



## Now is A Very Acceptable Time (2. Cor. 6): A Paschal Journey to Transformation

### Introduction:

- You may be asking: – what is acceptable about this time? And very acceptable – given what we are living through and the massive changes in our religious life?
- It is somewhere we did not intend to go AND it is our life to live.
- This is a challenging time, a time of suffering and it is from this aching truth that the Gospel calls us deeper. In a world armed with fear and suspicion, we are called to break down the walls we too have built – of fear and prejudice and perhaps living without hope or despair.
- We are called to disarm our hearts, open our hands and take courageous steps to bring about a new creation of love and freedom. To embrace the call and opportunity to live fully, freely and lovingly – our first vocation to be human.
- This is a time for transformation – reminding us of **who we are not and who we are not yet!** And this time is holy and acceptable because it opens us to grace and possibility! This call to transformation invites letting go of what we have relied on and left with the feeling that the world we have come to know is coming to an end – because it is!
- So how do you live authentically at this time? And how are you called together for the sake of one another and for the world? I to invite you to these considerations: see your journey/our journey as women religious as a Paschal journey - a journey from Good Friday to Easter and beyond, graced by the Spirit. And, looking at what might get in the way of being your best selves will hopefully send you on your way!

### The importance of AND: Called to Change AND Transformation

- Do you want a better version of your life **and** something new? Or do you see your choice as **either or**?
- **Change** is working to make things better, with the past as the fundamental reference point. When you choose **change**, your future is a reconditioned or improved version of the past. What changes have you been about and want to continue? Is this the life you are called to now – only a **resuscitated life**?
- **Transformation** is naming reality honestly AND acting to create a new reality not ruled by the past, permitting you to envision the future freely. Transformation is a call to live a **resurrected life** - a personal interior journey, and a communal journey together.
- **Remember: a butterfly is a transformation, not a better caterpillar!**

- Are you open to **being a community of transformation?** – women who live into the mystery of grace – ready to see the colors, where **everything** you are living now is precious, important and open to transformation.

**Pause For Reflection: You are invited to see this time as acceptable – very acceptable. Are you ready and open to consider this possibility today and in the days to come as you gather in Circles of Trust? To being a community of Transformation?**

## **Conversation 2:**

### **The Paschal Mystery: A Pathway to Personal & Communal Transformation**

An Invitation: to see the Paschal Mystery as a transformative journey which offers you/us new life, a new spirit and the ability to see colors – to live life with everything being precious and piercingly important – taking nothing for granted and living fully, freely and lovingly **the life we are now living!**

- You have an opportunity to reframe the deeper story of transformation by befriending and understanding the life-death-resurrection-ascension journey of Jesus which can help you find strength and gain perspective as you face the relentlessly difficult realities upon you/us today.
- Understanding the **phases of transformation – ending, in-between and new beginnings** – offers valuable insights into what it was like for Jesus and what it is like for us to live a Paschal journey to a resurrected life, not simply a resuscitated life

### **Endings: Good Friday – the beginning of transformation.**

Transformation begins with the experience of many deaths, lots of letting go and thresholds to cross if we are to **find the new spirit for the new life we are already living.**

- Who among us has not lived through suffering and many deaths: the loss of loved ones, health concerns, identity questions, the loss of reputation, the end of what we thought was normal in our respective countries and world, safety and security concerns, a hunger for peace and hope - maybe even in our own hearts. This time for many women

religious is about **letting go of how we thought our lives would be and surrendering to the life we are living.**

- **Surrender** does not mean giving up or losing hope; it is about trust. Good Friday is about trust. When Jesus prayed “into your hands,” he was not giving up, but letting go of control, allowing him to surrender to the unknown – to allow mystery into his life.
- How are you being called to open your hands? To trust? To not let fear get in the way of surrender, to let go and let come. What if you see losses. a big part of Good Friday, as part of a bigger whole, an element of well-being, part of the ebb and flow of life -not the end of life?

### **An Invitation: To attend together your endings in a new way**

- How **to be with and for** each other as you experience the many dyings and the unraveling that these times bring.
- An invitation to attend together this ending time by taking some time for grief, gratitude and naming what you value and will take with you.

