**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer for Sunday, July 12, 2020**

“Separately and together, we must make God’s gospel visible.”

(Sister [Joan Chittister](http://www.joanchittister.org/articles/let-call-be-heard))

**TECHNICAL CHECK-IN (Betty)**

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: turn on if you want. Gallery view option.
* Mute/Unmute: know how? Needed even during singing.
* I will now mute everybody. Unmute to speak.

Now let’s put technical things aside.

**WELCOME (Betty)**

Welcome, everyone! (Haven’t done this in many weeks, maybe do it from time to time? For those of you who have started coming since Easter – Those of us who have been planning our Sunday gatherings are members of Solidarity with Sisters. We are a group of lay women and men who began meeting in 2012withthe Leadership Conference of Women Religious. We are glad to be sharing with you the contemplative, communal way of presence and of prayer that we experience with those sisters. Thank you for being here with us!)

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Suzie and I had the joy of preparing today’s communal prayer.
* Thanks to Stu Sklamm and Reggie Ott for leading us in music.
* Thanks to our readers today – Anne Regan, Mary Ott, Lynn Bufka, and Marilyn Voigt. If you’d like to read on a future Sunday, please just let us know.

**SETTLING IN (Betty)**

Let’s move from getting here to being here. Settle into a comfortable position. Feel if there is any tightness in your body and let your muscles loosen. Notice your breath as it goes in and out. Exhale whatever is keeping you from really being here. Breathe in God’s love. 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 – THE KING OF GLORY (Stu Sklamm)**

REFRAIN:

The King of Glory comes,

the nation rejoices,

Open the gates for him,

Lift up your voices

Who is the King of Glory;

how shall we call him?

He is Emmanuel,

the promised of ages. REFRAIN

In all of Galilee,

in city or village,

He goes among his people

curing their illness. REFRAIN

Sing then of David's  son,

our savior and brother;

In all of Galilee

was never another. REFRAIN

**GREETING (Suzie)**

Sisters and brothers, rejoice!The Spirit of Christ is among us! Alleluia!

**All:** And all God’s people reply: Amen! Alleluia!

**CALL TO WORSHIP (Suzie)**

We come together today because it is with each other that we experience ourselves as the people of God and the body of Christ. We gather to remember that God is in love with us. Jesus promises us that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus himself is right here in the midst of us. In this extraordinary time we are called to Pentecost clarity and action. We are called to make God’s Gospel visible in more ways and in more places. We are here together this morning to say yes to this call, and to find light for our next step. And now let us pray.

**GATHERING PRAYER (Suzie)**

O God who creates and who gives breath,

be with us now as we come to you

with the great longings of our world

and of our selves.

We come together

trusting that the Spirit will be at work in us.

Help us to let go and to let come.

Help us to live the questions

and to move with you, in you, and toward you,

ever open to what is waiting to be born in us.

Amen.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Suzie)**

Today’s Gospel is the first of several Sundays where Jesus uses parables to tell us about the kingdom of God. The whole series of parables invites us to ask: What is our role in building the kingdom of God?

It’s not as simple as achieving our own salvation so that we can be part of God’s kingdom at a future time. Focusing on individual salvation can pull us *away* from building the kingdom. As Christians, we are a community called to build a community. We are called to be good soil… and to feel the frustration when weeds thrive… and to feel heartbreak when the community fractures.

Today Paul reminds us that we are the children of God. He challenges us by writing that “the whole of creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed.” We hear several different images of how that revelation can occur from labor pains to seeds planted in different soils. The Gospel suggests that we become good soil by admitting when we’re confused and by asking questions. So let us ask ourselves what we need to become the revelation of Christ. That is the work of our lifetime.

In the words of Bishop Ken Untener, often called the Romero prayer:

It helps, now and then, to step back

And take the long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,

It is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of

The magnificent engterprise that is God’s work.

Nothing we do is complete,

Which is another way of saying

That the kingdom always lies beyond us. \*

Now Mary Ott will read from chapter 8 of Paul’s letter to the Romans. After each reading, Jim will offer questions before we pause for silent reflection. Don’t feel you have to answer all questions. To stay with only one of them might lead you into a deeper place.”

