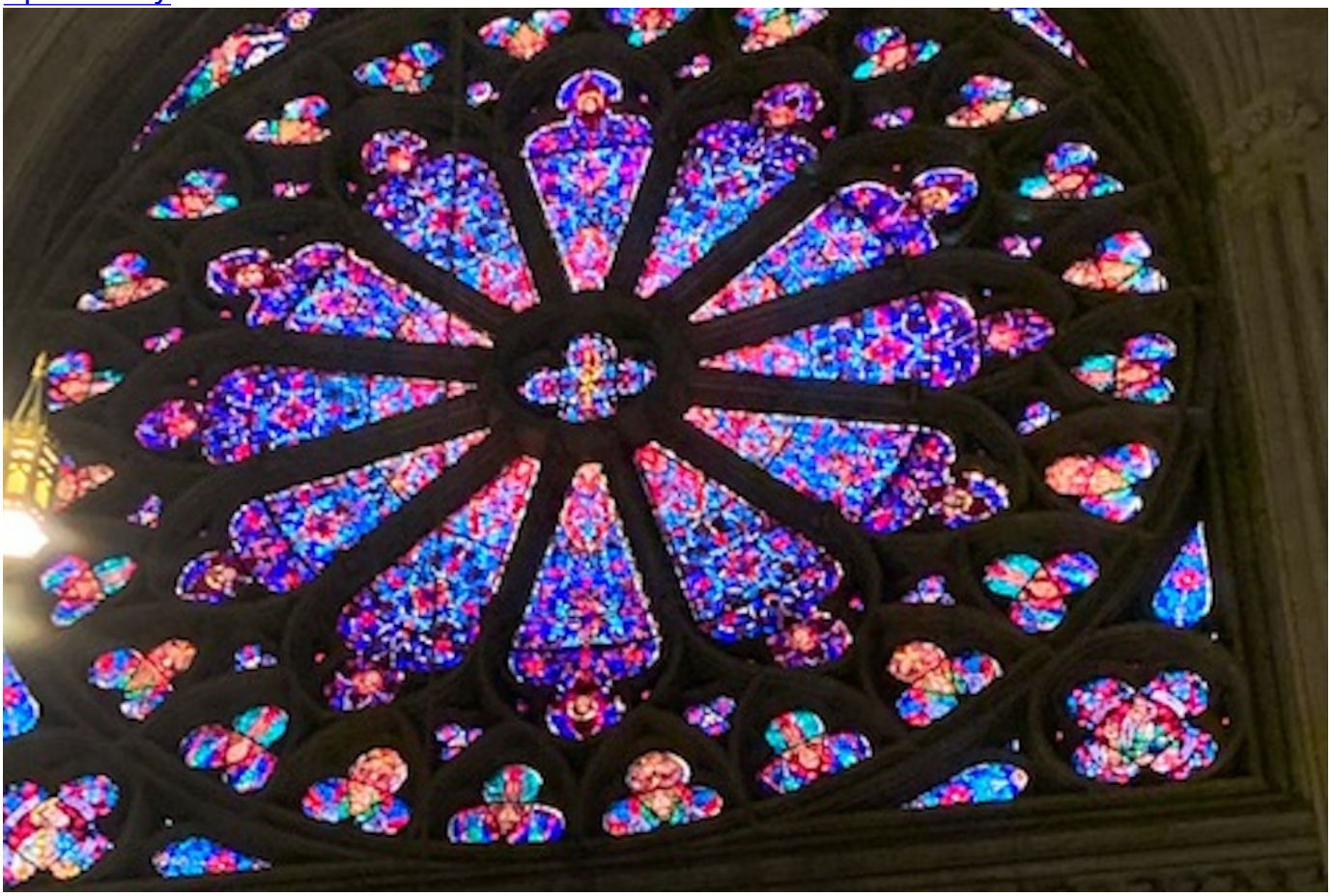
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Stained glass rose window at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark, New Jersey (Donna L. Ciangio)



by Donna L. Ciangio

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Each of us experienced Holy Week and Easter in very different ways this year. No one could have told us in early March that we would be celebrating Palm Sunday and the Triduum through livestream. We probably would have said it could never happen. Yet, it did!

