

July 3, 2022

Summer Blessings,

After all the rain, and last weekend's heat, I am enjoying the cool mornings and recently gorgeous afternoons. The hydrangeas are in their early stages of bloom, with wild geranium blossoms crouching near, and a few tiny tomatoes promising their eventual delicacy. A beautiful day in the neighborhood, as Mr. Rogers would say. I take it all in as this early summer afternoon brings gratitude for lush foliage overhead and roses beaming at me from a neighbor's yard across the way. Nature. Even in the city, with trees towering into the blue jewel of sky and leaves stirring in the softly moving air, the Earth offers her gifts to anyone who will notice. Why are we so seldom aware as we rush from one project, one destination, one concern or obligation to another? We have been trained over long centuries to give more credence to the stuff of everyday living than to the sacred ground that gives life its structure and sustenance. Our focus has been skewed toward "the ways of the world" rather than the life-giving forces surrounding and supporting us and all things in "the ways of the Earth."

These thoughts were brought home to me when I began reading John Philip Newell's latest book, "Sacred Earth/Sacred Soul". An essential piece of our history was ignored or buried when an ancient way of life throughout Europe was suppressed and finally eradicated by Empire. The battle waged in the 4th & 5th Century-Church for the heart and soul of Christendom began when Constantine declared Christianity the religion of the realm. What we are not told is that there were two faces of Christendom in Europe and throughout the Mediterranean region at that time. The oldest and most widespread had its origins in ancient Celtic wisdom traditions going back to 500 B.C.E. "The Celts spanned the whole of middle Europe," Newell writes, "ranging from what is now Turkey at the eastern edge right through to the Atlantic coastline of present-day Spain. [They] formed a loose federation of tribes sharing a common culture and language base," and they were a people "who regarded the earth and human mystery as sacred." When the teachings of Paul became known to Celtic teachers around 50 C.E. word of the mystery of Christ spread from ancient Turkey across Europe to Spain, France, Great Britain and Ireland. "There was deep receptivity to the new teaching," says Newell. "The Christ mystery did not seem strange to the Celtic worldview. Rather, it gave further expression to the sacredness the Celts already knew existed deep in the matter of the earth and in the stirrings of the human soul." Christian teachers spread the Gospel throughout Europe, but they posed a significant challenge to the brand of Western Christianity developing within the Roman Empire. "Empire did not want to be reminded that the earth and birth are sacred, a view that held too many implications for how living beings and the resources of the earth were to be revered rather than exploited. Consequently, religion was made to bow to imperial power, and the stage was set for conflict with the spirituality of the Celtic world." And, as we well know, that conflict continues with even more devastating consequences to the health and integrity of Earth and all life as we know it today.

I focus on this ancient battle for the heart and soul of Christianity today as six Catholic judges seek to re-write the laws of our land to conform to an imperial brand of "gospel" and justice. As young people, along with a growing confluence of elders, stand together in a modern Celtic cry for an end to sacrilegious treatment of the Earth, and the revolting sacrilege of demeaning human beings and Earth's many life forms, we begin to reclaim our holy roots in this planet. We begin to reverence what is truly Sacred, the Divine spark at the heart of all matter and the Divine spirit alive and requiring respect for each and all.

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

Upcoming Events:

Online Mass Schedule Continues This Month

Mass via Zoom will be Saturday, **July 9**, at **5:00pm**. Our Masses are online every 2nd Saturday-of-the-month.

Zoom Invitations for July Liturgy

If you have regularly participated in Sophia Christi liturgies or have recently requested a Zoom invitation to our online Masses, you will automatically receive a Zoom invitation this month. Invitations will be sent Friday, July 8. 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 6.

Pastoral Update

Summary of June 25 Council Meeting

The Pastoral Council met over Zoom on Saturday, June 25 to discuss important business. Two issues under consideration were Toni's vacation during the month of October and a sabbatical for Toni after Easter 2023, both of which the Council approved. Further business included Council Member Josie Miranda's suggestion that we begin a series of prayer vigils, the first of which will be scheduled in August with the theme of an end-to-gun-violence. We also made plans for our 15th anniversary in August, which is coming together nicely due to the planning of Council Members Anna Lankutis and Mike Newton and with Sophia Christi member John Coutu. Watch future communications for more information about all these items of business. - Submitted by Secretary Rachel Wheeler

Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together Resume This Month

After a one-month hiatus we are resuming our Sophia Christi Zoom Get Togethers on Saturday, July 23rd, from 5:00 to 6:00 pm. These relaxed, informal gatherings are a wonderful opportunity for us to come together and enjoy each other's company. All are welcome and there are no expectations around participation. Toni will send the Zoom link out the Friday before our gathering. Please contact Josie via email if you have any questions (Josephine.miranda64@gmail.com). See you on the 23rd!

