Campus Ministry has specifically designed this retreat for you to do at your own pace, in the vein of Ignatian spirituality, and with the opportunity to grow in community.
WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

“He who goes about to reform the world must begin with himself, or he loses his labor.” – St. Ignatius of Loyola

GOAL: We will rise together from the ashes and from who we are now to:

- become who we are called to be
- deepen our relationship with God
- better understand God & each other

As a special way of honoring the Sisters of Saint Anne during our college’s 75th Anniversary, we chose to follow the Ignatian prayer tradition for this retreat as a way of infusing our community with the style of spirituality & prayer that led brave women to step out in faith to found and run Anna Maria College.

You are invited to use this retreat in whichever way is most beneficial for you. We suggest that each week you pray with the two designated Stations of the Cross, read the reflections provided by Fr. David Cotter, explore the resources, participate in the call to action, and join us for weekly community reflection on Fridays at 12 PM via Zoom.

All are welcome!
Ignatian prayer is imaginative, reflective, & personal. St. Ignatius encouraged people to develop an intimate relationship with a God who loves them and desires the best for them.

We are using this tradition to help us focus on Pope Saint John Paul II's Scriptural Stations of the Cross- an alternative to the traditional stations as a way of reflecting more deeply on the Scriptural accounts of Christ's passion.

**PRAYER SPACE:**

Below are some suggested items that we think might help make your retreat time most rewarding. You might consider finding a space in your dorm room or home that you can designate as a prayer corner or quiet space and set it up with items such as this to help set the space for reflection:

1. Chair or pillows or small table
2. Cloth
3. Candle
4. Sacred Object: cross, rosary, prayer cards, image/icon, statue, or another item that has special meaning for you
5. Bible or holy book
6. Journal and pen
LEN T  R E T R E A T:  W E  W I L L  R I S E  T O G E T H E R

Join our community faith sharing **ZOOM call** at 12:00pm EST every Friday
**Meeting ID:** 940 3647 7332
**Passcode:** LENT2021

**SCHEDULE:**

**Week 1:**
Friday, February 19th
Focus: Stations 1 & 2

**Week 2:**
Friday, February 26th
Focus: Stations 3 & 4

**Week 3:**
Friday, March 5th
Focus: Stations 5 & 6

**Week 4:**
Friday, March 12th
Focus: Stations 7 & 8

**Week 5:**
Friday, March 19th
Focus: Stations 9 & 10

**Week 6:**
Friday, March 26th
Focus: Stations 11 & 12

**Week 7:**
Friday, April 2nd (Good Friday)
Focus: Stations 13 & 14
IGNATIAN MEDITATION:

Here are some guidelines to follow when praying in the Ignatian tradition:

1. Take a few deep breaths and ask God to help you quiet your head and open your heart. Often, we only try to focus on getting rid of all the mental chatter inside of us, but it’s also important to place our attention on the waves of emotions and feelings inside us.

2. Ask the Holy Spirit to rise up inside you and give you the wisdom to acknowledge God in your life. Ask the Spirit to help you meditate on the scene you’ll be reading.

3. Slowly read the passage. Imagine the setting as vividly as you can. What do you hear? What do you see? Are there people? What are they doing?

4. Read it again. Is there something in particular that is touching your heart – either enlivening or frightening you?

5. Insert yourself into the scene. What are you wearing? What do you see/smell/hear? What are you doing there? What are your feelings? Sometimes in your prayer the story can change and take unexpected twists. Allow this to happen. Often something very significant is revealed to us in the changes.

6. Talk to the characters in the story. Is Jesus there? Talk to him about what he is doing. Is there anything you want to ask him? Does he ask you anything?

7. Listen to what Jesus says to you. What are you feeling?

8. Do not try to control the prayer. Surrender! Let the Holy Spirit guide you.

9. When you are ready, give thanks and close with a prayer in which you offer yourself to God.

10. Say the Lord’s Prayer.
WEEK ONE:

STATION 1: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."  
-Matthew 26:36-41

STATION 2: Jesus, Betrayed by Judas, is Arrested

Then, while [Jesus] was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, "the man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely." He came and immediately went over to him and said, "Rabbi." And he kissed him. At this they laid hands on him and arrested him.  
-Mark 14: 43-46
It's easy enough for us to understand why Jesus was, as Scripture says, “grieved,” “agitated,” and “grieved unto death.” After all, he knew what awaited him in the coming days. He’d spent his whole life in the cruel world of the Roman occupation under which his people suffered. He’d have seen, or at least heard about, the cruelly arbitrary nature of Roman punishments. Punishments so cruel we hesitate even to name, much less describe, them here. The possibility of falling into the hands of Roman executioners would make anyone quail.