**READING 1: Romans 8:16-24 (Mary Ott)**

The Spirit joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, sharing his suffering, so as to share his glory.

Sisters and brothers, in my estimation, all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us, for the whole of creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed, with the intention that all might be brought into the same glorious freedom.

From the beginning till now, the entire creation has been groaning in one great act of giving birth.  And we too, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we are groaning, waiting with eagerness to be set free. In hope, we already have salvation.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS: (Jim)**

As co-heirs with Christ, in what way do we share in the suffering of God?

How do you experience the glorious freedom as a child of God?

What is still groaning in you, waiting to be born?

**SILENCE (Sound a chime after 2 minutes.) (Betty)**

Now Anne Regan will read from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 13.

**GOSPEL READING – from Matthew 13:1-10, 13. (Anne Regan)**

That same day, Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the shore, and he told them many things in parables. He said, “Listen, a sower went out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up at once, because there was no depth of earth. But as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Anyone who has ears should listen!”

Then the disciples went up to him and asked, “Why do you talk to them in parables?” Jesus answered, “The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear!”

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS: (Jim)**

Jesus talks about different kinds of soil. How does this community become rich, sustainable soil?

When are you the sower, the seed, the thorns, the soil, the harvester?

What does this parable tell us about the kingdom of God?

**SILENCE (Sound a chime after 2 minutes.) (Betty)**

Now Marilyn Voigt will read a reflection that draws on Sister [Mary McGlone](https://www.ncronline.org/news/spirituality/scripture-life/fifteenth-sunday-ordinary-time) in NCR and [Molleen Dupree-Dominguez](https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/07122020) at Catholic Women Preach.

**REFLECTION: (Marilyn Voigt)**

The reading from Romans encourages us to recognize our groaning as part of a cosmic reality: “From the beginning till now, the entire creation has been groaning in one great act of giving birth” to the kingdom of God. The parable of the sower highlights the long cycle of growth, from seed to fruit. These readings encourage us to look at the coming of God’s Kingdom as a process, not a one-time harvest at the end of time. Like the disciples, we may be confused by what’s happening at the moment. It’s essential to keep our uncertainties active. Our questions help us to cooperate with the action of God.

Right now we can really identify with the “groaning” in Romans. We look around God’s garden and groan deeply as we see what looks to us like shallow soil we are not able to cultivate, and thorns we have not been able to root out. But if we recognize our groaning as labor pains, not as groans of frustration and impotence, then we can see them as integral to the birth of the kingdom. For millennia, God acts through us, and little by little, with each generation, the kingdom emerges in greater fullness.

How does that happen? In Catholic Women Preach, Molleen Dupree-Dominguez writes that:

“The Sower is tossing out seeds from every angle, and into every heart, whether prepared soil, vacant lot or, more likely - some of both. These seeds are flying on social media. They’re posted in signs on our front lawns, they’re shouting into news cameras, they’re marching in the streets, they’re begging for oxygen to breathe. They are the seeds of justice…. These seeds seek repair of broken systems, institutions and relationships….

“Now – imagine – you’re the soil. You’re the soil. I’m the soil. Let us allow the Holy One to do what the psalmist promises – break up our clods, shower the valleys, uproot that which chokes out life, and prepare the soil so that the seeds might yield a fruitful – and long-lasting – harvest….

“God assures us through the mouth of Isaiah: My work is not wasted. I send out my word, says God, and it will not return to me until it has accomplished its work. God’s word – these seeds thirsting for justice – will find fertile soil. God is our ultimate model of the skilled gardener – persistent and focused.”

How can we prepare ourselves to be good and sustainable soil, so these seeds can still flourish next year and the year after that and a decade after that? Sister Mary McGlone connects the idea of being “good soil” with the last part of the Gospel. She writes, “The disciples admitted that Jesus had confused them. ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ was a question that really meant “We don’t get it!” That was exactly the attitude they needed for Jesus to be able to break through to them, for the seed of his word to go deep into the interior space they opened with their questions. When it comes to having ears to hear, this Gospel assures us that questions are more fruitful than answers.”

Molleen reminds us that scripture “imagines a fruitful harvest where the fields are lush with blossoms and the valleys blanketed with grain. The harvest is abundant and available to all.

