

PAX CHRISTI USA COMMUNITY LENTEN SERVICE – week 5

Fifth week of Lent – [Readings are from Monday, March 18](#)

Welcome

We'll be remembering tonight: John Patrick Downing of Pax Christi Metro DC; Naed Smith of Pax Christi Harrisburg; Sr. Betty Donaghue of the Terre Haute chapter of Pax Christi



Opening song

Opening Prayer: “Bread Not Stones,” by Tom Cordaro, Pax Christi Ambassador of Peace

God of Liberation from all our foreboding;
Our children ask for bread but are fed the poison of fear.
We put guns in their hands and tell them:
this is the way to safety, power, respect, and salvation.

We give lip-service to your call to love without cost
and to show compassion without distinctions;
but we are quick to abandon your teachings when
we are told to fear and despise those who are not like us.

We have abandoned your promise of abundant life in exchange
for the promise of longevity through overwhelming firepower.

Give us the wisdom to embrace the things that make for peace.
Help us to understand that we live in a world of endless wonder
that needs to be cared for and treasured.

Help us to see that we live in a world of bounty that belongs to
the whole human family, without excluding or favoring anyone;
from each, according to their ability;
and to each, according to their needs.

Help us understand that our security lies in the strength of our
solidarity with all – even those who are marked as enemies.

Open our eyes, hearts, and minds to the truth that we are only
safe and secure when everyone is safe and secure;
that we will be at peace only when justice rolls like a river,
protecting the dignity of every person
and embracing every creature.

Show us how to give children the bread they need. Amen.

>> *This prayer is available as a prayer card in the Pax Christi USA Online Store. [Click here to find it.](#)*

First reading: A reading from Psalm 23...

Our response is: Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side.

R. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side.

God is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures God gives me repose;
Beside restful waters God leads me;
God refreshes my soul.

R. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side.

God guides me in right paths
for God's name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
With your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

R. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

R. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of God
for years to come.

R. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side.

Gospel reading: A reading from the gospel of John...

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them.

Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him.

Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

She replied, “No one, sir.”

Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

The gospel of our God. **ALL: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

A reflection from this year’s Lenten reflection booklet, by Frida Berrigan

Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.

Can you imagine being stoned? There are few good ways to die but stoning seems like one of the worst. The first hit might not hurt too badly, but the thousandth and the one after that are unimaginable.

As I imagine this scene and the violence that Jesus subverts here, I meditate on the terrible loneliness of being accused, surrounded and stoned. I imagine looking from face to face and finding not strangers but neighbors amongst the crowd hemming me in.

To participate in a stoning seems pretty awful too, every stone matters equally. It is mob violence democratized somehow. One person might toss a small pebble in the woman’s direction, but they continue to stand there – they do not stop their neighbor who hurls large sharp rocks one after the other. Their violent intent is equal. There are no innocent bystanders in the stoning mob.

In my mind’s eye, I see the circle tightening around the woman. The power of othering and scapegoating is so intoxicating. When we blame others we feel blameless ourselves. It is her fault! It is all her fault!

It isn’t hard to balloon those feelings out to geo-political proportions and see drone targeted assassinations, economic blockades, collective punishment and nuclear saber-rattling as just bigger stoning mobs.

But, Jesus doesn’t just save the woman from being stoned. He saves the people who are ready to become a mob, he liberates them from their capacity for violence. They go away having not committed a gruesome murder and that is its own miracle.

What sins do we commit? Which women do we condemn? What stones do we hurl? What mobs do we join?

Jesus’ message to her – “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore” – is a command to the mob as well, and to us reading, listening and praying all these years later.

Silent reflection

We invite you to quietly reflect on tonight’s readings and reflection, and to consider Frida’s Lenten questions: ***What sins do we commit? Who do we condemn? What stones do we hurl? What mobs do we join?***

After our prayer service is over, we encourage you if you are with others, to share your answer to tonight's question. If you aren't with others but would like to share in a small group after tonight's prayer, we'll send everyone into breakout rooms with a few other people to share. We'll take now just about 3-4 minutes of silence to reflect quietly.

(In preparation for the Prayers of the Faithful, feel free to enter into the chat any prayers you have that you want those of us on this call to lift up over the coming week.)

Prayers of the faithful

(Community members are encouraged to write their prayers of petition in the chat. We will read aloud as many of them as time allows.)

Our response is: God of nonviolence, hear our prayer.

Closing prayer

A prayer from Thomas Merton...

O God, we are one with You. You have made us one with You. You have taught us that if we are open to one another, You dwell in us. Help us to preserve this openness and to fight for it with all our hearts. Help us to realize that there can be no understanding where there is mutual rejection. Oh God, in accepting one another wholeheartedly, fully, completely, we accept You, and we thank You, and we adore You, and we love You with our whole being, because our being is in Your being, our spirit is rooted in Your spirit. Fill us then with love, and let us be bound together with love as we go our diverse ways, united in this one Spirit which makes You present in the world, and which makes You witness to the ultimate reality that is love. Love has overcome. Love is victorious. Amen.

(In 1-2 minutes everyone who wants to stay on the call will be sent to breakout rooms to discuss tonight's reading, reflection and Lenten question. Breakout rooms will automatically close after 15 minutes.)