**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer for Sunday, October 18, 2020,**

**29th Sunday in Ordinary Time Mission Sunday**

*“Our sole wish is to do the Will of God.”*

*Mother Mary Lange Foundress of Oblate Sisters of Providence*

**TECHNICAL CHECK-IN (Betty Thompson)**

I’m Betty Thompson and I welcome you here on behalf of Solidarity with Sisters.

* We sent the files of readings, responses, and lyrics.
* Camera, Gallery/Speaker view. Second screen? Mute/unmute, even during singing.
* **I will now mute everybody.** Unmute to speak.

Now let’s put technical things aside.

**WELCOME (Betty)**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to Judith Nestor and Jill McGowan, who prepared today’s communal prayer.
* Thanks to Stu Sklamm and Reggie Ott for making us musical.
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today: Jill and Judith, Cindy Nestor, Linda Donaldson, Jim and Suzie De Quattro, Alicia Urban, Lynn Bufka, and Kevin and Sylvia Lynch.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please get in touch.

**SETTLING IN (Betty)**

Settle into a comfortable position. Feel any tightness in your body and let your muscles loosen. Notice your thoughts and try to put aside those that distract you. Notice your breath as it goes in and out. As you exhale, let tensions leave you. As you inhale, feel God’s love flowing into you. And now let’s take 3 deep breaths. One to be here… one to be together….and one to create space for how God will lead us today.

Now Stu Sklamm will lead us into our celebration.

**OPENING – BE NOT AFRAID (Stu Sklamm)**

If you pass through raging waters in the sea
You shall not drown.
If you walk amid the burning flames
You shall not be harmed.
If you stand before the power of hell
And death is at your side
Know that I am with you through it all.

Refrain: Be not afraid! I go before you always.

 Come, follow me and I will give you rest.

And blessed are your poor
For the kingdom shall be theirs.
Blest are you that weep and mourn
For one day you shall laugh.
And if wicked men insult and hate you
All because of me
Blessed, blessed are you. Refrain

**GREETING (Betty Thompson)**

Beloved Community, rejoice!The Spirit of Christ is among us! Alleluia!

**All:** Amen! Alleluia!

**CALL TO WORSHIP (Jill McGowan)**

Today the church celebrates World Mission Sunday, a day that reminds us of our baptismal call to bring the light of the Gospel into the world.We remember that sometimes our mission is in our own homes and communities. As St. Francis suggested, preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.

We are here today to remember that this is how we want to be the people of God and the body of Christ. We are here today to remember what we want our lives to preach: the great fact that God is in love with us. And now let us pray.

**GATHERING (Suzie De Quattro)**

God of prophets, God of grace,

teach us how to be your community –

to see one another with your eyes of love

and to recognize what is ours to do in the world.

May we inquire, nudge, and challenge each other

to imagine what none us could conceive alone. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Jill McGowan)**

The two readings in today’s liturgy deal with the interplay of faith and government -- and what could be more apt as we approach a national election.

The first reading presents the radical idea that Yahweh, the god of an enslaved people, is the Lord and that **there is no other**. Isaiah reassures a people in exile that their God is not only the most powerful god, but the only god.

In Matthew we hear that the Jews are again subjugated – this time by the Romans. Jesus responds to an attempt to trick him into blasphemy by saying: “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s.” This interplay between duty to government and duty to religion has been a question not only throughout Biblical history, but even into our own times.

In finding sources to examine these readings, Judith wanted to give voice to African American women in the church, who, though often subjugated themselves, bore witness to the Gospel from the country’s earliest days. For example, in 18th century New Orleans black women constituted a majority of the church’s membership. And free black women served as godparents to more than 80 percent of the city’s enslaved population.

Now Cindy Nestor will read from the 45th chapter of the book of Isaiah, and I will add some context. Then Judith Nestor will offer questions for our reflection.

**READING 1 – ISAIAH 45:1, 4-6 (Cindy Nestor)**

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, Cyrus,

whose right hand I grasp,

Subduing nations before him,

stripping kings of their strength,

Opening doors before him,

leaving the gates unbarred:

For the sake of Jacob, my servant,

of Israel my chosen one,

I have called you by name,

giving you a title, though you do not know me.

I am the LORD, there is no other,

there is no God besides me.

It is I who arm you, though you do not know me,

so that all may know, from the rising of the sun

to its setting, that there is none besides me.

I am the LORD, there is no other.

**REFLECTION 1 (Jill McGowan) (SLIDE – Betty)**

While the Jews were still in exile in Babylonia, God reminded them to remain faithful and told them that they would be delivered from slavery through Cyrus, the Emperor of the neighboring kingdom of Persia. African Americans often identified with the Jews in captivity and they too have called on God to effect their release. Throughout the civil rights movement, African Americans have believed that by working for liberty, they do God’s work.

