

Yes, where Charity is, God is present.

Many of us gathered to sing these words one year ago in the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Chicago. The energy we experienced together at that time has continued throughout our federation in so many ways throughout the year.

And what a year it has been— a year of turmoil, a year of transformation, a year that has stretched us and re-framed the compelling call of Charity in ways that we never could have imagined.

It is no coincidence that we gather in prayer on this feast of Corpus Christi. We come as charity and love.

We long for the love of God to be shared with our sisters and brothers all over the world. We are Eucharist – Communion with each other when we share our love with others.

We are bread, blessed, broken and shared and as Paul reminds us, “We can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine” when we come together as one bread, one body.

In her address to the leadership of women religious, Pat Farrell, Sister of St. Francis of Dubuque, Iowa, reminded us, “There is so much more going on within and around us than we will ever be able to perceive. The unseen movement of love is creatively holding everything together in ways infinitely beyond what we could ask or imagine.”

We ask the Spirit to “open space in us to flow with what we cannot see, with what is beyond us. Yet the path remains always a walk in the dark. We walk it together, summoning one another to deepening faith in the invisible energy of unstoppable love that surrounds and carries us.”

And so we pray,

O God who creates and who gives breath,
be with us now as we come to you
with the great longings of our world
and of our selves.
We come together
trusting that the Spirit will be at work in us
as breath that gives us life –
as fire that impels us –
as stillness that makes us spacious.
Help us to let go and to let come.
Help us to live the questions
and to move with you, in you, and toward you,
ever open to what is waiting to be born in us.

Elizabeth Ann Seton was a woman **impelled by LOVE**. She was drawn like a magnet to love, and to the God of love. She met her God in people, in relationships with her husband and family, and with the ever-widening circle of her friends.

It was a mystery of relationship, a mystery of **presence**, Christ's real presence in the Eucharist that captured her heart and led her to the Catholic Church.

Louise de Marillac was a woman who **sought and found the light of the Spirit**. Her *lumière* was a light that freed her, that showed her a way out of her pain and confusion. It was a way that only gradually became clear. But it was a way that she could trust, a light - even though dim - that she could follow – because she knew in the depth of her being that it was God who was leading her.

Vincent de Paul was a man who **bridged worlds**. When his eyes were finally opened to see, to really see those living in poverty, everything changed. The encounter with what and who he did not know seared his soul, brought him to his knees, and broke open his heart.

As he met the wounded, broken body of Christ, he met his own poverty as well. And he came to know his union with all humankind.

He stood on the same ground, breathed the same air, as the beggar in rags, as the abandoned child, as the galley slave, as the woman forced into prostitution.

He knew all too well the impact of the social systems, the weight of centuries that oppressed the poor.

But naming those systems, confronting them, overturning them, was not the grace of Vincent's moment. That challenge is for us, in this moment of God's time.

Transition after the voices of Vincent, Louise and Elizabeth

That challenge is for us, in this moment of God's time.

Now, because of a virus, we know as never before just how close, how connected, how one we are as a human family.

And because of tragic and brutal killings, we also see so clearly, perhaps as never before, just how split, how far apart we are, how the social systems and structures that some have knowingly created and others have unquestioningly accepted, keep us apart, segregated, broken. We see how the body of Christ continues to be crushed. And we begin to see and to weep over our part in it all.

Elizabeth, Vincent, and Louise, all you courageous founders of our communities of Charity: we look to you in times of turmoil like now. Be with us in this time and in this place.

We now invite you to listen to Teresa Kotturan, Sister of Charity of Nazareth, our Federation NGO Representative.

LIFE DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN - TOWARDS A NEW NARRATIVE

Teresa Kotturan, SCN

Living in New York during the COVID -19 pandemic is a unique experience - a desert experience in a city that never sleeps. Daily news updates indicated New York had become the epicenter of the crisis, with an ever-growing number of people being infected and an increasing number of people dying daily. Though, physically distanced from people, at the conscious and subconscious level I am impacted by the fears, anxiety, suffering, and angst of people here and all over the world. Living in solidarity with the pain and suffering of the world can be heavy on one's heart. Stress level is heightened when one is privileged to accompany friends who were hospitalized to endure the long-drawn treatment modalities which healed some and lead others to eventual death in isolation - without even a goodbye from loved ones. Losing a friend recently to the pandemic was a very painful experience.

The decision of the United Nations to cancel/postpone all the scheduled meetings in early March, changed the way Non-governmental Organization Representatives carried out their advocacy. While forced to work from home, we had to create new strategies to network and advocate online. As the COVID 19 pandemic crossed borders and devastated lives across the world, we witnessed a tendency among countries to turn inward. The ineptitude with which world leaders responded to the pandemic exposed existing inequalities and injustices. It motivated us to engage UN member states for respond to the un precedented challenges faced by people living in poverty.

