**Solidarity with Sisters’ Communal Prayer**

**July 16, 2023**

**15th Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1**

**HELLOs** and then Zoom host mutes everyone. **(Betty Thompson)**

**WELCOME (Judy Sholes)**

Welcome, everyone!

* Maryann and I prepared our prayer for today.
* Introduction – Is there anyone who hasn’t been here before?
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today: Alicia and George Urban, Karen and Dan McCarthy, Peg Duchesne, Terri Butel, Kate Monagan, Maria Desjardins, and Sr. Kay Smalley.
* **The July 23 service will be our last one until August 13. The two weeks in between will be a well-earned vacation for Betty and Suzie who regularly devote significant time on our behalf.**
* We are always looking for new readers and are grateful for everyone’s help. If you are available on Aug. 13, contact Suzie or Betty, and for Aug. 20, Terri Butel. Use Chat after prayer, or email.

**SETTLING IN (Judy)**

As we begin to settle into our prayer time together, let us quiet ourselves and be aware of the Spirit’s expression in each of us. ,Let our breath slow, deepen, and fill us with the spirit of life in our midst. We begin with three deep breaths:

one to be here,

one to be together

and one to know the Spirit at work in everything that exists.

On this 15th Sunday of Ordinary Time, let us enter into our prayer together by singing Rain Down.

**OPENING SONG** by Jaime Cortez

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkS7S2-MXsU>

Rain down,  
Rain down,  
Rain down your love on your people,  
Rain down,  
Rain down,  
Rain down your love, God of life.

Faithful and true is the Word of our God.  
All of God's works are so worthy of trust.  
God's mercy falls on the just and the right.  
Full of God's love is the earth.  
  
Rain down,  
Rain down,  
Rain down your love on your people,  
Rain down,  
Rain down,  
Rain down your love, God of life.

**(Judy**) Alicia Urban will now lead us in our gathering prayer.

**GATHERING PRAYER (Alicia Urban)**

We gather today as a community of faith to listen to the Word of God and to give thanks for the generous love poured out on all creation.

In our praying and our sharing may we encourage, inspire, and challenge one another to recognize the ordinary ways the Word of God is planted in us.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Maryann)**

Our biblical ancestors were convinced of the power of God’s word. We hear it in both readings today, we recall it in the creation account in which God creates by simply speaking the word, and we remember John’s description of Jesus as the Word of God.

Isaiah clearly states his insight into the absolute power of the word of God in today’s reading, using ordinary images of nature to make the point.  In the gospel, ordinary images of nature are used again as Jesus tells the parable of the seed. For followers of Jesus the word of God was part of their faith. Matthew tells of that faith and insists that when the word is planted in good soil, nothing can stop it from multiplying.

The 3rd reading is based on one of Fr. Ron Rolheiser’s postings entitled, “The Language of Silence.” It has been said that the language of God is silence and is beyond our ordinary use of words. Today we consider both word and silence and the power of each alone and in community

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Peg Duchesne will read from the book of Isaiah.

Then George Urban will offer questions that will lead us into silence.

**READING 1 Isaiah 55:10-11** **(Peg Duchsene)**

Thus says our God,  
Just as from the heavens  
the rain and snow come down  
and do not return there  
till they have watered the earth,  
making it fertile and fruitful,  
giving seed to the one who sows  
and bread to the one who eats,  
so shall my word be  
that goes forth from my mouth;  
my word shall not return to me void,  
but shall do my will,  
achieving the end for which I sent it.

**QUESTIONS 1** *(Pause between the questions.)* **(George Urban)**

How has your understanding or experience of the Word of God changed -- or changed you?

What are the ordinary ways you water the Earth today with the Word of God?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE** **(Betty:** Share slide; Judy: time 2:00 & chime.**)**

**Judy:** Now Dan McCarthy will read from the Gospel of Matthew.

**Reading 2 Matthew 13;1-9 (Dan McCarthy)**

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea.  
Such large crowds gathered around him  
that he got into a boat and sat down,  
and the whole crowd stood along the shore.  
And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying:

"A sower went out to sow.  
And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path,  
and birds came and ate it up.  
Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil.  
It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep,  
and when the sun rose it was scorched,  
and it withered for lack of roots.  
Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it.  
But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit,  
a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.  
Whoever has ears ought to hear."

**QUESTIONS 2 (George Urban)**

What is the condition of your soil? What does the soil of your life need now?

Recall a time when you have been the sower. In what ways have you been generous or in what ways you have you withheld the seeding?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE** **(Betty:** Share slide; Judy: time 2:00 & chime.**)**

**Judy**: Terri Butel will read excerpts from a posting by Fr. Ron Rolheiser.

**READING 3 A reflection based on a posting by Fr. Ron Rolheiser entitled “The Language of Silence.” (Terri Butel)**

This posting begins with a quote by Meister Eckhard. “Nothing resembles the language of God so much as does silence.”.Fr Ron Rolheiser continues with his own experiences and insights into silence as a special language.  
  
Sometimes we understand someone or feel understood by someone intuitively, beyond words, beyond anything we’ve ever spoken to one another. Often this understanding is deeper than the understanding we came to through normal conversation. But this doesn’t put silence in opposition to words. Silence and words need each other. Words take on greater power when they issue forth from silence, just as they begin to lose their force when they are constant and never-ending. Conversely, silence is more powerful after we have already come to know each other through words. There are things we can know through silence just as there are things we can only know through conversations inside a community. To find the deepest level of things and the intimacy we seek, silence brings us into community in a way that words often cannot.  
  
