

E-Portion
March 2009

Of the Empire, by Mary Oliver

We will be known as the culture that feared death and adored power, that tried to vanquish insecurity for the few and cared little for the penury of the many. We will be known as a culture that taught and rewarded the amassing of things, that spoke little if at all about the quality of life for people (other people), for dogs, for rivers. All the world, in our eyes, they will say, was a commodity. And they will say that this structure was held together politically, which it was, and they will say also that our politics was no more than an apparatus to accommodate the feelings of the heart, and that the heart, in those days, was small, and hard, and full of meanness.

Rector's Notes

The poem found on the cover of this issue of *The Little Portion* is a difficult word, but Lent is a time for speaking difficult words. If you don't know Mary Oliver's poetry, it might sound at first as if she is mistrustful of the world itself—and therefore perhaps that she counsels a form of Gnostic escapist theology. But that would be a misreading, I think, of how she sees the world. (See, for example, "The Summer Day," by the same poet; it is one of the most beautiful celebrations of creation and life that I know.)

For Oliver the world is, as God declared at the dawn of creation, "very good." Her problem isn't with the world; but with our culture's mistreatment of the world and our imperialistic tendencies. She doesn't use the word "sin" in this poem but that is what she is talking about. We have distorted the world; we who have been called to be stewards of this good earth have created a culture that "rewards the amassing of things." Fearing death and adoring power, we turn God's good creation into a commodity; leaving us with hearts that are "small, and hard, and full of meanness."

That is the "script" of our dominant culture. But as children of God, following in the Way of Jesus, we know another story. We seek to live, with God's help, into an alternative narrative that insists that we have been created in the image of God, male and female, and that our true calling is to speak and act on behalf of "the quality of life for people (other people), for dogs, for rivers." We know that our hearts can be big, and soft, and full of compassion again if we will allow God to heal them.

We are used to thinking about Lent a time for introspection, and I believe it is that. But the disciplines of Lent also include almsgiving and an outward focus to a world in need. We are used to thinking about Lent as a time for repentance and it is certainly that. But most of us have been taught to focus only on our *personal* sins—which are probably more than enough for us to name and confront and work on for forty days. But that leaves us with very little time or energy or inclination to focus on the *corporate* sin of our dominant imperial culture. We both participate in and are shaped by that culture; it makes us forget who and whose we truly are. It is no wonder we suffer from so much heart dis-ease!

Lent is a season of the heart. As a priest in Christ's holy, catholic Church and as rector of this parish, it is my job to extend an invitation to all "to the observance of a holy Lent." Just as the doctors tell us that we need to do aerobic exercise at least three times a week to get our cardiovascular system working well, so also in our spiritual lives there are intentional cardio-disciplines that lead to "new and contrite hearts," as we prayed on Ash Wednesday. We heard the prophet sounding a trumpet and reminding us to "rend our hearts and not our garments." These sound like strange words—until you recall that the only way muscles develop is to break them down so they can be built up again. A broken heart and a contrite spirit: this is the way we move from small and hard and mean to big and soft and clean.

Lent begins with the reminder that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. If we forget that we are already beloved of God then these words might well instill us with even more fear of death. But they are spoken by and to a people that has already died with Christ and been raised to new life in Christ through the waters of Baptism. Rightly understood, they are simply a reminder that we are creatures and not the Creator. To paraphrase Mary Oliver's last line in "The Summer Day," remembering that we are dust gives us the courage to ask what we will do with these wild and precious lives God has given us.

Lent is a call for the Church to remember its vocation to be salt and light and yeast in the world, transforming the dominant culture around us away from its imperialistic tendencies and calling it back to the One who on the last night of his life washes his disciples' feet and gives us a new mandate: "love one another." From Ash Wednesday until Easter morning, this season insists that we do not need to be defined by the values of imperial power. We belong to Christ: King of kings and Lord of lords. Lent is a chance to get back on the right track and start living again like we truly believe that.