Sophia Christi Prayer Vigil to End Gun Violence

We are pleased to announce that Sophia Christi will hold a prayer vigil to end gun violence on Thursday, August 18th, between 7:00 and 8:00 pm. The idea for the vigil sprang from our May Zoom Get Together during a discussion about the recent Buffalo and Texas shootings and our shared desire to engage in spirit-driven action against the scourge of gun violence. This will be a communal activity practiced individually rather than in one another's presence. More information will be shared in the August Sophia Christi newsletter. –Josie Miranda, Sophia Christi Councilmember.

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, or Rachel Wheeler rastonwinchel@hotmail.com.

Care Team

If you are interested in being a part of the Care Team or have a need that the Care Team might respond to, please contact Kathleen Glover gloverconnection@yahoo.com or Pastor Toni.

Council Member Reflection

While I was in Salzburg, Austria teaching for six weeks, I had the opportunity to go to Mass several times. Though following the Mass in German was a challenge, I enjoyed seeing Austrian people wearing their dirndls and lederhosen. It was clear that this traditional clothing was their Sunday best and it got me thinking about my own not having much of a distinction these days between professional clothes for work and what I wear to Mass on a Sunday morning. And when I get to show up for Mass on Zoom on a Saturday afternoon, I can make even less a distinction between the everyday and Sunday best! There's something to be said for the ordinariness of what Zoom Mass permits and the integration of our Sunday best in appearance and attitude with how we are other days of the week. And I also think there is something special about being able to use clothing or some other thing about our life that's different about how we show up in our time together, even if it's just (for me) remembering to put on a pair of earrings! - Rachel Wheeler, Council Secretary

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 28 for the April 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.

The Celtic vision of earth's sacredness threatened imperial power in the fourth century as it does to this day. "Empire did not want to be told that matter is sacred, because then it could not do with impunity whatever it wished to matter. Then the body of the earth and the bodies of men and women were not just there to be used and exploited; they were to be honored and cared for," Newell writes. These words usher us into next week's Gospel in which we hear again Jesus' parable of the Samaritan who stops to care for a severely beaten traveler left to die by the side of the road. That person's sacredness wasn't recognized by the priest or the Levite who passed by "on the other side of the road," distancing themselves even further from the person's agony by moving as far away as they could—to the opposite side of that lonely road. Newell writes: "A Christ-one, Pelagius said, is one 'who shows compassion to all...who feels another's pain as if it were his own, and who is moved to tears by the tears of others.' And this compassion is not just for human beings, he said; it is for all life. 'When Jesus commands us to love our neighbors, he does not only mean our human neighbors; he means all the animals and birds, insects and plants, amongst whom we live.' It is the sacredness of compassion that fuels the holy work of justice. It is compassion within us and among us that will inspire and sustain the work of equitably accessing the earth's resources," writes Newell.

Respect and compassion lead the way, and they are qualities embedded in the human spirit from the beginning of time. When Moses commands his people to “return to the Most High with all your heart and soul,” he reminds them that God’s law is in their hearts. No need to look further than inside their own being to know what is true, what is just, what is wholly sacred. Recognizing the Divine Spark within the earth and all of creation as well as within each human being is what “returning to the Most High with all your heart and soul” looks like. The Law that is written in our hearts quietly reminds us of our intrinsic connection to each other and to the Earth which sustains all life regardless of rank, tribe or species.

The patriarchs of the world’s institutions have chosen the way of Rome in opposition to the Nature-loving, Earth-revering, Human-reverencing, Wisdom-guided Celtic Christians who were, essentially, wiped from history with the excommunication of Pelagius, whose major crime was to state what progressive Christians proclaim universally today—that the Divine dwells within all things, all beings, all of Earth and Cosmos. Our nature is of God from the very beginning. May we return to a deep sense of the Sacred that was lost when Empire worked to bury what humanity knows in its heart, that we live in a holy garden and our only task is to learn how to love the God alive within it and each other with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Celebrating the Holy cry for truth and justice this national holiday weekend,

Toni