What’s harder to understand is how the disciples could have fallen asleep. As their friend, their long-time companion, their teacher, the one they believed to be their king and Savior, was praying in anguish just a few yards away. “If we’d been there,” we think to ourselves in a frankly self-congratulatory fashion, “we’d have done better. We’d have stayed awake and continued to accompany Jesus to the end.” And perhaps we would have. Or maybe not. After all, don’t we pretty blithely drive by Jesus suffering in the downtrodden every day? It’s winter and cold and they stand by the car with their sign, seeking a bit of help and we stare straight ahead, not looking, so that we can pretend the Child of God right at our elbow isn’t even there. And don’t we flick the channel, exasperated that we’re being shown Jesus starving and in despair in some forgotten corner of the world when what we want to know is the score or the next day’s weather?

Ancient authors very rarely tell us about the interior lives of the characters in their stories. Rather, they simply show us what they say and do, and we are to draw our conclusions about what kind of person they were from that evidence. So on the rare occasions, such as this one, where we are told explicitly about a character’s inner life, that Jesus was in anguish, we should ponder it very carefully and think what it could possibly mean for us. When we are told he walked over to his friends, looking for the support and comfort which they might offer him, and found them sleeping, we’re not told how he felt in reaction, although we hear his words. Was he surprised? Or is this what he expected? Did he know that their words would be bigger than their actions? Is he surprised when standing in the cold, he tries to catch our eye but we won’t even look in his direction? How could we fall asleep amidst such need as his?
Jesus has two disciples whose names indicate their political affiliation. One is Simon the Zealot, apparently a member of the Jewish group in Jesus’ day who were committed to expelling the Romans from the Holy Land. Nothing else is known of him, for certain. Then there’s Judas Iscariot. Most people probably think that Iscariot was his last name, but last names were not known or used at the time among the Jewish people. Or, because Judas was so very common a Jewish name that some other identifier would have been needed to indicate which Judas was meant. Perhaps it was the village, named Kerioth, he hailed from? Could be.

But Judas fascinates us because of his betrayal and we know very little about him so we struggle to find some meaning in even the smallest detail, so we continue to ponder what else his name might mean. Perhaps it refers to his membership in the Sicarii, the Daggers, a violent group of Jewish freedom fighters who would become infamous for stabbing Roman officials in public with the daggers hidden under their clothes.

Perhaps Judas, thinking that Jesus was the long-awaited King of the Jewish people who would drive out the Romans, was frustrated with the speed of his operation. Maybe he thought Jesus needed a good hard shove in the right direction and that, if he found himself under Roman arrest, he’d finally call out the armies of Israel and the uprising that the Daggers looked for would begin. Perhaps Judas saw himself as a kind of catalyst, speeding up the reaction he so ardently wanted. We simply don’t know. Like most other characters in ancient narratives, his inner life, his thoughts and emotions, are opaque to us. All we have are his words and deeds. With his words he betrayed his friend. With his kiss he doubled down on that betrayal. And so Jesus’ fate was sealed.

We do know what happened next to Judas. Instead of seeking forgiveness, which would have been given to him as surely as it was given to Peter, he despaired, tried to return the money he’d been given, and then ended his life.

