**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer for Sunday, Jan. 31, 2021,**

**Fourth Sunday inn Ordinary Time**

*“The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light;*

*on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death,*

*light has arisen”*

*Mt 4:16*

**CHECK-IN** and then Betty mutes everyone. **(Suzie De Quattro)**

**WELCOME (Suzie De Quattro )**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to Ann Jelen and Bob Gallagher for preparing today’s communal prayer and to Linda Donaldson and Reggie Ott for making our music.
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today: Kathy Heller, Jill McGowan, Jim De Quattro, Stu Sklamm, Peggy Thompson, and Mary Ott.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please note it in chat or get in touch.

**SETTLING IN (Suzie De Quattro)**

We are not all in the same place, but we can still be together by sharing a common breath.  So let us begin by slowly taking one collective breath together -  in and out.   With each breath let the Spirit of God settle deeper into you as your exhale tensions from your body and distractions from your mind.  In and out.   Now let’s take 3 more breaths.  One to be here…one to be together…and one to make space for what God has incarnated in you,

Now Linda Donaldson will lead us into our prayer together.

**OPENING SONG (Linda Donaldson)**

Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;

    let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

    let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Come, let us bow down in worship;

    let us kneel before the LORD who made us.

For he is our God,

    and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts**.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:

    “Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,

    as in the day of Massah in the desert,

Where your fathers tempted me;

    they tested me though they had seen my works.”

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

**GREETING (Bob Gallagher)**

Beloved Community, rejoice!

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

**CALL TO WORSHIP**  **(Bob Gallagher)**

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 celebrate the great fact that God is in love with us. We are confident that God will act in us and through us. We are in a time of transition with uncertainty ahead, but we trust that if we listen, we will hear God’s call. We believe that God will give us light for our next step. So let us pray …

And now Kathy Heller will lead us in prayer

**GATHERING PRAYER (Kathy Heller)**

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.

Ann Jelen will now introduce us to today’s theme.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Ann Jelen)**

Today our scriptures are about prophets, authority, and distractions. We could see a relationship between prophets and authority, but it took some new thinking for us to connect distractions to the prophetic theme.

Let’s look first at the readings fromfrom Deuteronomy and from Mark. Moses tells the Israelites that God will send them a new prophet to speak God’s word to them. Moses also warns them to avoid false prophets. Then in the Gospel we hear that Jesus, himself a prophet, teaches with authority in the synagogue. When Jesus later commands the unclean spirit to leave the possessed man, the people are amazed. They ask each other “What is this? A new teaching with authority.” For them this is unlike the scribes, whose teaching from the time of Moses has depended on what others have said and written. In Mark, we see that Jesus, the beloved son of God, has the authority Himself to teach and even command spirits. These two readings raised questions for us about how we recognize true prophets who speak with authority.

We found it harder to connect the reading from First Corinthians about anxieties and adherence to the Lord without distractions. The homily of Christina Zaker, from *Catholic Women Preach*, suggested another way to look at these readings. She spoke about distractions in a more positive way: they could really be invitations to hear God’s voice a little differently and a little more clearly.

The refrain in the Psalm 95 cautions us “ If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” We will not hear God’s voice unless we listen with an open heart to the prophets, to the words in scripture, especially the words of Jesus, and to the voices we may encounter daily. Not only must we be ready to listen, but we must not harden our hearts.

*(Slight pause)*

Now Jill McGowan will read from Deuteronomy Chapter 18, followed by questions and silence for reflection. Feel free to stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1**  **(Jill McGowan)**

Moses spoke to all the people, saying:

And the LORD said to me,

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin,

and will put my words into his mouth;

he shall tell them all that I command him.

Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name,

I myself will make him answer for it.

But if a prophet presumes to speak in my name

an oracle that I have not commanded him to speak,

or speaks in the name of other gods, he shall die.’”

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim De Quattro)**

How do you feel when you struggle with uncertainty about whether you are hearing a prophet of God or someone promoting an agenda?

How do you resolve the conflict that the struggle presents? Who or what helps you?

**SILENT REFLECTION** **(Betty:** Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

Now Stu Sklamm will read from the Gospel of Mark 1:21-28, followed by questions and silence for reflection.

**READING 2 (Stu Sklamm)**

Then they came to Capernaum,

and on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught.

The people were astonished at his teaching,

for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit;

he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Have you come to destroy us?

I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

Jesus rebuked him and said,

“Quiet!  Come out of him!”

The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him.

All were amazed and asked one another,

“What is this?

A new teaching with authority.

He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.”

His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

*(Slight pause)*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim De Quattro)**

What is it about Jesus that makes it easier for you to recognize His authority?

We don’t have a designated prophet today so we have to figure out who amplifies God’s voice for us. How does this happen in your life ?

**SILENT REFLECTION** **(Betty:** Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

Now Ann Jelen will give a brief summary of 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, and will read an excerpt from Christina R. Zaker’s homily based on our readings today. After both are read, they will be followed by questions and silence for reflection

**READING 3 (Ann Jelen)**

In 1 Corinthians, Paul contrasts the life of the unmarried with that of the married with a warning that all must be steadfast in seeking God without the distraction of the world.

In an excerpt from her homily, Christina Zeker offers her thoughts about distractions and hearing God’s voice.