And so it is important that we try to learn the language of silence, just as we try to learn the words that help us know each other. There is a huge silence undergirding us and inside of us that is trying to draw us into itself. To enter that silence is to enter the reality of God and the reality of our real communion with each other. For this reason, all great religious traditions and all great spiritual writers emphasize the need for silence at times in our lives. As Thomas Merton put it, there is a hidden wholeness at the heart of things and that hidden wholeness can only be discovered if we get to the deepest level of things. And the language we need to get there is the language of silence – the language of God and the language of intimacy.

**QUESTIONS 3 (George Urban)**

*(Pause between each question)*

How have you embraced or resisted learning the “language of silence”?

Think of a time when you knew or were known beyond words. What feeling does this memory bring to you today?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE** **(Betty:** Share slide; Judy: time 2:00 & chime.**)**

Judy: Karen McCarthy will lead our sharing.

**SHARING (Karen McCarthy)**

Take a moment to look at all of us gathered here this morning, the community that we have come to know through words and silence. Each of you brings a unique glimpse of God in your words and your listening. We long to hear from **everyone** who wishes to share. And so, we invite you to share **one** thought or feeling from your reflections this morning. We ask that you allow a bridge of respectful silence after each speaker to receive the gift they offer – enough time to take two slow breaths.

So let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. [pause]

Now who would like to start our sharing?

[People share personal reflections. If there is extended silence during the sharing:] Is there anyone else who would like to share?  [Pause for a slow, deep breath.]

[Stop after 20 minutes, or at 20 minutes after the hour, whichever is first.]

Thank you to each of you who shared and to all who listened If there was not time for you to share or speak fully, we can continue after the final song as we often do or send your reflection to Judy Sholes for our follow-up email. Now let us turn to God in prayer.

(Karen) Kate Monagan will lead us in our prayers of the community.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY (Kate Monagan)**

Let’s pause to notice the prayers that arise in us now. (Pause)

Our response will be **Gracious Gardener, refresh us.**

That the seeds planted by religious communities and organizations that reach out to serve others continue to flourish, we pray…**Gracious Gardener, refresh us.**

That we enrich our soil by engaging in the language of God as we spend time in deep silence, we pray… **Gracious Gardener, refresh us.**

That we may remain committed to the care of the earth and the pursuit of environmental justice, we pray…**Gracious Gardener, refresh us.**

That we continue our effort to support existing programs and create new possibilities to diminish food insecurity throughout the world, we pray **Gracious Gardener, refresh us.**

For what else, shall we pray?....

(People offer their prayers. Response:) **Gracious Gardener, refresh us.**

Thank you.

O You who love us more than we can imagine, we are grateful for this chance to give you our prayers, spoken and unspoken. We entrust the outcome to you. We now offer you ourselves as we reflect with music.

**OFFERTORY Musical Reflection God Beyond All Names**

: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Htrmq0g_Nk> (Stop at 2.52 seconds

God, beyond our dreams, you have stirred in us a memory,  
You have placed your powerful spirit in the hearts of humankind.

All around us, we have known you;  
All creation lives to hold you,  
In our living and our dying  
We are bringing you to birth.

God, beyond all names, you have made us in your image,  
We are like you, we reflect you, we are woman, we are man.

All around us, we have known you;  
All creation lives to hold you,  
In our living and our dying  
We are bringing you to birth.

God, beyond all words, all creation tells your story,  
You have shaken with our laughter, you have trembled with our tears.

All around us, we have known you;  
All creation lives to hold you,  
In our living and our dying  
We are bringing you to birth.

God, beyond all time, you are laboring within us;  
We are moving, we are changing, in your spirit ever new.

All around us, we have known you;  
All creation lives to hold you,  
In our living and our dying  
We are bringing you to birth.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Maria Desjardins)**

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 and among 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

and said, “… as I have done for you, you should also do.”

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.]*

Holy One, give us confidence in you and in one another.

Make us your bread of abundance.  Make us your wine of joy.  Amen.

To extend our communion, Kay Smalley will lead us in the Prayer of Jesus.

**THE PRAYER OF JESUS (Sr. Kay Smalley)**

***All (muted):***

Let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with our family throughout the world:

Eternal Spirit,  
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;  
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world;  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings;  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trial too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and forever. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING (Judy)**

Gracious Gardener,

You lovingly care for us.

You send us your waters of refreshment.

You fertilize us with your wisdom

and provide the warmth necessary for growth.

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May we care for our garden

by weeding and tending the soil

so we may produce an abundance of flowers

that reflect your unending love

and our desire to do your will.

Amen.

(**Judy)** Let us end our prayer today by singing our closing song, “For the Fruits of This Creation.”

**CLOSING SONG For the Fruits of This Creation by Fred Pratt Green**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FDx-MwLdt0>

For the fruit(s) of all creation,

thanks be to God;

for the gifts of every nation,

thanks be to God;

for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,

silent growth while we are sleeping,

future needs in earth's safe-keeping,

thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour,

God's will is done;

in the help we give our neighbour,

God's will is done;

in our world-wide task of caring

for the hungry and despairing,

in the harvests we are sharing,

God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit,

thanks be to God;

for the good we all inherit,

thanks be to God;

for the wonders that astound us,

for the truths that still confound us,

most of all that love has found us,

thanks be to God.

**RESOURCES**

Reading 3 - Adaptation of a posting by Fr. Ron Rolheiser, : <https://ronrolheiser.com/the-language-of-silence/>

Final Blessing adapted from *Inner Garden in Prayers* *to Sophia* by   
Sr, Joyce Rupp.