We can see ourselves in the sleeping disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, but perhaps we can also see ourselves in the man who didn’t believe his betrayal could be forgiven. Each of us has, in our own way at one time or another, betrayed love freely given. If nothing else, Judas teaches us that forgiveness can always be sought.
WEEK ONE:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

Listen to this podcast episode:

Lent Meditation 1: Praying with Jesus in the Desert
https://nacms.org/epubs/podcasts/lent-meditation-1-praying-jesus-desert

CALLED TO ACT:

Fast from distractions that keep you from prayer and being present for those who need you (i.e. not getting enough sleep, sleeping in too late, alcohol, TV, social media, video games, etc.)
When day came the council of elders of the people met, both chief priests and scribes, and they brought him before their Sanhedrin. They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us," but he replied to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question, you will not respond. But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further need have we for testimony? We have heard it from his own mouth." -Luke 22: 66-71

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. One of the maids came over to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it in front of everyone, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about!" As he went out to the gate, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazorean." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man!" A little later the bystanders came over and said to Peter, "Surely you too are one of them; even your speech gives you away." At that he began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had spoken: "Before the cock crows you will deny me three times." He went out and began to weep bitterly. -Matthew 26: 69-75
Some commentaries, and the preachers who rely on them, speak very confidently about the Sanhedrin and its operations in the 1st century AD: it had seventy members, it voted in reverse seniority from newest to longest serving members so that the new members wouldn't be overawed by the opinions of their elders, that a unanimous verdict that the accused was guilty automatically meant that the accused was acquitted because seventy honest men would not agree on anything, that its sessions had to begin and end during daylight so that there could be no suspicion of underhanded dealings. And so on.

But the truth is that we simply don’t know much of anything about the Sanhedrin at the time of Jesus. What we do know is what we’re told in the Gospels. These men, real powers in the community at their time, thought that they had a problem, Jesus and his burgeoning movement, and needed to find a way to fix it. The Romans were tense because the Holy Land was a powder keg of discontent. If that powder keg went off or even if the Romans merely suspected that it might go off, everyone would suffer. For the sake of the wider community the troublemaker needed to be gotten rid of. They were pragmatists trying to keep everything together. That’s what matters...not how many they were or the order of their voting. Some practical men looked at Jesus, heard his words and decided that the world could not tolerate him, his words, his understanding of how we should live. And nothing much has changed in that regard since their time.

Jesus does not offer a practical take on life, for there is nothing practical in leaving all things behind to follow him, in selling all that we have to give it to the poor before we follow Jesus, in praying always, in allowing the meek to inherit the earth. But the Sanhedrin were at least more honest than we are, in their rejection of Jesus, because we try to have it both ways. We try to find some minimal way in which we might follow just enough of what he had to say, understood in our own fashion, so that we can forego the rest. Sure, we’ll feed the hungry but only the hungry we regard as being worthy of our largesse. We’ll offer our cloak to the one who asks for it, but only because we know that we can order a better one when we get home and it will be delivered tomorrow! Oh, it’s made by a child in unsafe conditions for a pittance in some far-away part of the world that we can barely pronounce and couldn’t find on a map? Well, isn’t it good that the market has found a way for them to participate?

We’re just as practical as the members of the Sanhedrin were. But Jesus doesn’t ask us to be practical. He asks us to love as totally as he did. The powers that be didn’t want that total love to disturb their reasonably calm and familiar status-quo. Do we?
LENT RETREAT: WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

WEEK TWO:

REFLECTION 2:

Have you seen that meme, I suppose it is, in Instagram where voices alternate saying “No one’ll know,” and “They’re gonna know?” None of Jesus’ other followers were there in that courtyard on the evening Peter denied Jesus. No one would have seen him weep bitterly. A few words and some private tears. No one would have known about either had not Peter confessed them. “At the moment when I should have been steadfast, I was weak. At the moment when I should have stood by and supported my friend, as I had promised him I would, I denied even knowing him.”

Of course, Peter was taken off guard. Who could have expected that in Jerusalem that night, crowded as it was because of the coming religious solemnities that he would bump into someone who knew him? Who recognized, if nothing else, his tell-tale accent? Peter was not a sophisticated man, used to being in courtyards of High Priests, used to the subtle ways in which people can hide from each other with clever language. Three short years earlier he’d been a fisherman, skilled in that realm, no doubt, but entirely lacking the skills of word-play and subterfuge that would have allowed him to come up with some clever reason for explaining why he, a Galilean, should be there on that evening when another Galilean had just been arrested. Lacking subtlety, he simply lied. Again, and again and again. I don’t know him, never heard of him, it wasn’t me. He feared the consequences of a public confession of belonging to Jesus. And who knows, there may haven’t been any at all. Perhaps, had he said that “Yes, I’m also Galilean but Galilee is a big place,” the servant to whom he spoke might simply have said, “I thought so! You can pick out a Galilean a mile away, you all talk so funny.” Or maybe the servant would have said, “You’re lucky to have known him! I heard him speak once and it was so beautiful! I wanted to thank him for telling me that the poor are blessed. Lord knows, I’m poor now and my family’s always been poor. He told me that God loves me nonetheless and I was so happy to have heard that. And to think that you know him and that he’s your friend. Gosh!”