### **Grieving: Naming Your Reality Honestly**

- **Denial:** a constructed view of reality that covers over the facts and reassures and confirms the way we thought and wished the world to be. **Grief**, the counter to denial, helps name the losses, to sit and weep **individually and together**, to let loss flow over you.
- **Nothing can begin unless we acknowledge that something has/is ending** and we are allowed to feel the losses and grieve – to experience sadness and the other feelings associated with grief: anger, fear, frustration, disappointment, loss and even loneliness.
- **Where do feelings go?** If sadness and these edgy feelings are unvoiced, unembraced, unacknowledged, they can appear in indirect ways: anxiety, depression, anger, aggression and even violence toward self or others, as well as leaving you with a lack of energy and imagination, preventing the practice of new possibilities that lie beyond your comfort zone.  
**Remember: “What we do not transform, we will retransmit.”**
- Grief is a communal affair and voiced grief enables connection, a sense that I am not alone and helps in relinquishing and letting go of what is

finished. **Are you willing to let the past rest in the embrace of honest words? And doing this together - grieving your many losses AND not let grief define you?**

- We cannot keep talking about diminishment and grief as we have been doing – as if this is only about me or us? not connecting our loss and grief to the world’s peoples who are dealing with less, loss and grief? How are we called to point a way forward, to help others who grieve?
- **Venting:** letting it all out over and over again – chewing on edgy feelings (fear, disappointment, worry, anger...) not letting go, getting stuck and not making healthy life -giving choices about today leads to feeling worse and amplifies the challenging issues of today.
- **Grieving well is done with others** –We need to surround ourselves with others and **we need to Invite God into our grief and sorrow:** Do we dare to hope in God at this dramatic time of transformational change: lamenting together, talking to God, prayerfully expressing feelings in this intimate way; inviting a way of not being so alone and how you can accompany one another. Lamenting is to choose to TRUST that God is with us as we navigate the brokenness of our lives.
- Being honest truth-tellers about our fears, our struggles and our lack of trust becomes the ground for **real conversation, real connection** and communion and the experience of **grace**. When we trust another, it is the most precious offering we give another. You are invited to grieve and trust your Good Friday is an entry into Holy Saturday.

**Pause for reflection:** Loss is perhaps the most difficult experience for us as human persons; can you name one loss that has been difficult for you – a loved one, a community, a ministry, a place and stay with whatever you are feeling – sadness, disappointment, hopelessness, lost? In the days to come, will you join in a Circle of Trust and share your losses and feelings as you grieve and let go? Grief is a communal affair as well as a personal journey.

**Listening and empathy will help you on this Good Friday Journey.**  
<https://youtu.be/1Ewgu369Jw?si=JERpa30xCgCVeHe7> (Brene Brown)

**Gratitude and praise are also part of endings:** for what has been – for what God has done and continues to do for you.

- Bearing witness and honoring what is falling away or dying is another way to let go and let come – to live in the present.
- You help one another **live this time** if you open yourselves to expressing what you personally are grateful for - to stop and look at what was/is and not focus solely on what is no longer – another way not to be stuck in the past and help you to live in the present.

**Keeping what is of value, wise and beautiful is also part of endings**

- in times of letting go to keep what is of value, the hard-earned wisdom from your life together and what we are learning now is another way of honoring what was and letting go. It is important to make time to share what you are keeping of value, of beauty and what has inspired you.

**Pause for Reflection: What blessings of your past do you lift today so you can let them go into the waiting arms of God and also let them strengthen you here, today as you live fully this time and into your future.**

*Listen to your life.*

*See it for the fathomless mystery that it is.*

*In the boredom and pain no less than in excitement and gladness:  
touch, taste and smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it.*

*Because in the last analysis, all moments are key moments and  
life itself is grace.*

*Bishop Mariann Edgar Budds*

### Conversation 3

#### Holy Saturday: What is it like to live in-between?

Living in-between is often overlooked or avoided because it can feel uncomfortable and scary. Jesus' friends felt disoriented and confused because they were in a place they had not been before; it is living with the void from what has fallen away, from what has ended or is ending.

- This is a time of mixed emotions: feeling restless, rudderless, anxious, confused, disoriented, fearful and impatient. It is important to acknowledge these challenging feelings and have opportunities to share them with one another, so they do not get stuck within us.
- How are you experiencing this in-between time: confusion and disorientation? Is your life not as you thought it would be? Are you in a place you have never been before?
- **And**, how can you see this place as holy ground, a place of ongoing formation, learning and growth? This in-between place is a place of holy ground if we can **be hospitable** to the obscurity and the not-knowing. Holy Saturday invites us to stay in the discomfort, to stay in the tomb and not flee. In-between takes time and cannot be rushed.
- **Questioning is of value** - not in answers found but in the space it creates for reflection, insight and honest sharing and intimacy with one another. Can you stay here in this in-between place, or will you run away from opportunity and new life? Choosing to stay here, speak honestly, and share this slow inner process together is **the only way through** - going around this in-between time does not work!
- **Vigilance** is critical to catch the signs of new life and patience is necessary to wait for new life to take shape. Jesus encouraged his disciples and us to be vigilant – “above all guarding” – be alert and watchful - keeping an open heart.
- Waiting is not passive and is best done with others. Allowing ourselves to be honest with our doubts and lack of trust – even of God - is a place of truth-telling, vulnerability and authenticity. And this place of truth-

telling becomes the **ground for real conversation and communion** with oneself, God and especially with one another.

