**Solidarity with Sisters’ Communal Prayer**

**The 4th Sunday of Easter - April 30, 2023**

**“I am the good shepherd.”**

**HELLOs** and then Betty mutes everyone. **(Betty and Suzie)**

**WELCOME (Suzie)**

Welcome, everyone!

* I am Suzie De Quattro and Betty and I prepared our prayer for today.
* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to each person who will read and lead us in song and in prayer: Kathleen Cross, Linda Donaldson, Bill and Kathy Cavanaugh, Judith Galleazzi, Maria Desjardins, Jim De Quattro, Nancy Sushinsky, Kathy Linabery, Alicia and George Urban, Sister Jacqueline Quinn, and Ann Masters.
* We are grateful for all readers and always looking for new readers. If you are available on May 7 contact Kathy Linabery, for May 14 contact Judy Sholes or Maryann Dolan, and for May 21, Richard McGinnis. You can leave a message in Chat or email the planners, or say something after this morning’s prayer.

**SETTLING IN (Kathleen Cross)**

Let the divine name echo in the sanctuary of your heart, the place where the spark of God dwells within each of us. With each inhale invite this sacred presence to be more fully with you. With each exhale seek guidance from this divine indwelling. Let's take three deep breaths: one to be here, one to be together, and one to be open to the movement and gifts of the Spirit.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, let us enter into our prayer together by singing “Shepherd Me, O God” with Linda Donaldson.

**OPENING SONG** **- Shepherd me, O God** by Marty Haugen **(Linda Donaldson)**

God is my shepherd, so nothing shall I want,
I rest in the meadows of faithfulness and love,
I walk by the quiet waters of peace.

Refrain: Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants,

beyond my fears, from death into life.

Though I should wander the valley of death,
I fear no evil, for you are at my side,
your rod and your staff, my comfort and my hope.

Refrain: Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants,

beyond my fears, from death into life.

You have set me a banquet of love
in the face of hatred,
crowning me with love beyond my power to hold.

Refrain: Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants,

beyond my fears, from death into life.

Surely your kindness and mercy
follow me all the days of my life;
I will dwell in the house of my God forevermore.

**GREETING/CALL TO WORSHIP/GATHERING PRAYER**

**(Kathy & Bill Cavanaugh)**

**Kathy:** Let us rejoice, for Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Kathy and Bill with All**: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Kathy:** We come together today to stand beside the disciples as they – and we – deepen our experience of the Risen One alive with us. It is the light of the Risen One that lets us see our next step. And so we pray.

**Bill:** Holy One, over and over during this season we hear Jesus say, “Peace be with you.”

Teach us how to be a community of contagious peace and hope.

In a world and among loved ones with heart-breaking needs,

show us how to be your heart.

May we inquire, nudge, and challenge each other

to imagine what none us could conceive alone.

Amen.

Betty Thompson will introduce us to today’s theme.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Betty Thompson)**

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gave his own Spirit to his friends. In Acts we will hear that those first Christians lived their lives differently when they received this Spirit.  Now this same Spirit lives with you and me as our dailyshepherd, in and among us.  And the Spirit’s gifts empower us to become shepherds ourselves, calling us to live differently.

Shepherds take special care of weaker sheep, and also make safe structures to protect the whole flock. As shepherds, we have the same responsibilities: caring for individuals, and working for structures that shelter all.

Saint Catherine of Siena, whose feast day was yesterday, got the message. She felt God’s love and grace in her, and let it pour out in the ways of the Good Shepherd. She cared for those at risk, and she pushed the Church structure to focus on good, not on power struggles. Today her life will be a lens for us to look at our own.

*(Slight pause)*

Now Judith Galleazzi will tell us a bit about St. Catherine. Then Maria Desjardins will offer questions that will lead us into silence. Stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1**  **(Judith Galleazzi)**

Catherine was born in Siena in 1347. Even when she was 6 years old, she felt joyfully called to unity with God. As a teen, she went on a hunger strike to resist her family’s insistence on marriage.

At 15, Catherine chose to be part of a group of Dominican laywomen who spent their lives in prayer and in service to people who were hungry, sick, in prison, and dying. Many believe that this group of women taught Catherine to read and write. When she was 21, most people left Siena because of a terrible outbreak of the bubonic plague. Catherine influenced the women to stay in Siena and care for victims, who were often poor. Catherine was determined to defend those on whom the burdens of injustice fall most heavily, most urgently, most unfairly. She wanted to carry on her own shoulders those who were weakest.

Her action expressed her unity with God. She wrote:

I first saw God when I was a child, six years of age.