Watching the pandemic sweep across the world was astounding. Seeing caskets lined up in a church in Bergamo, Italy, was heartbreaking. Feeling the pain of loved ones in New York and New Jersey grieving for and worrying about their family members is terrifying. Watching exhausted healthcare workers begging for supplies is beyond comprehension. Praying for friends, co-workers, and others who contracted the virus is constant supplication.



Stained glass Stations of the Cross in the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Dominic of Caldwell, New Jersey, created by Dominican Sr. Gerardine Mueller (Donna L. Ciangio)

My religious community asked me to write a Stations of the Cross, focused on the pandemic, for Good Friday — to be posted on our website. The experience of writing them was very prayerful but also sorrowful and hopeful at the same time. I kept seeing friends who are nurses, first responders, and essential workers who were doing their best to fight the pandemic. I saw the faces of those who died shown on TV: beloved teachers, principals, mothers and fathers, transit workers, sports photographers, and so many more. Heartbreaking. At the same time, we saw so many people generously giving to help others and trying to ease the pain by providing food, sewing masks, 3D-printing face shields and so much more. I share

two examples from the fourth and fifth stations:

Jesus Meets His Mother

We adore you O Christ and we bless you. You will raise us up!

The care and comfort of a mother is essential for healing and hope. Jesus, we pray to your Mother for all the mothers who give their all to care for the sick and vulnerable as nurses, doctors, EMTs, orderlies and all first responders. Give them strength and protect them.

Jesus, our trust is in you.

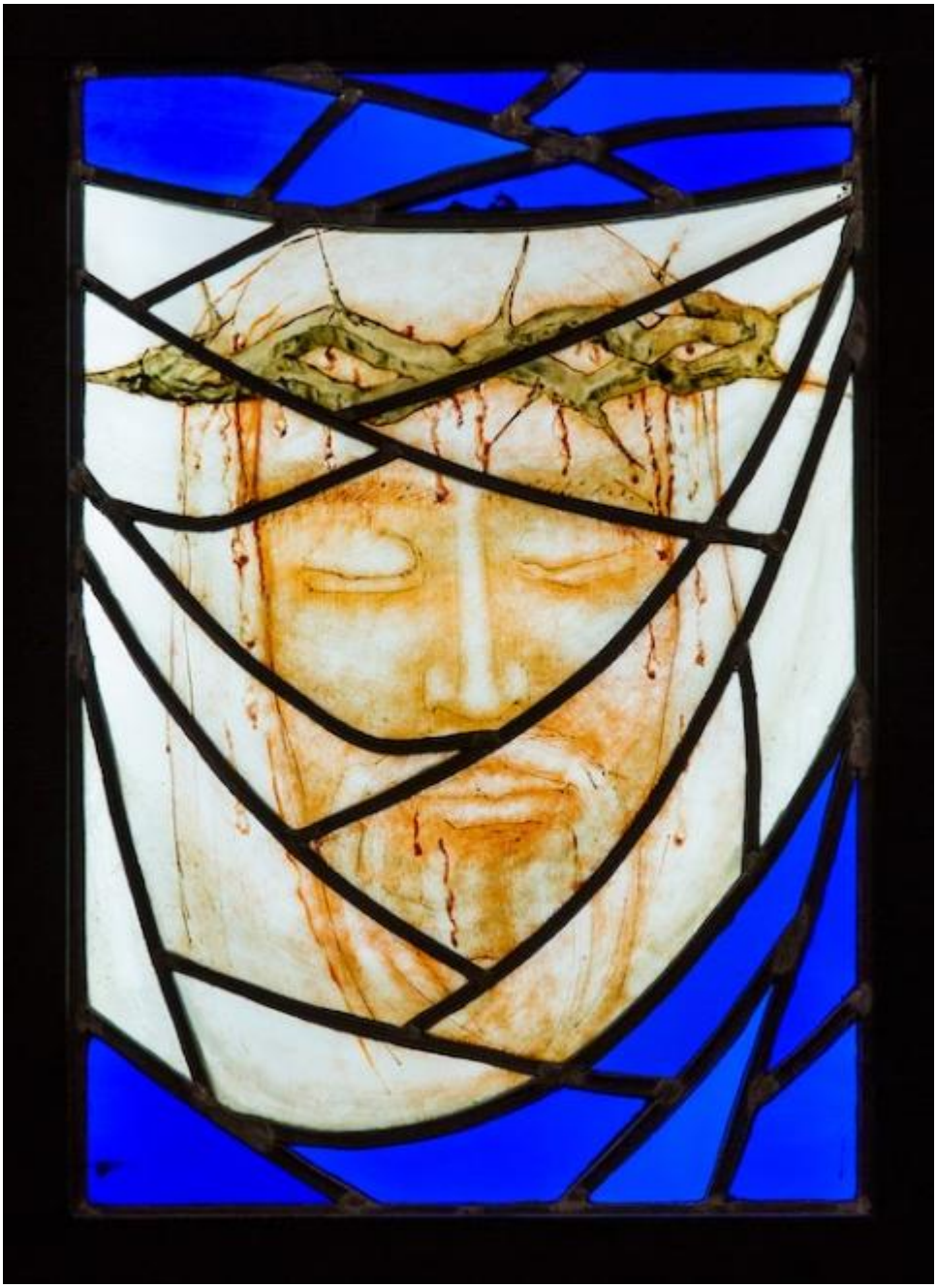
Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