- In this in between place, we are invited to discover our true humanity – we have a relational identity as well as an individual identity. We need each other! Our true identity is MWE – me and you together. A call to communion – to be one with without losing our individual self!
- While we are unlearning and imagining at the same time, we don't have new routines and muscle memory built in. It is a time of reorientation and self-redefinition as well and a time of trying some things.
- AND, this phase can be a time of openness and creativity, encouraging new ideas and possibilities. It is living on faith and possibility while not seeing direct results - it requires celebrating the small, incremental shifts within and among us.

How are we invited/challenged to live life on life's terms? Here are some hints, invitations about how to be here, in the present – the only time that is real:

- Letting go of how we think should be and accepting how life is – mysterious, unpredictable and insecure
- Letting go of striving to get life right leads to freedom
- Learning to feel powerless and helpless at times
- Letting go of over self-reliance, allowing collaboration and connection and asking for help
- Learning to be okay with not knowing and engaging life with curiosity; letting go of “right” answers
- Learning to regulate your nervous system to be able to respond, not react
- Attend to how much your routine, beliefs and habits (especially of the mind) lead to inflexibility
- Recognize the power of questions as a way of deepening knowing, exposing illusions of certainty
- Offer your gifts with a light heart – they have been given to give

- Understanding Jesus' invitation: be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect is not about perfectionism but about our call to live with and hold opposites – all that is unfolding in our lives
- Choosing to be hopeful

**For Reflection: which of these suggestions has your name on it? What will help you be more fully alive and freely able to share life with one another?**

### **A Call to Hope: An Antidote to Despair**

- **Hope** is a future-oriented divinely inspired dissatisfaction with what is and a desire for more life; those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with the reality as it is
- For human persons to be hopeful requires balance. healthy relating with others and embracing these 4 dynamics:
  1. Make **choices** that fit with who you say you are; do not be passive
  2. Cultivate caring, and intimate **relationships**; isolation is deadly
  3. Know **how to cope** with stress, uncertainty and anxiety in healthy ways – be about well-being
  4. Rely on, **trusting in a faithful and loving God**; it is not just up to you/us.

***For I know very well the plans I have for you, says the Lord,  
plans of well-being and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future. Jer. 29:1***

We are called to hold the space and bless it, inviting God to look favorably on us – helping us to be hospitable to what is and for new life to emerge, even when we see no indication that it will. Our job is to recognize the seeds of new life, to share what we see with others, and **to nurture any growth we see**. This can be contagious and is a way to preach Good News **in the life we are living**.

When we listen with compassion, empathy and leave judgment and cynicism aside, grace becomes a help to the next step – new beginning. If we suspend judgment, we see we have new work to do - our charisms are needed in a new way. It may not be what you would have chosen, but it is yours to do. **How are you called to live your foundational grace in a new way?**

**How are you personally being invited to surrender? As a Community to surrender? What might get in the way of staying in the in-between? How are you called to surrender by participating in the Circles of Trust?**

When we surrender to Good Friday and Holy Saturday, **rest emerges out of trusting** that life is no longer solely in our hands, as we let go of outcomes accomplishing and acquiring. Relying on **union with God and one another**, brings us home to the true essence of what it means to be human – we have both an individual identity and a relational identity, we are called to remember our Source and that **our true self rests in love, of self, one another and God.**

#### **Conversation 4**

**Video: We Are Going:** <https://youtu.be/BwckMpR9V-Q?si=UGpb2zRBGzS9x-m1>

#### **Easter: A new beginning – a resurrected life**

Easter and new life come as a surprise. If we yield to the unknown, we do not know how or when an Easter moment will come. Nature teaches us that our very surrender leads to new life, new life springing from a yielded form.

