

## **Commentator**

Good morning!

On behalf of the Charis Community, I welcome you to our Sunday prayer. While normally we gather for the Eucharist, today we will spend our entire time in the Liturgy of the Word, inquiring into God's hope for us and sharing whatever is there for us after this challenging week in our nation.

We want you to know that all are truly welcome, and we are excited that you are joining us whether it's your first time praying with us or if you've been with us for a while. The worship aid for our prayer is on our website, and we will put the address in the chat for you should you like to pull it up to support your prayer.

This week we will do a blessing with water, and you are invited to bring a vessel with water to where you are praying.

In recent weeks as we heard the story of the birth of Jesus, we were warned that the birth of the peace and justice is intertwined with the reality of imperial violence. As the beloved community comes into the world, evil kings will lie and murder — do anything — to stop the possibility of God's dream made manifest here and now.

So we are left with the question that has been the question facing Christians throughout the ages: what do we do?

Reexamine ourselves. Who are we? What are our values? How do we love our neighbors as ourselves? How do we follow the Jesus Ethic, for those of us who claim to be American Christians? What would Jesus do today in America?

In the midst of those questions, we gather as one people, as one Body, rooted in Christ, and rooted in God's love, together.

## **Introductory Reading**

A reading from the work of Franciscan priest and spiritual teacher, Richard Rohr.

If you are anything like me, there is some part of you that was relieved to turn the calendar over to 2021. The new year puts at least some symbolic distance between ourselves and 2020, a year that brought so much chaos, heartbreak, and uncertainty to so many people throughout the world. I dare say that no one lived through the past year without experiencing some level of disruption and loss of freedom, of health, of loved ones, and especially our cherished notions of how things “ought” to be.

[My] Daily Meditations theme for 2021 is “A Time of Unveiling.” I’m convinced we are living in such a time—when reality is being revealed as it is. Systems of evil have become both more brazen and banal, our sense of “normal” has been upended, and yet in the midst of it, God continues to invite us to deeper transformation. A few weeks into the pandemic, some people even began to use the word “apocalyptic” to describe what was taking place. Often, this word is used to scare people into some kind of fearful, exclusive, or reactionary behavior, all in expectation of the “end times.” But the word “apocalyptic,” from the Greek *apokálupsis*, really just means “unveiling.”

The beginning of the new year seems like a good time to pause, “pull back the veil,” and ask, “Where is this all going? What is the end goal for all of us, and—for that matter—for the cosmos itself?” Is our “late, great planet Earth” really headed toward Armageddon? In these fractious, unmoored, and disillusioned times, I can hardly think of more relevant concerns.

***Pause. Trish will say something here...***

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, Jacob, and formed you, Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name: you are mine. When you pass through waters, I will be  
with you; through rivers, you shall not be swept away.  
When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, nor will flames consume  
you. For I, the LORD, am your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior.  
I give Egypt as ransom for you, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.  
Because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you,  
I give people in return for you and nations in exchange for your life.  
Fear not, for I am with you; from the east I will bring back your offspring, from the  
west I will gather you.  
I will say to the north: Give them up! and to the south: Do not hold them!  
Bring back my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth:  
All who are called by my name I created for my glory;  
I formed them, made them...

Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not;  
See, I am doing something new!  
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
In the wilderness I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers.

The Word of the Lord.

Psalm 46

For the leader

A song of the Korahites. According to alamothe.

I

God is our refuge and our strength,  
an ever-present help in distress.  
Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken  
and mountains quake to the depths of the sea,  
Though its waters rage and foam  
and mountains totter at its surging.

II

Streams of the river gladden the city of God,  
the holy dwelling of the Most High.  
God is in its midst; it shall not be shaken;  
God will help it at break of day.  
Though nations rage and kingdoms totter,  
he utters his voice and the earth melts.  
The LORD of hosts is with us;  
our stronghold is the God of Jacob.

III

Come and see the works of the LORD,  
who has done fearsome deeds on earth;  
Who stops wars to the ends of the earth,  
breaks the bow, splinters the spear,  
and burns the shields with fire;  
Be still and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,  
exalted on the earth.”

The LORD of hosts is with us;  
our stronghold is the God of Jacob.

The Lord be with you. *And Also with You*  
A reading from the Gospel according to Luke *Glory to you, O Lord*

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, she cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

And Mary said "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.  
For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;  
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

The Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
His mercy is from age to age  
to those who fear him.  
He has shown might with his arm,  
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.  
He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones  
but lifted up the lowly.

The hungry he has filled with good things;  
the rich he has sent away empty  
He has helped Israel his servant,  
remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

The Gospel of the Lord

More from the work of Franciscan priest and spiritual teacher, Richard Rohr.

No matter what is going on around us, it's important to remember that God keeps transforming creation into something both good and new. Instead of hurtling us towards catastrophe, God always wants to bring us somewhere even better. A helpful word here is "evolution." God keeps creating things from the inside out, so they are forever yearning, developing, growing, and changing for the good. That might be hard to see sometimes in the moment, but it's nevertheless true.

While more and more people seem to believe that that the universe has no form, direction, or final purpose, as Christians, we can be confident that the final goal does have shape and meaning. The biblical symbol of the Universal and Eternal Christ (Alpha and Omega) stands at both ends of cosmic time. This assures us that the clear and full trajectory of the world we know is an unfolding of consciousness with "all creation groaning in this one great act of giving birth" (Romans 8:22). Why do I think this is such an important image to remember? Frankly, because without it we become very impatient with ourselves and others, particularly when we encounter setbacks (both personal and communal). Humans and history both grow slowly.

This is the Word of the Church.

Thanks be to God!

**Commentator:**

Loving God, you fill all things with a fullness and hope that we can never comprehend. Thank you for leading us into a time where more of reality is being unveiled for us all to see. We pray that you will take away our natural temptation for cynicism, denial, fear and despair. Help us have the courage to awaken to greater truth, greater humility, and greater care for one another.

Knowing, good God, you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers for all that is in our hearts this day.

We invite you to unmute your mic and share your personal prayers with our community. We would very much like to pray with you. Our response is **Lord, hear our prayer.**

*Commentator after people are no longer offering individual prayers :*

God of all people, God of many holy names: May we place our hope in what matters and what lasts, trusting in your eternal presence and love. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our suffering world, be our strength and our constant source of hope. And let the Church say: **Amen.**

*Prayer adapted from the work of Richard Rohr OFM*