

March 6, 2022

Lenten Greetings,

As I begin writing, I am reflecting on the words of the prophet Joel, the first reading heard every Ash Wednesday, words we will hear again in our liturgy next Saturday: “Even now—it is your God who speaks—return to me with your whole heart, fasting, weeping and mourning.” That we are mourning, and have been these past two years, is a painful reality. That we have even more reason to weep in the face of lives lost and threatened in Ukraine is a wrenching commentary on the state of our world today. As a people, we continue to suffer the effects of environmental pollution, land and water contamination, bodies maimed, families and homes destroyed in war, viruses unleashed across the globe. The two-plus year pandemic has killed nearly 6 million people worldwide and an estimated 956,000 here in the U.S. over the last two years. Now considered ‘endemic’ it continues to sicken and kill.

“Rend your hearts,” Joel bellows. “Return to your God.” In the original Hebrew the word “rend” means “to split, rip, bust, tear apart”. Doesn’t that sound like the experience of soul-wrenching grief? “Rending” suggests that force is needed to break open hearts that are hardened or so well fortified that it’s nearly impossible to experience the pain of others, to reflect on one’s own behavior, or to feel and express love. In that guarded state God’s presence is unseen; God’s voice unheard. The only voice resounding is one’s own, and it is intently focused on its own self-interest. Rending the heart is about deep, inner change. It is about inner transformation. The biblical word for that is “repentance”.

I like to think of Lent as a season of soul-reckoning. For six weeks we are asked to take a deep dive into our spiritual lives by setting aside time to reflect on our values, our attitudes, and behaviors. Prayer is the doorway into that internal space. Asking God, Holy Wisdom, the Divine Mother, Holy Spirit, Christ, Jesus, Higher Power—any of the multitude names for the Unifying Mystery—to accompany us, sanctifies our intention and helps to keep us honest. At one time many of us learned to give something up for Lent. It was a form of fasting, meant to heighten awareness of spiritual values, of God’s presence within and beneath the taken-for-granted material pleasures and needs of ordinary life. But most often it simply became a source of pride or failure whose point was self-restraint. There is much to be said about learning to control our appetites. Getting in touch with our motivations, identifying addictive patterns and those factors that activate them, is a healthy spiritual endeavor as anyone committed to 12-step recovery knows. It is that deep, dedicated process of radical change that all of us are called to in this yearly season of soul-reckoning.

Two years ago the Covid-19 pandemic appeared on the global stage as Lent began. It was, I believe, a strident call for awareness that whatever injures the Earth will ultimately destroy us in ways both visible (fires, floods, tornadoes, wars) and invisible (viruses, cancers, etc.). This year we move into Lent during a time of spiritual, social and economic upheaval as one country presumes to conquer and possess another. Old systems are upended. Pope Francis tells us “we are not living in an epoch of change, but in a change of epochs.”

We enter this season with Joel’s words resounding in churches everywhere. “Gather the people and return to your God.” We cannot discern the path forward without a change of heart, a softening of resentment and judgment, a stoking of grief that fuels deep and enduring compassion. We cannot find our way through the labyrinth of pain and fear without each other, and without 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, **March 12**, at **5:00pm**. Our Masses are online every 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday-of-the-month.

## **Upcoming Events:**

### **Zoom Invitations for March 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 12<sup>th</sup>. Invitations will be sent Friday, March 11. 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, March 9.

### **Join Us for Our March 26th Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together**

Our next Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together is on Saturday, March 26th, from 5:00 to 6:00 pm. During last month's gathering we spent time discussing our hopes and concerns for the 2021-2023 Synod on Synodality and the future of the Church. Come join us this month for more conversation about these and other important topics. All are welcome, even if you weren't able to participate in last month's conversation. For more information, contact Josie at [Josephine.miranda64@gmail.com](mailto:Josephine.miranda64@gmail.com). See you on the 26th! --Josie Miranda, Sophia Christi Communications Team.

### **Be Part of Sophia Christi's Synod "Listening Session" April 5<sup>th</sup> via Zoom, 6:00-7:00pm**

Last year Pope Francis issued an invitation for all Catholics to participate in the 2021-2023 Synod on Synodality. As part of our response to the call we invite you to join us on Tuesday, April 5th, from 6:00 to 7:00 pm for our Sophia Christi Zoom Synod Listening Session. This is an opportunity for Sophia Christi community members to share our hopes, dreams and concerns for the future of the Church. Your thoughts will help inform what we include in the synodal letter we plan to send to Rome in August. More information will be provided in the April Sophia Christi newsletter.--Rachel, Kathleen, and Josie, Sophia Christi Synod Response Coordinators.