Peace in Christ,
Rich

Annual Meeting

At the Annual Meeting of St. Francis Church on January 24, 2009, reports were received from the rector, wardens, finance committee (budget), Capital Campaign Committee, and the Discerning Our Future Task Force. Ministry reports were received in writing; if you didn't pick up a copy of the booklet please stop by the office to do so. In addition, members of the Executive Committee of the Vestry were all re-elected to one-year terms: Chris Berglund as Senior Warden, Laura Caswell as Junior Warden, Sandy Kimball as Treasurer and Dawn Rooke as Clerk. Julie Mankowsky, John Nowak and Dianne Wilson were elected to serve three-year terms on the vestry and Robin Carlo was elected to serve a three-year term as diocesan convention delegate. Congratulations and thanks to all for their willingness to serve.

Remember That You Are Dust: Confronting Death as Christians **Three Sunday Mornings in Lent at 9 a.m. (March 1, March 8, March 15)**

On Ash Wednesday our Lenten journey begins with a solemn reminder that we are dust and to dust we shall return. This same language is used at most funerals at the graveside: "ashes to ashes, dust to dust..."

But Lent culminates with our songs of alleluia on Easter morning, and the Burial Office insists that "even at the grave we make our song, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!" (BCP 499) As Christians we proclaim that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ and that life is changed, not ended, when we die.

We face our mortality as people of hope. One of the gifts we can give to our loved ones is to make our desires and plans known for the time of death. This Lent we will offer a three-week workshop to reflect on these issues from the perspective of healthcare professionals, legal issues, and pastoral concerns related to Christian burial. We hope you will join us for one or all three of these sessions.

March 1: Christian Burial, Led by the Rector, Rich Simpson.

March 8: Legal issues in last illness and after death. Led by parishioner, Attorney Kathleen O' Connor

March 15: Healthcare Concerns Related to Aging and End of Life. Led by parishioner Marge Tremblay and the Health Ministries Team

Eucharist Instruction Program

Purpose: Recognizing that at Baptism, parents promise to “see that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life,” (BCP p. 302) we want to provide resources and opportunities which support parents as they teach their children about the gift and mystery of Holy Communion and its connections with our daily lives.

✦ This program will begin on March 22nd with an informational meeting for children and parents after the 10:00AM service. Children should bring their Bibles.

✦ The curriculum, “Visible Signs ~ Spiritual Grace” will be used. This is primarily a home program designed for children ages 8-10. The program is appropriate for children who have not yet received communion as well as for those who have received but who are ready for more formal instruction.

✦ Three additional meetings will be held. The purpose and proposed dates of these meetings will be as follows:

- Sunday, April 19th: Children will meet with Susan Bastardo during regularly scheduled Church School time to review lessons on Baptism and begin the lessons on the Eucharist.
- Saturday, April 16th: Parents will meet with Rev. Jill to talk about the Eucharist for children, and children will meet with Susan to review lessons on “The Word of God” and introduce lessons on “The Holy Communion.” (3:00-5:00)
- Saturday May 30th: Children and their parents will meet with Fr. Rich to learn more about receiving Christ in the Eucharist and to bake altar bread. This lesson includes an opportunity to see the altar area up close and learn the name, function and purpose of many sacred items. (10:00-12:00)

✦ The children will be honored during the 10:00 AM service on Sunday, May 31st and will receive Holy Communion with their families.

A sign-up sheet will be available in the Narthex during the month of February.

Mission Matters

One of the tools used in our parish wide discernment process was a recollection of where we've been. Many will recall the several mission trips to the Dominican Republic in the 1980's and 1990's. Karen Kappes has been recalling her own journey there and has reminded the Mission Committee that the St. Francis community can still keep that outreach moving forward. We did that by contributing \$500 toward the medical education of Emily Chalas, a young woman (then a teenager) whom Karen met in La Romana in 1997. Emily is now

enrolled in medical school in San Pedro De Marcouris, and St. Francis is helping to underwrite her tuition, so she can minister to her fellow Dominicans.