- The wonder of new life is not something we can manage, control or acquire. It is a grace – a mystery that we receive as a gift.
- Easter challenges us to see colors –not the darkness of despair - to see what is in front of us – to see that everything is precious and is piercingly important - the very act of living, walking, breathing, eating, having friends and meaningful conversations are cherished. Everything seems to look more beautiful
- It becomes a matter of seeing – Transformation is about seeing colors.
- When Jesus said stay awake and be vigilant (Mt. 24:42-47), he was not just talking about preparation for death, he is also talking about seeing color while we live. Will we let things become precious and important when we are still here. Let's not be asleep while we are awake! Let us not be blind to miracle – the miracle of your own life by being aware of your journey, living a faithful life and seeing what God is doing within and among you (Adapted from Ron Rolheiser).
- Transformation is discerning new life, new energy, a hopeful beginning that is taking shape in the place of loss. We are each called to recognize

the seeds of new life seeking to spring forth, to share what we are seeing with others and to nurture that growth. Jesus told Mary Magdalen “do not cling to me, Mary, not as I was, not as you knew me. I have so much joy and life to share with you now, a new and deeper relationship, this gift of my own spirit living within you as my home. Let go and trust the grace of this moment.”

- The excitement of something new can be contagious. If we let it and do not spoil it by cynicism and judgment.

Easter challenges us to see colors – to live in the present – to be hopeful - to see what is in front of us – to see that everything is precious and important. Transformation is discerning new life, new energy, a hopeful beginning taking shape in the place of loss and letting go.

- For some, **service** to new life today is trying to articulate a vision that is taking place within them and inspiring others with its potential.
- For others, **service** is to respond to what is being shared/offered by others with an open mind (letting go of judgment), open heart (being empathic and compassionate with one another) and open mind (letting go of old identities). This is a time of coming to **know who we are not, who we are no longer, to let come who we are called to be now.**

The challenge of this time is the challenge of the Gospel, to be about seeing colors – to let everything be precious and important in our daily living.

Jesus’ invitation “Be awake! Stay vigilant!” (Mt. 24:42-47) is inviting us to see colors in the life we are living, and to see what God is doing and how we are called to be about God’s purpose.

**For reflection: How are you called to be of service? In what ways are you called to accompany one another with empathy, compassion and forgiveness; to be a community of Resurrection – of hope and joy, not fear? What seeds of new life will you see today and in the days to come? How are you preaching the good news by supporting and inspiring each other to see colors that others are seeing and inviting you and the community to share?**

## **End of Morning: (Lean into the light Video – Carrie Newcomer)**

<https://youtu.be/fxAUmNjWaIs>

**(video to begin afternoon - Together:** <https://youtu.be/WbCxRMBFRFA>

## **Conversation 5**

### **What Might Get in the Way of Your Personal & Communal Transformation**

There are many **possible blocks** to engaging the Paschal Mystery journey of transformation as you live the life you are living: past hurts, legacy burdens from family and community, learned trauma responses to stress and anxiety (fight, flee freeze or fray), speeding up when slowing down is more helpful, living in the past ( if only...) or future (what if...), living in horizontal time and not vertical time – the present.

### **Responding, Not Reacting**

I would like to focus on what I hope will be some help to you to be present and be your best self today and as you join the Circles of Trust.

- When someone says or does something that upsets us, our impulse may be to react right away, letting them know how we feel. When emotions are running high, these reactions may not be helpful or kind.
- While reacting may feel good in the moment, taking time to let emotions settle and respond from a more grounded place will lead to better outcomes in all of our relationships.
- A reaction is typically quick and emotional, driven by our feelings and less by thoughtful consideration. It's often automatic, immediate, and emotional, and often influenced by our past experiences and is unconscious. Reactions can also lead to unintended consequences, making things worse.
- a response is more thoughtful, deliberate, and rooted in higher levels of emotional awareness. It involves slowing down, analyzing the situation and then considering what we are feeling and why. Responding involves

considering the possible outcomes and choosing a course of action that's aligned with who you want to be.

## **The neuroscience of reacting versus responding**

Different parts of our brain are active during reaction and response processes.

- When we **react**, the more primitive part of our brain, **our downstairs brain** which processes emotions, takes charge quickly. This part of the brain doesn't consider long-term effects or rational thinking. Instead, it focuses on immediate **survival** and quick responses to threats.
- When we **respond**, the prefrontal cortex, **our upstairs brain**, the area of the brain associated with decision-making and social behavior, takes the lead. This part allows us to weigh options, think about consequences, and make choices based on reasoning rather than pure emotion.
- Experiences of trauma (any time you feel overwhelmed) have impacted how you learned to meet these human needs (love, safety, belonging), resulting in maladaptive stress responses: **fight, flight, freeze or fray**

*The walls of childhood create prisoners as adults. We have the capacity to heal mentally, physically and emotionally – a future free from learned constraints. Author Unknown*

## **5 tips for learning how to respond instead of reacting**

You can significantly improve your interactions with others and your personal wellbeing if you learn to respond thoughtfully rather than react incorporating these practices that improve connection with others as you journey together.