Divine light entered my heart from God’s love

and that light never fully waned…

for we are with a God that consumes us in grace,

a Beloved of infinite tenderness.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS 1 (Maria Desjardins)**

*[Pause to let everyone take in each question.]*

Consider a time when you felt consumed by grace, or full of God’s light.

When you were in your late teens (like Catherine in this reading), what groups did you choose to join? How have those groups influenced you, or you influenced them?

What or whom are you carrying on your shoulders? At what risk?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE** ***[Betty:*** *Show slide for 2:00.****]***

**Betty**: Now Jim De Quattro will tell us more about Catherine’s life.

**READING 2 (Jim De Quattro)**

Catherine’s reputation for great holiness spread. Some of Europe’s most powerful people sought her spiritual and political advice. This was a time of battling religious factions. For almost 70 years, power struggles had led to a move of the papacy from Rome to Avignon, France. Catherine spent months in Avignon, exhorting the pope to take leadership amid the factions and politics. Ultimately, the pope did as she and others urged, and returned to Rome. Catherine died a few years later at the age of 33.

We often talk about speaking truth to power. Let’s listen to how Catherine did this:

* To the pope, she wrote: “Be a man, not a frightened child! Open your mouth and swallow the bitter decision for the sake of the sweet outcome! May you not hear the voices of incarnate demons nor pay attention to your counselors who are stuck in self-love.”
* To a group of corrupt cardinals, she wrote, "You are flowers that shed no perfume, but a stench that makes the whole world reek."
* To other people of faith, she wrote: “**We’ve had enough of exhortations to be silent. Cry out with a thousand tongues. I see the world is rotten because of silence.”**

Are we like Catherine of Siena? Sister Joan Chittister writes: “It is your voice and mine, alone as well as together, that are meant to raise the alarms. If we don’t point out the breakdowns in human community and make clear the unseen millions in need, they go on being unseen by the many…. It is prophetic to love both church and country enough to want them to be everything they claim to be—just, honest, free, equal—and then to stay with them in their faltering attempts to do so, even if it is you yourself against whom both church and state turn in their attempts to evade the prophetic truth of the time.”

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS 2 (Maria Desjardins)**

*[Pause to let everyone take in each question.]*

Recall your feelings from a time when you stubbornly spoke up for what’s right, with love – or when you did not do this.

Catherine’s clarity came from her joyous unity with God. When have you felt your speech or action was united with God?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  ***[Betty:*** *Show slide for 2:00****.]***

**Betty**: The gifts of the Spirit were vibrant in Catherine of Siena. Let us listen as Nancy Sushinsky reads from the Acts of the Apostles.

**READING 3** Acts 2:14a, 36-42 **(Nancy Sushinsky)**

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and said:
"Women and men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem,

listen to what I have to say:

Let the whole House of Israel know beyond any doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Messiah and Sovereign.”

When they heard this, they were cut to the heart and asked, “What are we to do?”

Peter replied:

“Each of you must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ,

that your sins will be forgiven.

Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
This promise is made to you and to your children
and to all those far off, whomever our God will call."

Those who accepted Peter’s message were baptized,

and devoted themselves to communal life, to the breaking of the bread, and to prayer.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS 3 (Maria Desjardins)**

*[Pause to let everyone take in each question.]*

Who or what helped you to recognize your gifts? Whom have you helped to know their gifts?

In which of your gifts are you most confident?

How would it be for youo to live like the early Christians, in prayerful communal life?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  ***[Betty:*** *Show slide for 2:00****.]***

**Betty**: Kathy Linabery will lead our sharing.

**SHARING (Kathy Linabery)**

We invite you to share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you have reflected upon our reading and music. Each of you holds a spark that brightens what we see together. We welcome **everyone** who wants to speak. 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?

*[People share the essence of their personal reflections.]*

*[If there is extended silence during the sharing:]* Is there anyone else who would like to share?  *[Long pauses are fine, as we continue to reflect.]*

*[Stop by 20 minutes after the hour.]*

Thank you.  Let us pause for a minute of silence to let all these words do God’s work in us. *[Long pause.]* We can continue after the final song, as we often do.

Holding onto what the Holy One is saying, we turn to God in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY (Alicia and George Urban)**

Pay attention to the prayers that arise in you now. *[Pause.]* Our response will be: Divine Light, consume us in grace.

God among us, thank you for Catherine of Siena and all holy people who shine brightly, showing us how to be caring shepherds who build structures for your grace. For this we pray. Divine Light, consume us in grace.

