



# Body and Blood of Christ

June 23, 2019

## Readings

*This week:*

Genesis 14:18–20

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

Luke 9:11b–17

*Next week:*

1 Kings 19:16b, 19–21

Galatians 5:1, 13–18

Luke 9:51–62

## Psalm

You are a priest forever, in the line of Melchizedek.

## Today

Today's presider is Msgr. John Sandersfeld.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Waverley and Homer Streets, Palo Alto. Members of the Thomas Merton community participate in planning these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to “full, active and conscious participation” in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate, there are return envelopes in the bulletin on the last Sunday of each month for your convenience (donations by check or cash are welcome). The donation basket is in the back of church after Mass or available by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope to mail your donation. **Please do not put your TMC envelope in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).**

## Calendar

### No Scheduled Events this week

From  
Thomas  
Merton

My Lord God,  
I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
nor do I really know myself,  
and the fact that I think I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
does in fact please you.  
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.  
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,  
though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always though  
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,  
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.  
— *Seize the Day: Vocation, Calling, Work*

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy, to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality, and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development.

# COMMUNITY NOTES

*News Announcements Requests*

## ***International Thomas Merton Society 16th General Meeting at Santa Clara University June 27-30***

### **UPDATED**

This biennial meeting carries out the mission of the ITMS to promote an understanding and appreciation of the multifaceted character of Thomas Merton and encourages study and research to make better known the unique contribution he has made to the literature of spirituality and to American literature and religious life.

This year's conference theme is "O Peace, bless this mad place," a line from a poem by Merton. Keynote speakers include Rose Marie Berger, Fr. Cyprian Consiglio, O.S.B. Cam., Robert Ellsberg, Ron Hansen, and Richard Rodriguez, a panel on Dan Berrigan, and many concurrent sessions on topics such as Merton and Racism, Merton and the Ignatian Tradition, Merton and Peace, Merton and Ecology. Sr. Kathleen Deignan, who has led several retreats for TMC in the past, will participate in a workshop, as will Morgan Atkinson, the filmmaker who has shown two of his films on Merton at TMC events.

Registration for the 3-day conference is open now at: **merton.org/2019**. Registration fee is \$350 for ITMS members (TMC is a member) or \$400 for non-members and includes 3 days of meetings and meals. Several members of the TMC Spiritual Education Committee will be attending.

*Full day and half-day registration options are now available.*

*Full day options for Friday \$110; Saturday \$110  
Half day options are available for Thursday afternoon \$60; Friday morning \$60; Friday afternoon \$60; Saturday morning \$60; Saturday afternoon \$60*

*The passes cover parking, lunch, as well as morning and afternoon snacks along with any conferences or talks during the covered period.*

*Here is the link for full and half day registration:  
<http://merton.org/2019/dayregistration.htm>*

*The entire program is at <http://merton.org/2019>*

*In addition, the ITMS has sent out a request for volunteers to work at registration either June 26 or June 27<sup>th</sup> for 2.5 hours. In exchange, there is a full conference tuition reduction to \$235.*

Please join us after Mass in the St. Albert Hospitality Center for coffee and donuts. We especially encourage newcomers or those passing through town to stop by for food and fellowship.

*Also, ITMS has notified us that Fr. Cyprian's concert, 7:30 pm in Mayer Theater on Thursday June 27th will be open to the community without charge*

*Contact Anna Jaklitsch with questions or about how to volunteer: [annajak14@yahoo.com](mailto:annajak14@yahoo.com) or 650-327-0978.*

### ***Memorial for Tom Williams***

There will be a funeral Mass for Tom celebrated Saturday, July 6, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, 751 Waverley Street, Palo Alto, CA.

Fr. Larry Percell will be the presider.