Of course, one of the strongest tools in the work for liberation is education. In 1829, Mother Mary Lange, who was of Haitian descent and arrived in the US through Cuba, founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore. This was the first order of black women religious in the United States. Three decades before the abolition of slavery, she felt a strong call to educate black children in the city that had become her home. Mother Mary personified the call to mission work, which we celebrate today, on Mission Sunday. And she faced many obstacles. Local Catholics supported the children’s education but were disturbed by the idea of black women and girls in religious habits, commanding the respect due to nuns. The Oblate Sisters were in serious financial need and agreed to do domestic work for Catholic priests. Mother Mary insisted that they would only do this work if the priests treated them justly and with respect.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Judith Nestor) (SLIDE: Betty)**

When does religious humility require us to remind one another of our equal status as children of God? How can we be humble and still insist on human dignity?

How does it feel to know that sometimes deliverance comes from the hands of a someone who seems an adversary?

**SILENCE** (Sound a chime and stop slide after 2 minutes.) **(Betty Thompson)**

**Jill McGowan:**

Now Linda Donaldson will read from the 22nd chapter of Matthew and Jill McGowan will add some context. Then Judith Nestor will offer questions for our reflection.

**READING 2 --** [**MATTHEW 22:15-21**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/22) (**Linda Donaldson)**

Then the Pharisees went off

and plotted how they might entrap him in speech.

They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians,[\*](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/22#48022016-1) saying,

“Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man

and that you teach the way of God in accordance

with the truth.

And you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion,

for you do not regard a person’s status.

Tell us, then, what is your opinion:

Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”

Knowing their malice, Jesus said,

“Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?

Show me the coin that pays the census tax.”

Then they handed him the Roman coin.

He said to them, “Whose image is this and whose inscription?”

They replied, “Caesar’s.”

At that he said to them,

“Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar

and to God what belongs to God.”

**REFLECTION 2 (Jill McGowan) (SLIDE - Betty)**

Jesus tells us in the Gospel to render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s. The question of how to balance duty to God with duty to government is an old one.

Whoever we are, we occasionally must confront the question of how to resist what we see as the immoral behavior of our government. Unfortunately, in this country we still live and labor under systemic racism.

Sister Roberta Fulton is the current president of the National Black Sisters’ Conference, and a member of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur. She tells of being asked why she was joining a convent when she was so bright and gifted and could do so much for her people. Sister Roberta replied that she could do those things as a nun also. And she did. She taught her sisters about Martin Luther King and Harriet Tubman and led her congregation in weekly marches against segregation.

And Sister Roberta was not the only African-American woman to bring the mission of conversion to the church. Black sisters educated 10 of the nation’s first 23 Black priests. Theydesegregated several Catholic colleges and universities, including Saint Louis University, Villanova University, and the Catholic University of America, before the Brown v. Board of Education decision. In 1933, for example~~,~~ Oblate Sisters of Providence Mary of Good Counsel Baptiste and Mary Consolata Gibson re-integrated the Catholic University of America and, in 1934, became the institution’s first black women graduates. Black laywomen also encouraged and nurtured the vocations of Black girls and boys in their own families and parishes. They remind us all that a racially segregated church is a profoundly un-Catholic church.

Recently, we have seen this question of duty to God and to government addressed in differing ways as we look at the Black Lives Matters movement. Many people have felt called to demonstrate with them while other see these demonstrations as unlawful. Some Catholic religious orders that are mostly white are facing the fact of their own racism, past and present. They are examining how they profited from the work of enslaved people, how they excluded or constrained people of color, and how they still may operate as if white ways are the default choice.

In a few weeks we have the ability to influence our government by our votes. As always, each of us must search our own hearts and pray for the guidance to vote wisely. Then, as we pray, we should “move our feet,” as the African proverb, often repeated by Congressman John Lewis, tells us.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Judith Nestor) (SLIDE – Betty)**

When have you felt called to disagree with the government or those in authority? Did prayer help to inform your decision? How did you feel? Were you afraid?

What do these stories of African American women religious call forth in you?

**SILENCE (Sound a chime and stop slide after 2 minutes.) (Betty Thompson)**

**Betty:** Now Suzie De Quattro will lead us in sharing reflections.

**SHARING TIME (Suzie De Quattro)**

We invite you to briefly share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you listened and as you reflected on these readings. That helps us to glimpse the many ways God is among us. We welcome new voices, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening,

As you share your feelings, please use "I” or “me". And let's leave a bit of silence between speakers. A bridge of silence allows us to take in what was just said and gives others the chance to gather their feelings to share.