God beside us, thank you for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Let us unite with them in desire to be recreated for your purpose in this place and in this time. For this we pray. Divine Light, consume us in grace.

God within us, help us to see the individuals and the structures that are weak and in need of your grace and our action. Let us know how to stand with bold love against a culture of violence that harms body, mind, heart, and all creation. For this we pray. Divine Light, consume us in grace.

For what else shall we pray?

*[People share prayers.]* Divine Light, consume us in grace.

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. Amen.

**OFFERTORY (Sr. Jacqueline Quinn)**

In this Easter season, we celebrate that we share in Jesus’ resurrection and Jesus’ Spirit. Reflect on the Spirit of Christ in you now. *[Pause.]*

Let’s listen to this musical meditation calling on the Spirit of God to fall upon us. To melt, mold, fill and use us.

*[Betty: Audio only - play from 0:11 to 1:14, then fade; end before 1:42.]* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06h3J5FYn-I>

Let us pray. You who love us more than we can imagine, show us how to commit our time, talent, and treasure in gratitude for your gifts to us. Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Suzie De Quattro)**

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 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 wine,

gifts of Earth and the 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 know God within ourselves so that we become God’s living presence in our world. *[Pause.]*

Holy One, we entrust ourselves to you and to one another.

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

Let even our fragments be plenty to share.

Amen.

To extend our communion to all people and all creation, Linda Donaldson will lead us in the Prayer of Jesus.

**THE PRAYER OF JESUS (Linda Donaldson)**

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

***All (muted):*** Our Father, Our Mother, you are here among us.

Blessed be Your Creation.

May Your reign be a reality here on earth.

May we become more interested in building Your kin-dom here and now

rather than waiting for it to come down from above.

Let us share our bread with those who hunger.

Let us learn to forgive as well as to receive forgiveness.

Help us through the time of temptation, delivering us from all evil.

For ours are the eternal blessings of your love.

Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING (Ann Masters)**

Let us extend our hands to bless each other:

This blessing
will find its form
only as you
give it away

only as you
release it
into the keeping
of another

only as you
let it
leave you

bearing the shape
the imprint
the grace
it will take

only for having
passed through
your two
particular
hands. Blessed be!

(Suzie): Thank you for getting to know Catherine of Siena with Betty and me. Now let us “sing a song of the saints of God.”

**CLOSING – I Sing a Song of the Saints of God (Betty play video)**

United Methodist Hymnal, text by Lesbia Scott, Music by John H. Hopkins

[I Sing a Song of the Saints of God, Hymn 293](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFIy-iUZKhU)

1. I sing a song of the saints of God,
patient and brave and true,
who toiled and fought and lived and died
for the God they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,
and one was a shepherdess on the green;
they were all of them saints of God, and I mean,
God helping, to be one too.

2. They loved their God so dear, so dear,
and God’s love made them strong;
and they followed the right for Jesus' sake
the whole of their good lives long.
And one was a soldier, and one was a priest,
and one was slain by a fierce wild beast;
and there's not any reason, no, not the least,
why I shouldn't be one too.

3. They lived not only in ages past;
there are hundreds of thousands still.
The world is bright with the joyous saints
who love to do Jesus' will.
You can meet them in school, on the street, in the store,
in church, by the sea, in the house next door;
they are saints of God, whether rich or poor,
and I mean to be one too.

**RESOURCES**

Background on the Avignon papacy: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avignon_Papacy>

Readings:

* Sister Joan Chittister, OSB - an excerpt from the May issue of *The Monastic Way* - <https://joanchittister.org/word-from-joan/breaking-silence>
* Fr. James Martin, SJ - Evening meditation: St. Catherine of Siena: Guardian of the Papacy - <https://m.facebook.com/FrJamesMartin/photos/st-catherine-of-siena-the-doctor-of-the-church-whose-feast-we-celebrate-today-wa/10151352623416496/>
* Dominican Sisters of Peace – St. Catherine of Siena - Catherine of Siena - <https://oppeace.org/celebrating-st-catherine-of-siena/>
* Dominican Center – St. Catherine of Siena - <https://www.dominicancenter.org/saint-catherine-of-siena/>

Final Blessing: © Jan L. Richardson at <https://paintedprayerbook.com/2011/11/07/blessing-the-talents/>

Closing song: United Methodist Hymal, text by Lesbia Scott, Music by John H. Hopkins -I Sing a Song of the Saints of God, Hymn 293 - [I Sing a Song of the Saints of God, Hymn 293](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFIy-iUZKhU)