### ***Pictures from the Steps of St. Thomas Aquinas***



**PRAY FOR US:** Please remember in your prayers this week Denise Alongi, Rudy Bahr, Tom Carmody, Kerry Carmody, George Chippendale, Mary Connors, Mike Cummings, Jim Davis, Ken Dias, Pat Dietrich, Dick Freeman, Deonna Gill, Emily Gill, Joanne Hasegawa, Fr. John Hester, Dean Judd, Hunter Kubit, Dick Jackman, Alicia Kot, Fr. Bill Leiningner, Andre and Alyssa Lippard, Deacon Ysidro and Dolores Madrigal, Patricia Markee, Nancy Marty, Maureen Mooney, Hayden Pastorini, Alicia Placone-Combetta, Paul Prochaska, Anne Rush, Priya Smith, Bernice Sullivan, Jean Vistica, Dolores Walsh, Tom Williams and T. J. Wooten. **[Add or subtract names by e-mailing editor Kay Williams,**

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# COMMUNITY FORUM

*Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns*

## ***Let There Be Light***

[By Jenna Barnett, Sojourners (sojo.net) - July 2019]

During Rev. Heidi Hankel's interview for the lead pastor position at Philadelphia's Bethesda Presbyterian Church, she learned that one of the church's deacons was under investigation by law enforcement for allegedly sexually abusing a member of the youth group. Hankel was later offered the job.

No one would blame even the bravest of pastors for turning it down, but fortunately for that small Presbyterian church, Hankel is a reverend who likes to hop down in the trenches to be with her parishioners. She was afraid, she said, but also propelled by her faith to address the violence openly and holistically. She took the job.

"I didn't know if they would fire me," said Hankel. "But I felt at least I could stand before God one day and say I handled this well."

Hankel had a simple answer for why it is so important for church leaders to loudly and actively work to prevent and address abuse: "God isn't silent. And if God isn't silent, we as his body—his hands and feet—should not be silent."

During the past couple of years, silence has given way to a chorus of abuse accusations against Christian leaders across the country: More than 300 priests in Pennsylvania, 100-plus Southern Baptist youth pastors in Texas, a handful of megachurch pastors across the country. While Christians have grieved these revelations of violence, those in leadership have often prioritized the perpetrators over the victims—the reputation of the church over its mission. In summer 2018, reports emerged that the then-president of a prominent Southern Baptist Convention seminary, Paige Patterson, had counseled abuse victims to stay with their violent husbands, once advising a survivor of rape to forgive the assailant instead of reporting the violence. In response, the seminary thanked Patterson for his longstanding commitment to the SBC and appointed him president emeritus—with compensation. (A week later, after an outcry, the seminary board stripped him of that title and of all "benefits, rights, and privileges.")

### **Transparency isn't easy**

Before Hankel was hired, the pastor and appointed lay leaders of Bethesda Presbyterian had already taken a few important steps to support the victim. First, they ensured separation of the perpetrator and the victim, though this was made easy when the perpetrator submitted a formal letter of membership resignation. The church offered to pay for professional counseling for the victim and the

victim's family, which Hankel considers an important form of reparations in sexual abuse situations. And they informed the denominational leadership.

Around the time that Hankel began her position as head pastor, law enforcement's investigation closed, with the abuser accepting a plea deal. Until that point the abuse had been kept confidential within the church's leadership team. But after talking with the victim and the family, Hankel decided that members of the church needed to know what had happened. Without disclosing the victim's identity or gender, Hankel called a congregational meeting to tell them how the church failed and the specific steps they would take to try to ensure no one was ever victimized again.

That was precisely the moment when Bethesda Presbyterian distinguished itself from other churches: Where other churches have tried to cover up this type of violence, relocate the perpetrator, or dismiss a leader without explanation, this small church insisted on pulling back the curtains on the abuse to bring it fully into the light. That kind of light leaves no room for ambiguity about God's preferential favor to the vulnerable and abused. It is an Ephesians 5 kind of light: "for while it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, everything exposed by the light becomes visible, and everything that becomes visible is light."

Such transparency isn't easy. "I will never forget the look on the faces in the congregation, the deep grief," Hankel said, remembering the day she told them about the deacon's actions. "The place that they treasure, that they love, has become a place of trauma for someone so vulnerable."

### **Was David redeemed?**

Not a single person withdrew their membership that day. Nor would anyone leave when Hankel began an eight-week sermon series on abuse, using King David as the entry point. David, she explained to me, is "this guy after God's own heart," but he has committed "an incredible depth of sin." He rapes Bathsheba, then murders her husband after impregnating her. Two chapters later, David's son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar and David, her father, remains silent on the matter.

"God is so vocal about abuse and rape," said Hankel. She cited the prophet Nathan's rebuke of David in 2 Samuel 12 ("Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites"). "I don't think you get it any clearer."