## **Pastoral Update:**

### **Report on Our February Sophia Christi Synod Discussion: A Powerful and Moving Experience**

During our February 26th Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together time was spent discussing our community's participation in Pope Francis' Synod on Synodality. More than a dozen Sophia Christi community members joined in the conversation, and the sharing was thoughtful and heartfelt. We provided three questions to the group to help guide the discussion and then followed one member's suggestion to allow everyone an opportunity to respond to whichever question they preferred. Common themes included sadness that lay participation/formation had lapsed in many places; experiencing the pain of feeling shut down when broaching certain social justice issues, and; dealing with the frustration of having an expressed desire to participate more fully in the liturgy dismissed. Others spoke of their feelings of exclusion or the inability to feel completely comfortable sharing their authentic selves in Catholic communities because of their gender or sexual identities. And a few admitted to a certain level of cynicism about the Pope's call given the Church's past record on follow-through with

earlier initiatives. Overall it was a powerful and moving hour-long conversation that could easily have continued into the night. --Rachel, Kathleen and Josie, Sophia Christi Synod Response Coordinators

### Next Council Meeting – Saturday, March 19

Our next Council meeting will take place from 11am to 1pm on March 19. We will continue to pursue the topic of Sophia Christi's participation in the two-year Synodal process Pope Francis initiated Oct. 17. Your thoughts are needed and welcome as we work to insure that progressive and alternative Catholic voices are heard in the Vatican. Please send your ideas to one of the Council members, or Toni, before March 19. Portland Council members: Kathleen Glover, Mike Newton, and Rachel Wheeler. Eugene Council members: Jessica Katon, Josie Miranda, Anna Lukatis and Carol Zolkoske.

### Volunteers Needed

There are many things that keep a community together and functioning well, and most of them involve the willing hands and big hearts of interested and caring people. A few require some level of skill, or a willingness to try something new. Two years into a pandemic that moved us to online liturgies and social gatherings, we've been relying on a handful of people to do a variety of tasks. I would love to see our circle of involvement expand, beginning with the Zoom liturgies since they are the online face of Sophia Christi. You can simply reply to this email and let me know what you would like to do or learn how to do.

- \* Coordinate/Moderate Zoom liturgies
- \* Music Ministry (play an instrument, sing)
- \* Lector (read first and second Scripture readings)
- \* Read community's responses during Zoom Masses
- \* Write Intercessions

### 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 Anna Lankutis [lankutisa@gmail.com](mailto:lankutisa@gmail.com), or Rachel Wheeler [rastonwinchel@hotmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:gloverconnection@yahoo.com) or Pastor Toni.

### Council Member Reflection

*A positive outlook has been difficult to maintain in recent times. It seems we are bombarded by bad news, a lack of solutions to difficult problems, health issues, and so on. Indeed, the circumstances under which we are living can be discouraging. I have found that my inner strength continues to move me forward. In these challenging times, my support system becomes yet more important. It is a source of comfort and renewal when I reflect on the many blessings I receive from the Sophia Christi Community. The consistent positive message in Toni's homilies have reinforced my faith and helped me navigate everyday life. A sense of joy and being ready to meet all challenges rises from my years*

*of being a member of this beautiful community of caring people. My wish at this time is that all people could have this sense of peace and togetherness that comes from a community such as Sophia Christi. What the world needs is kindness, generosity, and love. —Carol Zolkoske, Council Member*

### **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 March 4<sup>th</sup> for the March 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](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.

Throughout Lent the Scriptures of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament focus attention on prayer. In today's first reading the Israelites are instructed to bow before God as they bring the first fruits of their harvest to the altar. Bowing is an example of body-prayer. In the second reading Paul urges the Romans to "call on the name of the Most High God." This is verbal prayer. In next week's Gospel Jesus goes up a mountain with three of his disciples to pray. He communes with his Abba, a form of contemplative or meditative prayer. When we don't have words it might be helpful to realize that prayer doesn't need words. Paul tells the Romans "If we don't know how or what to pray it doesn't matter. The Spirit does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, and aching groans. The Spirit knows us far better than we know ourselves and keeps us present before God." (Rom 8:26-28) We can think of prayer as an open circuit through which love/light energy flows. It sends love circulating through us and aligns our mind and heart with the Heart of the Divine while nourishing the unseen connective tissue between us and those for whom and that for which we pray.

In the early 1980's the theoretical physicist David Bohm coined the terms 'implicate' and 'explicate' order. He used them to describe two different frameworks for understanding the reality in which we live. The 'implicate order' is seen as a deeper and more fundamental aspect of the manifested reality we perceive with our senses. Science tells us we live in a universe of material phenomena. This is the 'explicit order.' Mystics tell us there is a subtler, more primal level, in which all things are interconnected in a universal Consciousness. We draw on this 'implicit order' to help us understand the reality and power of prayer. The energy of the Universe flows through us, one and all, and that energy flows from the heart of God. In prayer we open mind and heart to consciously align with this flow and direct our loving concern toward the highest good in every situation. We pray for each other. We pray for all who are suffering. And we pray for a turn toward peace in Ukraine, an end to war-making, reverence for Mother Earth, and a healing of the human spirit throughout the world

Have a blessed and prayerful Lent,

Toni