Because we’re afraid of what we imagine might happen if we confess our faith in Christ, we never discover what will happen. When someone asks us, in that incredulous tone that the sophisticated use these days, “You’re not religious, are you?” and we try to think of some way out of admitting that we are (“I have to take my grandmother to church. Sooo booorrrring!” or “It’s easier just to go than to fight with my parents about it,” or “As soon as I move out, I’ll be able to stop going.”) rather than just say, “Yes, I am.” Perhaps the person we’re speaking with just wants someone to go to Mass with. Perhaps they’re curious to find out more. Perhaps they thought they were the only one.

We can never know how or when Peter told someone else about his moment of fear and weakness, his moment of betrayal. But he must have told someone. So, whenever we’re tempted to do the eye-roll of exasperated denial (“As if!”) when someone asks whether we know Jesus, or are still practicing, let’s say a quick word of thanksgiving to St. Peter for the courage to be honest.
LENT RETREAT: WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

WEEK TWO:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

Watch this video and meditate on the artwork:
Arts and Faith: Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, Cycle B
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asc_NuDuTUQ&feature=emb_logo

CALLED TO ACT:

Give your friends and loved ones extra attention this week through acts of service, words of affirmation, quality time, and/or thoughtful gifts.
STATION 5: Jesus is Judged by Pilate

The chief priests with the elders and the scribes, that is, the whole Sanhedrin, held a council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He said to him in reply, "You say so." The chief priests accused him of many things. Again Pilate questioned him, "Have you no answer? See how many things they accuse you of." Jesus gave him no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.... Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barrabas... [and] handed [Jesus] over to be crucified.

- Mark 15: 1-5, 15

STATION 6: Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged. And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, and they came to him and said,"Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck him repeatedly.

- John 19: 1-3
Aside from the times he’s mentioned in the New Testament there is very little record of Pontius Pilate’s existence, or his career. Having said that, though, he’s better attested than most ancient people because he presided over the trial of Jesus and condemned him to death by crucifixion after being scourged. But what little record there is indicates that he was not at all shy about putting down any hint of Jewish insurrection with such ferocity that he was reported for it to the emperor of Rome himself. It’s hard to get a read on him, though. On the one hand, he was brutal in his dealings with the local Jewish population. On the other hand, he was in office for ten years so must have been reasonably competent. But there were lots of prefects of lots of Roman provinces and we neither know nor care much about any of them except for Pontius Pilate. Indeed, Christians recite his name every weekend as they recite the Nicene Creed at Mass. So he’s achieved a certain fame, or notoriety, which few could dream of.

The Roman Province of Judaea was complicated. There was a mixed population of Jews and non-Jews. The jurisdiction of the various political powers was unclear. This is evident in Jesus’ trial as the Sanhedrin passes him off to Pilate, who passes him off to Herod who passes him back to Pilate. It wasn’t clear to any of them who had proper jurisdiction, but it was eminently clear to all of them that this was a case for which they wanted political cover. The powder keg which was 1st century AD Judaea could blow up in any of their faces, so they wanted to pass this responsibility off as quickly as possible. Finally, Pilate, in one of history’s great “They made me do it” moves, gets what was in all likelihood a sort of 1st century rent-a-crowd to give him the answer he was looking for, so he could very publicly wash his hands of the whole mess and go take a nap. He’d heard the last of Jesus, he doubtless thought.

