



Association of Contemplative Women

"We, the Association of Contemplative Women, exist to foster and support the contemplative journey of our members. Rooted in the Christian contemplative tradition, we live in a diversity of ways a life of prayer." This newsletter seeks to help carry out that tradition by providing a vehicle for sharing our journeys. The views expressed in this ACW Newsletter are those of the authors, and not necessarily the views of the ACW or the editor.



From the ACW Leadership Team

Today, the day of this writing, is Palm/Passion Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. By time you receive this newsletter, it will probably be the Holy Triduum or perhaps Easter Week.

Palm Sunday: a time of triumph and hope. The crowd is shouting, not "Hallelujah," "Praise God", but instead, "Hosanna," "God please save us."

And it is also **Passion Sunday:** a time of defeat, of loss of hope, of inhumane suffering, of humiliation, of fear, of desertion. In Matthew and Mark's telling, Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" John: "Woman, behold your son!" "Behold your mother." "I thirst." "It is finished." Luke's account of this tragedy, which in some traditions was read today, expresses Jesus' compassion: he forgives his killers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He assures the thief being crucified next to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Before his final breath, he prays, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." This is the Incarnate God about whom Paul wrote to the Philippians, "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:5-8)

During this week we will celebrate the story, day by day: the Last Supper. The prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. The pleas for weapons to turn the tide of the invasion. “I thirst.” The betrayal and arrest. The bombings of hospitals and train stations. The trials. The denials of culpability. The begging for a protective no-fly zone. The torturous journey up to Mount Calvary. The tanks and artillery surrounding the Donbas. The crucifixion. Bucha. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The total destruction of Mariupol. “It is finished.”

What will be the homilies in our churches on Good Friday? What will be the sermons in Uniate and Orthodox Churches throughout Ukraine? The Stations of the Cross? Kyiv. Kharkiv. Kherson. Dnipro. Donetsk, Luhansk. Kramatorsk. Mykolaiv. Zaporizhzhia. Odesa. The Stations of the Cross tragically followed by the Ukrainian people. The Stations of the Cross tragically followed by the Russian soldiers. “Behold your mother.” “Behold your son!” Behold your brother! Behold your sister!

In a few days we will celebrate Easter. The fulfillment of promises. The 1994 documents signed by the US and Russia that they would protect Ukraine if it gave up its nuclear weapons. The time of hope. The warnings that if the defensive weapons do not arrive in the next days, they will arrive too late. The Resurrection. The empty tomb. The mass graves. The banks of flowers and glorious choirs. The thunderous explosions, the charred buildings and bodies. What homilies will we hear in our churches at the glorious Easter vigil and on Easter morning? What sermons will be preached in Kyiv and Mariupol? In Moscow? In Paris, Berlin and London? In Bucha? “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”



Fr. Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam, writes in our ACW online club book, *The God Who Gave You Birth: A Spirituality of Kenosis*, about self-emptying. About both surrendering our will to the will of God while living and acting from the wonderful individuality that God created within us. About not being like the self-righteous Pharisee, but instead like the humble tax collector who confesses his sinfulness. About being merciful as God is merciful. About Lent being a time of back to basics and a stripping away of what is unnecessary to get to what is foundational, to what is the deepest self. Of prayer that is of emptying oneself, “content with the grace of God.” Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.

When we do indeed empty ourselves, to the extent that, with the grace of God, we can—in between news broadcasts, in the flow of our lives and our individual pain and joy--what might we hear? To what might I—or you—or the sister in our prayer circle—be invited in that stillness? To what in the face of the tragic realities thousands of miles away and next door in our own neighborhoods? In the face of the fight for democracy in Eastern Europe and in the United States of America? In the face of culture wars and divisions within families and communities? “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” May we forgive “them” for they—for we—know not what we do.

The theme of the September 2022 ACW General Assembly, at which Fr. Cyprian will be the keynote speaker, is “The Spirituality of Kenosis: The Transformative Power of Contemplative Practice.” Kenosis is undoubtedly our Passover to Easter. But how do we do that, maintaining true kenosis without abandoning the Self God has birthed in each of us? What transformation is God proposing in my contemplative practice—in yours—in that of the sister in our prayer circle?

Please send your thoughts to the next ACW newsletter (deadline July 15, 2022).

Please come to the General Assembly and join this dialogue. Lend your thoughts, your hopes, your fears, your Good Friday suffering, your Easter Resurrection. Your learnings from the Christ’s teachings during the forty days between Easter and Ascension (Acts 1). Your Pentecost transformation.



Hosanna! Hallelujah!

Ana Santorini

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear contemplative women,

Oh, my goodness! It is Saturday morning, April 16 and the articles and documents for the Newsletter were due yesterday! The date creeping up on me so quickly is a perfect example of all that has been a part of my life since I last wrote the President’s

message. This is a very busy time for me with the Triduum and getting ready for the celebration of my Golden Jubilee in a few weeks, my focus may have been myopic. Not just for me, but for all of us, I suspect the war in Ukraine is very present. How our minds and hearts hurt for that situation.