“We are not there yet. We may yet be far from this verdant vision.

“But if we pause and stop, we can feel it coming. The stirring of the earth, the yearning of our hearts, brave roots reaching down into the dark muck, searching for nourishment there in the dark, moist, hidden nooks of earth. We witness the cautious breakthrough of a tendril, poking above the ground. Will it bear fruit that lasts? Depends on the soil.”

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**: **(Jim)**

How comfortable are you with uncertainty?

What questions compel you right now?

What communities help you in exploring those questions?

**SILENCE (Sound a chime after 2 minutes.) (Betty)**

**SHARING (Betty)**

We invite you to briefly share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you listened and as you reflected on these readings. Everyone’s individual reflections help us to glimpse the many ways God is among us.

If you would like to speak, you will need to unmute yourself on your phone or in Zoom. After you speak, please mute yourself again. If more than one person speaks at once, one will go first and the other will speak after that.

Who would like to begin our sharing?

(Sharing)

Thank you.

Now Lynn Bufka will lead us in prayer.

**INTENTION (Lynn Bufka):**

O God, you groan with us in the continual birthing of your Kingdom. You rejoice with us as your Kingdom emerges among us. May we hold back nothing to be rich soil so that all may thrive in your kingdom. And so we pray.

Our response will be: Holy One, hear our prayer.

God within us, give us attentiveness to notice the seeds of your kingdom that are right in front of us. Inspire us with good questions to keep us alert. For this we pray. Holy One, hear our prayer.

God among us, give us the courage to risk what we are accustomed to, so that we build a society in solidarity with all who are most vulnerable, and with Earth itself. For this we pray. Holy One, hear our prayer.

God of every day, abide with us and with those we love and those we serve. For this we pray. Holy One, hear our prayer.

God of time and space, give our country unselfish courage and wisdom to choose liberty, justice, and compassion for all. For this we pray. Holy One, hear our prayer.

God of abundance, let our solidarity with Catholic sisters and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious bear rich fruit in unexpected ways. For this we pray. Holy One, hear our prayer.

Now let’s remember the feelings and prayers that arose in us as we shared reflections, and also the prayers we carry with us. [Pause.]

Now, for what else shall we pray? Please unmute yourself as you speak. Please end your petition with “for this we pray.”

(People speak.)

Thank you.

O God, we place all of our prayers, those spoken and those unspoken, into your loving care, and we entrust the outcome to you. As we do, we continue the words of Bishop Ken Unterer:

This is what we are about:  
We plant seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.  
We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything  
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something,  
and to do it very well.  
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,  
an opportunity for God’s grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,  
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.  
We are workers, not master builders,  
ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own. \*

Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Suzie)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

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

We offer you our lives. We give you thanks for your love. [Pause.]

We remember the night before Jesus died.

Jesus, who was having dinner with his friends,

looked at what was in front of him, the bread and the cup,

and he 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, you transform us as you nourish us here.

May we nourish others with your presence.

Amen.

**OUR FATHER (Betty)**

Now let us pray in harmony with all Christians throughout the world in the words that Jesus gave us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy 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 (All)**

Betty: Let us now bless each other as we conclude:

**All:** May the Lord bless us and keep us.

May the Lord shine his light upon us.

May the Lord be gracious to us

and give us peace. Amen.

**CLOSING SONG: “This Is the Day” by Tim Schoembachler (Reggie Ott)**

This is the day that the Lord has made!

Let us rejoice and be glad!

This is the day that the Lord has made!

Let us rejoice, let us rejoice and be glad.

Creation is waiting, standing up on its toes,

Waiting for us, fully alive. Refrain

The Lord is creating, all the world is made new!

This is the day made by the Lord! Refrain

Footnote:

\* "The mystery of the Romero Prayer." The mystery is that the words of the prayer are attributed to Saint Oscar Romero, but they were never spoken by him. They were, in fact, spoken by John Cardinal Dearden in November of 1979. They come from a homily he gave at a Mass for deceased priests. But what is even more important to know is that they were words drafted for Cardinal Dearden by Ken Untener (then Father, later Bishop). The “Romero” prayer is really the words of Ken Untener.