*“If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts.”*

The first time I sat down to work on this reflection, I read the readings and began to pray but was distracted by a text from my neighbor who wanted to let me know that her beloved uncle had died… I offered to make dinner for her family.

Later that day I got back to working on this reflection and read the readings again and found myself asking, what counts as a distraction? Paul claims that if you are married you are distracted by the stuff of this world, but I wondered just what was the distraction that day. Even though I had been trying to be in tune to God in reading the Scriptures and in prayer, was the text that came a distraction, or was it a clear invitation from God to nourish a family in need?

Our psalm says, “If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts.” which invites us to consider two questions – what does it take to hear God’s voice today? And how do you make sure you don’t harden your heart when you do hear it? I would argue that some of the things we might count as distractions, are really ways of God trying to break in and invite …us to get into the mess of life: to comfort those who are mourning, to heal the sick, to feed the hungry. To “smell like the sheep” as Pope Francis would say. These are all “distractions” yet, they are also ways God is calling us to reexamine and reimagine the incarnation. Just who is it that can give witness to God in our midst?

…We don’t have designated prophets today; we have to try to figure out for ourselves who amplifies the voice of God for us. Oh, there are the obvious prophets who point us in the right directions: Pope Francis calling all of us to fraternal love for one another. But there are more subtle prophets too, those raised from among our own kin: protesters kneeling as they call for an end to racial discrimination, nurses and doctors simultaneously healing our very sick and speaking on the news encouraging others to not take chances. Even text messages that if we read between the lines, we hear God’s whisper of an invitation to pray Good News to life. The prophets in our midst distract us from our complacency and point us to Grace and hope…

… Challenging our hearts to notice God in the other means having the humility to look for not only the ones we find easy to love, but the ones we disagree with or the ones we see as foolish too. Even the unclean spirits in the Gospel heard Jesus’ voice and knew who he was. Softening our hearts to the voice of God involves noticing God in the faces of the other, not being distracted by what they say or do, or how they smell, but seeing that distraction as an invitation to recognize our own brokenness and imperfections as well. In this shared vulnerability, in recognizing our shared humanity, God blesses us with an abundant love.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim De Quattro)**

When has a distraction become an invitation to hear God’s voice for you?

How do you soften your hearts to the voice if God?

**SILENT REFLECTION** **(Betty:** Slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

Peggy Thompson will now lead our sharing.

**SHARING TIME (Peggy Thompson)**

We invite you to briefly share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you have reflected upon our reading and music. Please speak from your personal experience, using “I” or “we”.

We welcome everyone who wants to speak, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening.

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

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

[Sharing]

[If there is silence more than about 30 seconds before anyone speaks:] Take whatever quiet you need before you speak.

[If there is extended silence during the sharing:] Is there anyone else who would like to share?  [Pause.]

[Stop by about 11:20.]

Thank you.

Now Mary Ott will lead us in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY(Mary Ott)**

We have just listened to God’s word — in scripture, in our reflections, and in our hearts and minds. Let’s pause in silence so we can each answer this question :

What is the longing in my heart at this moment — for myself, for my community, for people who are vulnerable? {Pause…}

As we offer our prayers, our response will be: Holy One, hear our prayer.

Let us pray that we listen with open hearts to true prophets, to Jesus, and to the voices we encounter in our world today. For this we pray. Holy One, hear our prayer.

Let pray that all people, both our leaders and citizens will hear and answer God’s invitation to heal the divisions in our country. For this we pray. Holy One, hear our prayer.

Let us pray that the vaccine production and distribution will slow the spread of the virus and allow people to feel safe again. For this we pray, Holy One, hear our prayer.

~~T~~hank you for the creative presence and prophetic voice of women religious in our church. Together let us live for the good of the world and especially for those who are unheard and vulnerable. For this we pray. Holy One, hear our prayer.

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

(Shared prayers)

Loving God, we place all of our prayers, those spoken and those unspoken, into your loving care. We will do all that we can to put our prayers into action – while entrusting the outcome to you. Amen.

**OFFERTORY ( Bob Gallagher)**

Often, through our shared reflections, we discern a call to take some kind of action.

Let us now take time to name within ourselves something we will offer to others this week 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 (Bob Gallagher)**

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.

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 in our world. [Pause.]

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

May we nourish others with your presence.

Amen.

**OUR FATHER (Bob Gallagher)**

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 do not let us fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil

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

**FINAL BLESSING (Bob Gallagher)**

Let us extend our hands over each other and bless each other

Broken, we have gathered. Nourished, we reach out.

Now let us now go forth in peace:

in communion with each other

and offering communion to a hungry world. Amen.

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Now Reggie Ott will lead us in singing our closing hymn.

**CLOSING – We Walk by Faith (Reggie Ott)**

We walk by faith, and not by sight: No gracious words we hear of him who spoke as none e'er spoke, but we believe him near

We may not touch his hands and side, Nor follow where he trod; Yet in his promise we rejoice and cry "My Lord and God"

Help then, O Lord, our unbelief, and may our faith abound; to call on you when you are near and seek where you are found:

That when our life of faith is done in realms of clearer light we may behold you as you are in full and endless sight