The trips were really work camps as people from St. Francis and the Baptist Church here in Holden help to build the Good Samaritan Hospital in La Romana. The work stretched over a ten-year period. In 2001 some of the participants formed the Good Samaritan Mission Council, a 501 c 3 non-profit through which we help with Emily's education. St. Francis parishioners can be proud of the good work they did and continue to do in the Dominican Republic.

You can be proud, too, of your generosity in establishing the Mission Committee budget. Your most recent contribution, in addition to helping Emily is committing \$1,000 to the Episcopal Relief and Development Fund to assist their relief efforts in Gaza. Committee members Tom and Diane Wilson have a friend who serves on the staff of the Episcopal Bishop of Jerusalem, they have testified to the tremendous need there.

When you receive this edition of *The Little Portion* eight St. Francis parishioners will have returned from their trip to El Salvador, our second. Their journey was different from the first because they spent some overnights in the countryside and actually worked on a water project in the area where we are underwriting a program in indigenous agriculture. Seek them out and ask them about their experience. It will help them with their reentry struggle and help you understand more fully what we are doing there.

Prayer Shawl Ministry

Next Prayer Shawl meeting is scheduled for
Monday, March 17th at 10:00 a.m. in Fellowship Hall.

Very exciting that each month shawls are placed at the Altar and are then taken. Always a need. Thank you team ~ you are wonderful.

PS4FS February update. Statistics show that we have completed 4/5ths of the Army current list. There are now fewer names to fulfill than those completed. Good news indeed. I'm sure you agree with me.

Beryl Turner

Lent begins.....

Lenten Soup Suppers ~ Wednesday nights at 6:00 p.m. from March 4th through April 1st. Sign up in the narthex and plan to join us for Eucharist at 7:00 p.m.

Holy Eucharist with Prayers for Healing and Anointing ~ Every Wednesday in Lent at 7:00 p.m.

Thursdays in Lent ~ Three Thursday in Lent – February 26, March 5 & 12 7:30 p.m. at St. Clare House. A Book Study/Discussion on Giving and Forgiving In A Culture Stripped of Grace.

Fridays in Lent ~ 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. *The Way of the Cross (Stations)* The church will be open for personal prayers each Friday in Lent. Stop in and, using a prayer booklet, pray the *Way of the Cross*.

Quiet Day: Saturday March 14: 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (Please note the date change from 3/7/09)

The Book of Common Prayer defines prayer as "responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words." (BCP 856)

This year's Lenten Quiet Day will be an exploration of various ways to pray and include exploration of lectio divina, meditation, and body prayer. It will be team led by Rich Simpson, Jill Williams, and Julie Mankowsky. You can sign up on the sheet in the narthex. The day will begin with Morning Prayer and conclude with a simple soup lunch.

Theology for today's Culture: A Lenten Bible Study for Teens

Every Sunday from 5:30-6:30pm at St. Francis Church

March 1st: Theology in Music: How do today's great love songs hold up to the love in Song of Songs?

March 8th: Theology in Movies: Finding God in stories and characters.

March 15th: Theology in Literature: A chance to discuss the theology of the Twilight series.

March 22nd: Theology on the Internet: Christianity on www.youtube.com

March 29th: Theology in School: A chance for open discussion

April 5th: Theology of Culture: Looking for God in today's world.

Adult Confirmation Class: Orientation Meeting on Sunday March 1 at 1 p.m.

If you are interested in learning more about the Episcopal Church and possibly being confirmed or received when the Bishop visits on Sunday, May 10, please speak with the rector and sign up on the sheet in the narthex.

Thank You!!!

Special thanks to Gloriann Switzer for her hours of work in the office during Karen Heath's recent medical leave. We are truly grateful.