Mass is, whether in-person or virtual, especially when meeting in rented spaces in-person. As Toni let us know that things need to continue changing as we move forward, we were encouraged and seemed of one heart to let Sophia inform our imaginations as we discern what those changes will be and how to implement them. Numerous Council members expressed gratitude for Toni's candor and leadership. It was evident that we all care very much about helping create a sustainable and supportive community. --Submitted by Sophia Christi Parish Council Secretary, Rachel Wheeler

Zoom Liturgy Recordings

One advantage of Online Liturgies is that we have the option of recording them. If you are interested in receiving the recording this month please let Toni know. The recording is available within a day or two following Mass. Send her an email if you are interested.

Staying Connected – Zoom Gatherings and Facebook Options

In addition to our monthly Masses and social gatherings over Zoom, we also have the Sophia Christi Facebook page. You can join the page and check for postings about online courses and other offerings, as well as post information you would like to share. FB also provides the option of hosting a private group discussion in one of its meet-up rooms. If anyone would like more information about this resource, or if you are interested in facilitating a discussion with other Sophia Christi members please contact lanlutisa@gmail.com, or Rachel Wheeler rastonwinchel@hotmail.com.

Care Team

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 contact Kathleen Glover gloverconnection@yahoo.com or Pastor Toni.

Toni's Vacation

Toni will be on vacation from September 19 through the month of October. There will be no newsletter or Mass in October. The newsletter will return November 7th with Mass the following Saturday, November 13.

Member's Corner – Sharing Reflections

This space in the newsletter is available for sharing our stories, insights and experiences. Consider sending a short paragraph of your own for inclusion in next month's edition. Deadline is June 4th for the June newsletter.

Website

Outreach has always been part of the mission of Sophia Christi and our website is an important aspect of that mission. The web address is 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.

Our first reading next week comes from the prophet, Amos, whose stirring words were often used by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to highlight the struggle for racial, economic and social justice. In his Letter from a Birmingham Jail, King addressed the moral laxity of his Southern clergymen during the Civil Rights movement with these words from the prophet: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Julia Myers O'Brien, in her introduction to Amos in the HarperCollins Bible Commentary says: "Modern advocates of human liberation have found a kindred spirit in this book, which repeatedly insists that physical and economic oppression are as abhorrent to God as improper worship." A simple shepherd from the southern kingdom of Judah, Amos was an outsider in Bethel, the royal sanctuary where King Jeroboam II had erected a golden calf. For Amos that golden idol was less important than the worship of status, wealth and privilege that grew on the backs of the poor. O'Brien tells us: "The book itself is addressed to a sharply stratified society with a large economic gap between rich and poor, a situation that could have prevailed either during a time of economic prosperity or in a period of gradual economic decline, which would have hurt most those with the least resources." It is, in other words, a society very much like our own. Writing about King's use of that famous passage from Amos, Samuel Thomas, Associate Professor of Religion at California Lutheran University, says that the context for Amos' words rests in a denunciation of the "sacrifices and meal offerings" of a people failing to maintain the covenant God made with their ancestors on Sinai, a covenant founded in justice and fairness. Religious devotion has no meaning, no substance, if it isn't grounded in care for others, and in concern for the plight of the poor. "I think Amos would disapprove of the concentration of wealth and the

corresponding increase in poverty,” says Thomas, “and he would rage against the displays of self-importance and exceptionalism in some quarters of American life. According to Amos, a nation is exceptional by the measure of how it cares for the lowest members of society.” The prophet deplored religious hypocrisy and economic injustice and prophesied the destruction of Israel if it continued ignoring the needs of the poor and the urgent but neglected need for religious and societal humility. Israel didn’t heed the prophecy. Later generations likely understood Amos’s prediction to have been fulfilled when Assyria destroyed the Northern Kingdom in 722/721 B.C.E. Like Amos we live in a time of religious hypocrisy, great injustice and, perhaps, even greater blindness. We have been gifted with the wisdom and idealism of our nation’s ancestors in the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, but we have also been saddled with the racial, gender and ethnic biases our ancestors wrote into law. We have much work to do as a people to live up to the claim that we are “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” In its own way, perhaps, this may be God’s Covenant with America. It calls us to unity, to treating one another with respect, to observing the prophetic call for liberation from every oppression, and for true justice imbued with mercy. For that is the God we’ve come to know through a long line of prophets who have appeared, and will continue to appear, in every age. They are always with us, those prophets, and their words draw us forward even in times of darkness when only they, it seems, have eyes to see.

Blessings this holiday weekend,

Toni