

Theresa Lungu:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Theresa Lungu:

And welcome to Morning Prayers at the Memorial Church. Today's service will begin with the responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter Book, Psalm Number 111, found on page 56. Please stand as you're able, to read responsibly by whole verse.

Theresa Lungu:

I will praise the Lord with my whole heart in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.

Congregation:

The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all of them that have pleasure therein.

Theresa Lungu:

His work is honorable and glorious and his righteousness endureth forever.

Congregation:

He has made his wonderful works to be remembered. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.

Theresa Lungu:

He has given meat unto them that fear him. He will ever be mindful of his covenant.

Congregation:

He hath shewed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen.

Theresa Lungu:

The works of his hands are verity and judgment. All his commandments are sure.

Congregation:

They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.

Theresa Lungu:

He sent redemption unto his people. He hath commanded his covenant forever. Holy and reverent is his name.

Congregation:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. A good understanding have all they that do his commandments: His praise endureth forever.

Choir:

(Singing).

Gianluca Avanzato:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Gianluca Avanzato:

My name is Gianluca Avanzato, and I'm grateful to be here with you. The inspired text I'm about to read is a Blessing for Absence, by John O'Donohue.

"May you know that absence is alive with hidden presence, that nothing is ever lost or forgotten. May the absences in your life grow full of eternal echo. May you sense around you the secret elsewhere, where the presences that have left you dwell. May you be generous in your embrace of loss. May the sore well of grief turn into a seamless flow of presence. May your compassion reach out to the ones we never hear from. May you have the courage to speak for the excluded ones. May you become the gracious and passionate subject of your own life. May you not disrespect your mystery through brittle words or false belonging. May you be embraced by God in whom dawn and twilight are one. May your longing inhabit its dreams within the great belonging."

A few weeks ago, a package arrived at my door. I opened it while talking on the phone to my partner, [Federica 00:10:11], who, after staying with me for a month over winter break returned to Europe to start a new job in the Netherlands. We are doing, as a friend put it the other day, long, long distance. And we don't know the next time we'll see each other.

"Someone sent me a book" I explained to Federica on the phone, leafing through a hard cover copy of John O'Donohue's, *To Bless the Space Between Us*, "to bless the space between us, from which I read today. This book, I found out, was a Valentine's Day gift from Federica that had arrived earlier than expected.

"When you part from your friend, you grieve not," writes Kahlil Gibran, "for that, which you love most in him may be clearer in his absence as the mountain to the climber is clearer from the plain."

In the past month, I've received two packages from my mother, Rosemary, as she has done wherever I've been living, be it Tucson or Berlin. My mom always sends me tea and chocolate and handwritten notes. In one of these packages, there was another small bag. I opened it to find my Grandma Clara's holy rosary, crafted of wooden beads, and acquired, I've come to discover, during the trip to Italy she took with her children after my grandfather, her husband, Ferdinando, had passed away. I did not know Grandpa Fred, but I wear his watch every day. And I do not remember my Grandma Clara praying, but now I pray with her rosary. Simone Weil reminds us that, "when affliction makes it seem that God is absent, the soul has to go on loving in the emptiness."

Another package arrived unexpectedly, this time for my brother, Masimo. It contained a HEATTECH shirt from Uniqlo, an invaluable winter possession, as Masimo and I are both thin, and always freezing.

In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler writes that, "the soul is precisely what the body lacks. Hence, the body presents itself as a signifying lack. That lack, which is the body, signifies the soul as that which cannot show." Is it just my body, then, that this HEATTECH shirt is to keep warm?

A few weeks ago, another package arrived, the final one, and it was an empty journal full of possibility. This was another thoughtful gift from my beloved Federica, who had listened to my paltry and passing, passing lament that no one buys me books or journals, anymore. "I want you to know," she told me later, "that even from across the Atlantic, I'm here to support you and your writing. Federica especially ordered and personalized this journal. Along the spine is written a verse from one of my favorite passages from the Tao Te Ching, one I have repeated many times in meditation. "We work with being, but non-being is what we use."

I invite you to pause and pray with me as you are comfortable and able.

May we recognize the sacrality and fecundity of divine vacuity. May we honor these presences which are further recognized through absence. May we tend to our abundant emptiness with reverence and gentleness and grace. May we remain grateful for all those people and presences that have continued to show up for us and be blessings. And may we, too, show up and be blessings for each other, and for the world. Amen.

Theresa Lungu:

Please stand as you're able, and let us recite the Lord's prayer, together, saying...

Theresa Lungu:

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us, this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Theresa Lungu:

Now let us sing the hymn, Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace. Number 313, in the Princeton Harvard Hymnal.

Congregation:

(Singing).

Theresa Lungu:

As we go forth into this day, may we lavish Christ's abounding goodness upon our families, friends, and colleagues. Holy Spirit, come and equip us in our workplace, guide us in our school life, and inspire us in our neighborhoods. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.