I had a powerful experience of grace yesterday, Good Friday, at our service here. The sister who did the reflection (homily), reminded us over and over that we cannot come to the table to celebrate who we are when we receive the Eucharist, the Body of Christ, unless we go through the cross. In so many ways, she showed us examples of our own crosses, pain, troubles we must endure before coming to the table and this sacred meal. She then very gently invited all of us – the dozen or so with walkers, others with canes and the rest of us, to come to venerate the cross and then to go immediately to receive the Eucharist.

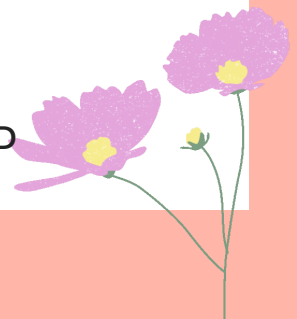
Everyone responded and did it! Everyone. Those with walkers usually have someone come to them with the Eucharist, but they all got up and moved. Our chapel is large, but they chose to participate in a way they haven't for a long time. I hope as you read this, you see that instead of the traditional way of one procession, first to venerate the cross and the second to receive the Eucharist, we had only one procession: through the cross to

the Eucharist. How like our care with Ukraine; through the cross to the sharing of mystery.

Sometimes as a liturgist, I am so involved in the minutia of details that go into a service like this, especially one that is different, that I cannot be present to pray as I would like. Sure, that is how I pray many times, but other times, I am taken somewhere else. This was one of these days. I am grateful for the ways God surprises me with revelations that I cannot doubt. And reminds me that God is faithful. As surprises and invitations go, I hope individuals are noticing stirrings in your heart to consider being a part of the leadership of ACW. It is a wonderful way to get to know others in this organization.

I pray that your life these days has also had moments for graced surprise. May the season of Easter and the season of spring in nature be a time of beauty and ever new awakenings. Blessed days to each of you.

Carol Marie Hemish, SSND





An arts group!

Calling ALL artists, creative women dabbling in paints, painting with thread, threading machines, machining metal adornments, adorning with glassy glazes, glazing pots...and enjoying the process. We want to hear from you!

Would you like to be part of an art group to share your process, see other's creations, become inspired?

Drop me a line at the email below, and let's set up a Zoom meeting to discuss how the group would work and what you'd be interested in sharing and seeing and hearing from others. In your email, please include the times and days of the week that are best to meet.

Looking forward to connecting with you!

--Pat Thurston: pattt1246@gmail.com

Editor's note

Yes indeed, this issue of the ACW newsletter looks very different. Our faithful composer, Nancy Rude, retired, you will remember, with the last issue. This new look is thanks to my very talented friend and neighbor, Allison. We are trying to live up to the new website--lots of flowers!

Remember that the next deadline is July 15th.

--Karen Varanauskas



Cluster news

The virtual Sacramento cluster met on March 19th on Zoom. Nine of us were able to attend. We caught up with one another through our check in. That was followed by a short reading and prayer. We then discussed a short section of one of Richard Rohr's daily meditations on the Divine Feminine, concentrating on Mary, Mother of God, and Sophia. The Hebrew Testament's more feminine characteristics of God were also mentioned. We used the questions posed on Rohr's Saturday reflection: Reflect on your relationship to the Divine Feminine figures; How has the Divine Feminine been ridiculed, shamed, etc. in you? It was a rich discussion. Our virtual cluster continues to meet the third Saturday of the odd months. We will meet next on Saturday, May 21st at 10:30 AM PDT. Please let me know if you are interested in joining us. My contact information is on the last page of this newsletter.

--Melissa Barbour

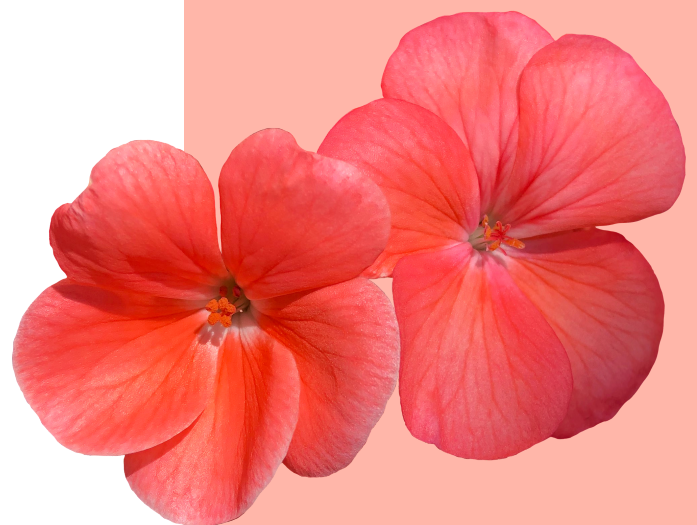
The Minnesota cluster met at the end of January, and welcomed a new member. The group discussed a Richard Rohr meditation after twenty minutes of silent prayer.

--Diane Casper

Obituaries

Deborah Gephardt died March 13, 2022 at the age of 86. A longtime member of the ACW, Deb served as secretary and as president. "She was smart, well-read, well-traveled and had an amazing sense of humor, a little stubbornness, and just enough sass."

The same day, March 13, 2022, we lost long time member Therese Maxwell, also age 86. A quiet but strong and loving woman, Therese served many years as secretary of the ACW.



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