### **1. Pause and breathe**

This can help slow the physical sensations of stress and give your mind a moment to catch up before you speak or act.

### **2. Reflect before you speak**

Before you respond, take a moment to consider what you want to accomplish.

### **3. Practice active listening**

Listen actively, giving your full attention to the speaker, can help you respond more thoughtfully, and also makes the other person feel heard and respected.

### **4. Identify your triggers – know yourself**

Everyone has specific triggers - situations, words, or behaviors that provoke an intense emotional reaction or physiological reaction because it reminds us of a past traumatic event.

- Being aware of your triggers can help you prepare to handle them more calmly and help you choose a better response.
- When you encounter a trigger, a strong emotional and behavioral reaction occurs automatically. When you encounter a trigger, you unconsciously move to protect yourself, (fight, flee, freeze or fray/make nice), you do what it takes to feel safe.
- After encountering a trigger, your nervous system is activated and needs time/help to return to a calmer state. Individuals can learn how to help themselves in a given situation (***If you see it, you do not have to be it***) and we can help another by connecting and relating as a first step to understanding and regulation.

**For Reflection: Know Yourself - What are your triggers?** We have **mental triggers** (achieving, perfectionism – getting things right, control), **emotional triggers** (intense feelings and emotional states may trigger a trauma response, such as anger, fear, or sadness) or **environments** may trigger the memory related to a traumatic situation (e.g., feeling trapped) or **interpersonal triggers** (certain people with whom you have a past, are highly critical or how another speaks/participates).

## **5. Create a Safe Environment for Everyone**

In order for all to **feel safe**, each sister needs to embrace these **commitments**:

- ✓ **Inclusion** –helping one another to be oneself and be accepted for who you are
- ✓ **Learning** – feeling safe to ask questions, give and receive feedback, experiment and make mistakes
- ✓ **Contribute** – inviting each other to make a difference and make a contribution
- ✓ **Challenge** – encouraging one another to speak up and challenge what is when you think there is an opportunity to change or improve what is.

## **6. Use 'I' statements**

When it's time to respond, express your thoughts and feelings by starting sentences with "I" instead of "you." For example, say, "I feel upset when" instead of "You make me upset." This approach focuses on your personal experience rather than accusing or blaming the other person.

### **Slow Down and ask yourself these questions before responding:**

By asking these questions you take a step back, evaluate the situation, and choose a response, which can reduce misunderstandings and support stronger relationships with one another.

#### **1. What am I feeling right now?**

Acknowledge your current emotional state. Identify your feelings as yours .

#### **2. Who do I want to be and what outcome do I hope to achieve?**

Consider what you ultimately want from the interaction: to resolve a conflict, communicate a point, or offer support, express caring.

#### **3. How can I express my feelings constructively?**

Think about how you can communicate your feelings in a way that is honest yet respectful.

#### **4. Ask: what might the other person be feeling or needing?**

Shift some of your focus to the other person. Ask: what might it be like for her (empathy)? Be more sensitive and effective in addressing both your needs and the others' needs or wants.

#### **5. Ask: Is there more information I need before responding?**

Ask: do I have all the necessary information to respond? Be curious and ask!

#### **Some additional reminders:**

- See one another as you are today – let go of the past and forgive one another and past hurts
- Slow down and breathe
- Instead of creating barriers, choose to have:
  - **an open mind by suspending judgment;** judgments take up time and energy, interfering with your ability to be creative and think differently about the familiar; Can you live with less than perfect?
  - **An open heart by letting go of cynicism;** redirect your attention to what you want to be about together, be empathic, kind, compassionate and forgiving,

- **An open mind by letting go -to let come into being;** do not let fear rule; go together to new places where there is potential so that you live more fully, freely and lovingly today and in the days to come

**As you are being invited to enter into small Circles of Trust to discern and deepen your Paschal Journey of Transformation, I offer this reflection/prayer from Margaret Wheatley.**

**From Turning Toward One Another**

There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.

Ask: "What's possible?" not "What's wrong?" Keep asking.

Notice what you care about.

Assume that many others share your dreams.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.

Talk to people you know.

Talk to people you don't know.

Talk to people you never talk to.

Be intrigued by the differences you hear. expect to be surprised.

Treasure curiosity more than certainty.

Invite in everybody who cares to work on what's possible.

Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.

Know that creative solutions come from new connections.

Remember, you don't fear people whose story you know.

Real listening always brings people closer together.

Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.

Rely on human goodness.

Stay together.

Amen and Alleluia!