



St. Mary's By The Sea Note From the Rector, Fall 2020

My Dear Sisters & Brothers in Christ,

What a year 2020 has been, and it's not over yet! The worldwide pandemic caused by COVID-19 has claimed countless lives across our country and around the world. Millions are unemployed as our economy falters, stalls and fails. Children are going hungry. Elders can't afford medicine and healthcare. The ugly reality of systemic racism is being revealed. Other systems of injustice and inequity are being exposed. Violence and discord are tearing our country and our hearts apart. Some of our largest and strongest institutions ... including those of politics, economics, education, healthcare, culture and, yes, even religion ... long thought to be "too big to fail" are doing just that, crumbling and tumbling down around us.

What in the world is going on?!

Well, as always, it depends on who you ask. Some of us, who have the spiritual habit of trying to peek beneath the surface, to see beyond the superficial reality of our lives, believe that what is going on is entirely in keeping with God's sacred pattern for creation, which includes life, death and resurrection. It would certainly seem that we're in the midst of death ... standing on the threshold of resurrection! In our tradition, this has most commonly been thought of as the "dark night of the soul." And sometimes it seems very dark indeed.

But I remain filled with HOPE! Because the light of resurrection is already shining all around us! And that light is shining brightly at St. Mary's By The Sea.

Though we were forced to close our buildings for a time, and are now reopened in a more limited capacity for safety's sake, this current crisis has only served to make us stronger, wiser, and more compassionate. We have grown, in spirit, and wisdom, and compassion. And we look forward to whatever God has in store for us next, as we continue to shine the Light of Christ brightly, for all the world to see.

From the time in early March when our church building was first temporarily closed, we never failed to provide a weekly service of worship and faith formation to all, first on FaceBook Live in our “Scripture & Sermon” series, then on Zoom and FaceBook Live as “Zoom Church” and now in-person at St. Mary’s every Sunday at 9 am AND on FaceBook Live for those who would prefer to continue to worship with us from the safety and convenience of their homes.

Our Outreach Ministries have skyrocketed during this economically-challenging time. St. Gregory’s Pantry was forced to close down early in March due to a lack of volunteerism at the beginning of the pandemic crisis. An amazing team of St. Mary’s volunteers stepped forward to continue St. Gregory’s ministry as the St. Mary’s Emergency Food Project. For more than four months, hundreds of local families were fed, physically and spiritually, by this nurturing ministry of food and love. Mary’s Table has continued and grown it’s weekly feeding ministry. Prior to the current crisis, they were serving approximately 150 people per week. That number is now approximately 225 people per week. St. Mary’s ministry to Interfaith Hospitality Network has continued by serving homeless families in need at their Day Center facility.

We’ve also continued to serve one another pastorally during these deeply challenging times. I have been gratefully amazed to witness your love and care for one another, helping the vestry and I to keep track of each other, reach out when we’re needed, and assist as much and as often as we can. Our sacred ministry of Presence continues unabated ... though sometimes now that Presence is conveyed via phone calls, text messages, face time, emails, and other internet avenues.

All of this has shown us that our capacity for ministry is bigger than we ever dreamed it could be, that our grace-filled Presence is much bigger than we ever thought possible, and that the depths of our patience and compassion are more boundless than we ever could have imagined. We are growing. We are deepening. We are being transformed. And that’s exactly what God’s sacred pattern of life, death and resurrection is all about!

I want to thank every single one of you for your committed faithfulness in continuing to support our beautiful church community, physically, spiritually, emotionally and financially. I also want to invite you to join us by worshipping with us on Sundays, either in-person or on-line, by serving one of our amazing outreach ministries, and by joining me or Andrea in one of our Adult Education and Faith Formation offerings this Fall and Winter. More information will be posted on the parish’s website and FaceBook Page, and will be emailed out to all.

Thank you so much for your ongoing love and support. We will get through this together, with God’s help. And we will continue to grow into the image of God. Together. As One. In Christ. Forever.

With hope, love, and prayers,

Victoria+

The Reverend Victoria Pretti, Rector