We adore you O Christ and we bless you. You will raise us up!

Healthcare workers, first responders, wives, husbands, children, friends, like Veronica, care for the needs of their patients and families on a daily basis. The tender compassion of a cold compress and faithful presence bring relief. We pray for the continued strength of those who bring relief by a tender touch.

Jesus, our trust is in you.

On the spiritual and community side, parishes began scrambling to livestream Sunday Masses, devotions for parishioners, along with prayer times and hopeful messages. Our cathedral music director put together a Zoom Mass with the priest celebrant in a small chapel and liturgical ministers and parishioners all praying from their homes. It was a remarkable experience that was prayerful and communal and we are planning for the next one.



Stained-glass picture of Veronica's veil by Dominican Sr. Gerardine Mueller (Donna L. Ciangio)

In the middle of the pandemic came Holy Week. In my lifetime, I would never have imagined streaming Palm Sunday and the Triduum and yet it happened. In our Archdiocese of Newark, Cardinal Joseph Tobin celebrated each service at our stunning Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart with a few priests, ministers and the archdiocesan communications team participating.

In this vast space, normally filled with thousands, it seemed a very lonely place. Yet we knew that we had an audience of thousands participating at home. My part was as reader for each service. As I walked up the steps to the ambo, I realized the emptiness of the cathedral. As I began to read, the building echoed with the words of Scripture. It was a very unsettling experience not to have any sound absorbed by worshippers. Yet, we knew they were out there, celebrating with us virtually.

Reading to an empty cathedral was, hopefully, a once in a lifetime experience. I was honored to be asked and to minister with the remarkable team of cardinal, bishop, priests, deacon, musicians and communications team, and to pray with folks from our diocese and those who tuned in from across the country and as far away as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

We are so thankful for all who are rising to the occasion to reach out with love and hope to parishioners, neighbors, strangers and friends. We are thankful to those who are feeding the hungry and caring for the sick and elderly, and we pray that a cure will be found for this virus and we will soon return physically to our families, friends, workplaces and parish communities.



Three views of the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark, New Jersey: amid blossoming cherry trees, at night, and inside, empty (Donna L. Ciangio)

[Sr. Donna L. Ciangio is a Dominican Sister of Caldwell, New Jersey. She serves as the chancellor of the Archdiocese of Newark.]

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