COVID 19 was considered the great equalizer, but as it spread, it amplified existing inequalities; the elderly, Blacks, Hispanics, Indigenous people, the homeless, migrants, refugees, slum dwellers and prisoners were impacted disproportionately. Vulnerable people, called to self-isolate in crowded homes and shelters were exposed to the threat of being infected, with no means to seek healthcare. Lack of access to healthcare gave the impression, their lives were expendable. Women, victims of domestic violence, now trapped at home with their abusers had no access to protection. Increase in domestic violence has led to an increase in homelessness. Frontline responders in health and social sector, of whom 70% are women risked their lives to serve the community. They could not afford to miss work, and if they fell ill, could not avail paid sick leave. Millions of children out schools are denied digital tools to learn online. They are also experience hunger and domestic violence.

Navigating my life during the pandemic required discipline, sticking to schedules and structures. It meant living intentionally and mindfully; to be present to the Presence in me and around me in contemplation and trust Christ is accompanying in all our suffering. It is finding joy in simple rituals like lighting a lamp, striking the singing bowl for prayer; delighting in each sun rise, birdsongs and spring colors. It is a time to live in gratitude and solidarity, to lift up the suffering humanity everywhere and who all who are part of my journey. Creating virtual community and cherishing friendships and relationships gave meaning and strength to withstand the ravages of the pandemic. Exercises, music and walking in the apartment sustained mental and physical wellness.

In a short span, our lives have been changed irreversibly. The current crisis has exposed our vulnerabilities; we have been disarmed. Old narratives can no longer meet the current challenges. There is no going back to business as usual. Every crisis demands transformation. At the crossroads, I am called to embark on a new journey; for an ecological conversion, to embrace a spirituality of global solidarity. The new normal invites me to open up the well of compassion and love hidden in the depth of my being for an **'explosion of compassion'**. Globalization of economics need to give way for the globalization of compassion, kindness, understanding and solidarity, for the creation of a COMMUNITY OF CARE.

From a world of inward gazing, the cry of George Floyd "I can't breathe" has catapulted me to a world that is demanding racial justice, to dismantle the structures that perpetuate injustice and inequity. Consciously and unconsciously, I am part of these structures and systems. Remaining silent is not an option. To become part of the reconciling and healing process, I need to live the words of Gandhi: "Be the change that you wish to see in the world."

In the voice of Dawn Turner – Journalist and Author

When I was a columnist for The Chicago Tribune, I often wrote about race and poor African-American communities.

Many times, well-meaning white readers would ask me: What can I do?

I want you to know that this pandemic has afforded you a vantage point like none other. This is your opportunity to know what people who live in poor communities face and feel every day, long before COVID.

I want you to remember what it feels like to stand in long lines to enter stores, because, in poor black communities, some merchants, fearing theft from a few bad apples, have long restricted the number of people they allow in at one time.

And those Plexiglas dividers that protect store workers now? Well, their bulletproof cousins have been mounted in stores in black communities for ages.

I want you to remember the knot of anxiety you feel wondering whether there will be enough eggs or meat or even toilet paper on store shelves. Poor people living in food deserts face scarcity all the time.

I want you to remember the unease of walking past boarded-up businesses and jogging down barren streets, because that's what poor black people who live in blighted communities experience every day. I want you to remember what it feels like to have to hole up in your house because the world beyond your door is dangerous and filled with people who could cost you your life.

I want you to remember what it feels like to lose your job, and not only to be stripped of vital income and all that entails, but of purpose, and those social connections that motivate and inspire us. I want you to remember how it feels to have to stand in line to ask for a handout and how you worry that people will ask you, how did you get yourself in this situation?

If you take away nothing else from this pandemic, I want you to remember how powerless and hopeless and disaffected this moment has rendered you. I want you to realize that, for poor black people, this is not a moment.

If this pandemic offers even a smidgen of empathy, then maybe you understand why people might rise up and rage.

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There is a Time by Linnea Good

There is a time. A time to birth, a time for dying,
a time to plant, a time to pull up what is sown.

There is a time. A time to kill, a time for healing,
A time to build; a time to cut down what has grown

There is a time when each will lose a dream most dear,
When searching through the rubble of a life that seemed so clear,
A time will come for keeping what has surfaced in the sun.
And a time will come for letting go of that whose time is done.

There is a time. A time for tears, a time for laughing.
A time to mourn; a time of dancing for the day.

There is a time. A time to join, a time for breaking.
A time to gather stones, a time to throw those stones away.

There is a time. When each will rend the temple's veil.
And from its shredded pieces sew a new and brilliant sail.
The time for keeping silent will burst seaward as the wind,
And words of truth and comfort shall be spoken from within.