So let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. [Pause for 30 seconds.]

Now who would like to start our sharing? Remember to unmute yourself to speak and mute yourself again afterwards.

(Sharing)

Is there anyone else who would like to share? [Pause.]

Thank you. Lord, we thank you for this time of sharing, for the thoughts spoken and unspoken and ask that you help us find in these words a way to discern the mission you have chosen for us.

Now Jill McGowan will lead us in prayer.

**COMMUNITY PRAYERS (Jill McGowan)**

O God, we trust in your guidance and mercy as we search for ways to discern our own missions in this world and the courage to do what we are called to do. Now let us pray for God’s guidance and mercy in tending the needs of our own community.

Our response will be: Lord of Love, hear our prayer.

Lord, help us always to remember that you are our first and ultimate leader, and our allegiance to leaders of this earth must be informed by your love. For this we pray. Lord of Love, hear our prayer.

On this Mission Sunday, help all Christians to remember to respect and honor the culture and dignity of people different from ourselves. For this we pray. Lord of Love, hear our prayer.

We pray that African American women of the church be honored for their gifts and contributions as they deserve. For this we pray. Lord of Love, hear our prayer.

That we will learn from African American sisters, past and present, about how to put ourselves into situations where God’s mission needs a human body, ours, for this we pray. Lord of Love, hear our prayer.

That we will encourage our own communities to do what the Leadership Conference of Women Religious is doing: examine our groups’ past and present racism, and work for a different future, for this we pray. Lord of Love, hear our prayer.

For a speedy end to this world-wide pandemic and for a free and fair election with a peaceful, respected outcome here in the United States. For this we pray. Lord of Love, hear our prayer.

For what else shall we pray? Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute yourself afterwards.

(Shared prayers)

O you in whom our whole lives become mission, we place all of our prayers, those spoken and those unspoken, into your loving care. We will do all we can to put our prayers into action – while entrusting the outcome to you. Amen.

Now Jim De Quattro will lead us in our Offering.

**OFFERING/STEWARDSHIP (Jim De Quattro and Alicia Urban)**

**Jim:** Often, through our shared reflections, we discern a call to take some kind of action. Today we have asked Alicia Urban to tell us about one of the ways she is working in the vineyard.

**Alicia Urban** speaks.

**Jim:** Let us now take time to name within ourselves something we will offer to others in recognition of all that we have received from God. [Pause.]

In thanksgiving for the presence and power of Jesus Christ, and in unity with the Holy Spirit, let us pray. God of abundance, we commit to sharing our time, talents, and treasures so we that we may be a light and a witness to the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Lynn Bufka)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in us. [Pause.]

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet.

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the cup,

gifts of the earth and work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it. [Pause.]

Let us invite God into ourselves so that we become God’s living presence. [Pause.]

Holy One, you transform us as you nourish us here.

May we nourish others with your presence.

Amen.

**OUR FATHER [Kevin and/or Sylvia Lynch]**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with Christians throughout the world in the words that Jesus gave us:

**All (muted):** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING [Jim De Quattro]**

While we keep ourselves muted, let us reach out our hands and bless each other:

**All: (adapted from a traditional African American prayer)**

May God support us all the day long,
till the shadows lengthen
and the evening comes
and the busy world is hushed
and the fever of labor is over
and our work is done-
then in his mercy-
may he give us a safe lodging
and sweet comfort

In the company of our loved ones
and peace through the night

And grace to face the new day.

Through Christ Jesus. Amen

**CLOSING SONG -- HOW CAN I KEEP FROM SINGING**  (**Reggie Ott)**

My life flows on in endless song
Above Earth's lamentation.
I hear the real, though far off hymn
That hails the new creation.

REFRAIN

No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that rock I'm clinging
Since love is Lord of Heaven and Earth
How can I keep from singing?

Above the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It sounds an echo in my soul
How can I keep from singing?

REFRAIN

No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that rock I'm clinging
Since love is lord of Heaven and Earth
How can I keep from singing?

What though the tempest loudly roars,
I hear the truth, it liveth!
What though the darkness round me close,
Songs in the night it giveth!

REFRAIN

No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that rock I'm clinging.
Since love is lord of Heaven and Earth
How can I keep from singing?

When tyrants tremble, sick with fear,
And hear their death-knell ringing,
When friends rejoice both far and near,
How can I keep from singing?

REFRAIN

No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that rock I'm clinging.
Since love is lord of Heaven and Earth
How can I keep from singing?

**SOURCES AND** **RESOURCES:**

<https://uscatholic.org/blog/celebrating-unsung-black-catholic-women-in-u-s-history/>

globalsistersreport.org

https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/faith-tools/meditation/2004/01/prayers-from-african-american-traditions.aspx