In one of Hankel's sermons from this series, she points out that David, shamed by Nathan's harsh words against him, confessed to sinning against God. But he failed to

acknowledge his sin *against Bathsheba*, the victim and the survivor who would become queen, who Matthew would include in his lineage of Jesus, and who would become the mother of King Solomon.

“Do you think David was ever redeemed?” I asked Hankel. She laughed, “I’m probably not the one you want to ask.”

She was exactly who I wanted to ask. Hankel is a survivor of childhood sexual violence in a church setting, now leading a congregation to face and redeem the abuse that occurred under their own sacred roof.

“Personally, I still struggle with David,” she said. “I have a hard time calling him ‘the great King David,’ ‘the man after God’s own heart.’ I say it very sarcastically, as you can hear in my tone. Even when David hears Nathan’s rebuke, he only half-repents.”

The broader church has received an earful of “half-repentances” from powerful faith leaders over the past year. From the defrocked Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, under investigation for sexual abuse: “While I have absolutely no recollection of this reported abuse, and believe in my innocence, I am sorry for the pain the person who brought the charges has gone through.”

And from Bill Hybels, the former pastor of the prominent evangelical megachurch Willow Creek, accused of several accounts of sexual misconduct: “I realize now that in certain settings and circumstances in the past I communicated things that were perceived in ways I did not intend, at times making people feel uncomfortable.”

These read less like genuine statements of repentance and more like press statements of self-preservation.

## **Jesus is a survivor**

I learned from Hankel that there are no shortcuts in repentance. True repentance, she explained, requires that a person fully acknowledge that what they did hurt someone else and damaged their own relationship with God. And then it requires change. Bethesda Presbyterian installed windows in all their doors except the restrooms. The congregation collectively decided that two adults—rather than just one—would accompany the youth at all times. And they acknowledged they didn’t have to figure this out all on their own.

There are a number of organizations and resources available to equip churches to respond and prepare for these types of situations, including Faith Trust Institute, Northwest Family Life, and the “Healing the Wounds of Trauma” course offered by the American Bible Society. Bethesda Presbyterian called Boz Tchividjian of Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE), a nonprofit organization that empowers and trains Christian communities to recognize, prevent, and respond to abuse.

Tchividjian, a grandson of Billy Graham and a lawyer, started GRACE after prosecuting several hundred sexual abuse and sexual assault cases for the state of Florida. He noticed that churches rarely responded in a way that prioritized the victim, and he wanted to help change that.

“So many people who had been wounded in the church fled from it,” he said. “They didn’t see it as a place of healing and refuge. They saw the church as a place of pain and sorrow and hopelessness and, oftentimes, marginalization. I don’t blame them.”

Tchividjian is unabashed in his insistence that the church has continually failed to prioritize survivors and lead with transparency. “Are we willing to expose our own failures in order to identify those who are hurting people and to demonstrate repentance to those who have been hurt?”

I asked if this work has changed him, and he spoke of a new personal depth for empathy and compassion. He told me that he now has more theological questions and has lost his taste for any answers dressed in absolutes. But still, Tchividjian said, he is hopeful. Mainly because of Jesus, who he considers to be “the most outspoken child advocate of his time.”

Hankel also believes that Jesus is uniquely equipped to minister to survivors. After all, he is one.

“There really isn’t much that [Jesus] doesn’t endure or doesn’t know about our human experience,” she explained, referencing the passion narrative. “He’s stripped naked, he’s beaten, he’s mobbed, he’s publicly tortured, publicly abused. People do not listen to him. They don’t want the rest of the population to hear what he has to say. They’re afraid it’s going to stir up discontent and conflict. We see the same current problem that we’re seeing with sexual abuse happen to our savior.”

But abuse isn’t the end of the story. “Every scar, every moment of that abuse is redeemed in some way in the belief in the resurrection,” Hankel said, before seamlessly beginning to address survivors directly as she spoke with me, a shift I noticed in many of her sermons as well.

“God [through Jesus] experienced what you experienced, and he was not believed. He was chased out. He was pushed away. You are not alone. Your God and your savior has experienced this too and is still with you.”

*To be continued . . .*

Jenna Barnett is an Associate Web Editor for Sojourners.