There is a time. A time to birth, a time for dying.
A time to plant, a time to mow the budding ground.

There is a time. A time to love, a time for hating.
A time for war, a time for peace to circle round.

To this is added nothing. From this subtract we none.
What God shapes under heaven is beginning and is done.
What is has been already. What will be is here today.
All things shall find their season;
All creation find its way.
There is a time.

Questions after video

Since we gathered last June, throughout the year, the power, the call, the grace of unstoppable Charity has unfolded, especially in these past few months.

How have you/we claimed that grace?

How have we been fed by it, challenged by it?

Where do we find ourselves today, as the Body of Christ?

How is this Body feeling, here and now? (Take a moment to be in touch with what you are feeling, and what you know/imagine that others are feeling.)

Broken and oppressed?

*Suffocating under the weight of heavy burdens? Powerless to help those in pain?
Sad and grieving? Angry? Disheartened?*

*Held and supported? Connected and united? One in mission? Lifted up by the care
of others? Hopeful? Resolved? Committed? Impelled?*

Pat Kozak will say something to lead into your prayers.

Announce response:

We are the body of Christ, make us whole.

The Body of Christ has different gifts and roles. Be with doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical personnel, the healing parts of our body, who help those affected by this virus. Be with our essential workers who put themselves at risk while working to assure that we get our basic necessities. May they know your protection. We pray.

We are the body of Christ, make us whole.

There are parts of the Body of Christ that are in need of basic necessities at this time. Be with those whose livelihoods or finances are or will be negatively affected by this virus. Give them the wherewithal to find the resources they need to take care of themselves and their families. Bless our elected officials with wisdom to go about safely with reopening the economy, putting the well-being of people first and foremost. We pray.

We are the body of Christ, make us whole.

Let us pray for the more than 123,000 people in the United States, Canada and more worldwide who have died from the virus as well as their grieving families and friends. (silence) We pray.

We are the body of Christ, make us whole.

There are centuries of deep hurt, injustice and pain suffered by a particular part of the Body of Christ. Help us to stand with our Black brothers and sisters in the fight for their lives against racism. Forgive us for our silence, for our complicity in systems of privilege and power, for the times we have failed to take action against racism in ourselves, in our church and in society. May we always remember with humility that when one part of our body is unwell, the whole body is unwell. We pray.

We are the body of Christ, make us whole.

We are the body of Christ, make us whole.

Forgive us for our silence, for our complicity in systems of privilege and power, for the times we have failed to recognize racism in ourselves, in our church and in society and for our failure to take action. May we always remember with humility that when one part of our body is unwell, the whole body is unwell. We pray.

We are the body of Christ, make us whole.

Empower your Church to be your very healing hands, Touching every corner of this world. So we may say to your people, "You are made whole." And grant us humility and wisdom to discern when it is that your Spirit must come to accomplish that which human beings and groups cannot. We pray in the name of Jesus, himself the bread of justice and the cup of solidarity.

Amen.

This Grace That Scorches Us

Jan Richardson

Here's one thing
you must understand
about this blessing:
it is not
for you alone.
It is stubborn
about this;
do not even try
to lay hold of it
if you are by yourself,
thinking you can carry it
on your own.
To bear this blessing,
you must first take yourself
to a place where everyone
does not look like you
or think like you,
a place where they do not
believe precisely as you believe,
where their thoughts
and ideas and gestures
are not exact echoes of
your own.
Bring your sorrow. Bring your grief.
Bring your fear. Bring your weariness,
your pain, your disgust at how broken
the world is, how fractured,
how fragmented
by its fighting, its wars,
its hungers, its penchant for power,
its ceaseless repetition
of the history
it refuses to rise above.
I will not tell you
this blessing will fix all that.
But in the place
where you have gathered,

wait.

Watch.

Listen.

Lay aside your inability
to be surprised,
your resistance to what you
do not understand.

See then whether this blessing
turns to flame on your tongue,
sets you to speaking
what you cannot fathom
or opens your ear
to a language
beyond your imagining
that comes as a knowing
in your bones
a clarity
in your heart
that tells you
this is the reason
we were made,
for this ache
that finally opens us,
for this struggle, this grace
that scorches us
toward one another
and into
the blazing day.

We have been blessed with this opportunity to share unstoppable charity in the midst of turmoil.

As a Federation, we are called to be charity, love, and Eucharist as we are blessed, broken and transformed.

I would like to thank all who planned our prayer, especially our communicator, Susan Oxley and now I invite us to be blessed once more as we see the many faces in our Federation who are with us this evening. Since we are muted, feel free to sing your heart out as we join Sister Brendalee in song.