There’s no hint that Pilate was moved by a desire to discover what the right course of action might be and to pursue that. No hint that he wanted to find out whether Jesus was in fact an insurrectionist, trying to overthrow Roman authority, or just an inconvenience to some powerful locals on whose good side Pilate would have very much wanted to stay and who could make his life miserable if he didn’t do what they wanted. They wanted Jesus gone, for reasons that to Pilate would have seemed fanciful at best. Pilate wanted him gone, and had the power to make him disappear, for practical reasons. Romans wanted peace and quiet. These Jewish people seemed determined to give him anything but, no matter how violently and how often he tried to put them down. Jesus was just one more Jewish gnat to be crushed. Get rid of Jesus, he must have thought, and he’d finally have the peace and quiet he so craved. It didn’t work out quite the way Pilate expected it to.
In our modern western tradition, the punishments meted out to criminals are intended, in addition to imposing some unpleasant consequence of their misdeed on the wrongdoer, to allow some sort of repayment for the misdeed, to remove dangerous individuals from the larger community, and even to allow some possibility for rehabilitation. Roman punishments were almost entirely different, aside from the imposition of an unpleasant consequence. They were intended to demonstrate to any onlooker that the person being punished was a nothing, below contempt, not worthy of the sort of treatment accorded to a fellow human being. Thus, the person being punished was stripped of their humanity in his or her own eyes and in the eyes of onlookers. To show that, in relation to those in authority, they were powerless. In addition, punishments were extreme so as to terrify everyone involved, the criminal—should he or she actually survive, any onlookers and even the ones meting out the punishment so that they would curb whatever inclination they might have had to do wrong themselves. Punishment as crowd control, we might say. All of this in the context of monarchical authority regarded both by the monarch and their subjects as divine in origin and so infallible. The individual counted for nothing and the divine monarch was all in all. And these punishments were commonplace and well-known to all.

So, when we come to the scourging of Jesus and his crowning with thorns, we get no description because none was needed. Every member of the early audiences of the Gospel knew what was meant and could visualize the lead weighted whips, with bits of metal tied to the ends for added effect. They understood as well the significance of the painful crown, a mockery of Jesus’ supposed claim to the throne of Israel and the threat that would have posed to Roman authority.

If we can’t quite believe that one human being would do such things to another human being, we need only watch the evening news, for such things are indeed still done in our day and age and for the exact same reasons the Romans did them so long ago. Or you might turn to the traditions of sacred art and see them there, albeit oftentimes somewhat sanitized. We don’t like to admit to ourselves what we human beings are capable of in our relations with each other and how eager we can be to deny each other’s humanity and to instill terror. “Do what I want you to do or the sufferer might be you.”

If nothing else, the scourging and crowning of Jesus must further convince us to strive to create a world in which such barbarity has no place.
WEEK THREE:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

Read this poem:
"The Sacrifice" by George Herbert
-Short Version:
-Full Version:
  http://www.georgeherbert.org.uk/docs/The%20Sacrifice.pdf

CALLED TO ACT:

Fast from thinking or speaking critical thoughts of those you disagree with, do not like, or do not understand.
WEEK FOUR:

STATION 7: Jesus Bears the Cross

When the chief priests and the guards saw [Jesus] they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him. I find no guilt in him." ... They cried out, "Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha.
-John 19: 6, 15-17

STATION 8: Jesus is Helped by Simon of Cyrene to Carry the Cross

They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.
-Mark 15: 21
LENT RETREAT: WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

WEEK FOUR:

REFLECTION 1:

Crucifixion was a peculiarly Roman method of execution which could be imposed only on non-citizens. The Greeks generally disapproved of it but used it from time to time as did other peoples in the ancient world, but it was mainly identified with Rome. And the Romans practised it with abandon, sometimes crucifying thousands at a time. After the rebellion of Spartacus was finally put down in 71 AD, no fewer than 6,000 rebels were crucified at once, lining the Appian Way, the main road between Rome and Capua in the south of Italy, for some 120 miles. Imagine driving from Worcester to Bridgeport through a forest of dead and dying men. Our minds rebel in horror, but Romans thought it was a good idea. It’s no surprise then, that the first certain depiction of the crucifixion of Jesus in art was on the 5th century doors of the church of Santa Sabina in Rome, after it had finally been outlawed. Despite its commonplace nature, the first remains of a crucified person were only found in 1968 in Israel, identified as such because the man’s ankle bones were still attached by the nail which had been driven through them. Just as we would expect from the Gospel description.

It took various forms, depending on the whim and/or creativity of the executioner involved, but generally involved a permanent upright beam into the top of which was slotted the crossbeam, weighing about 100 pounds, onto which the sufferer had been tied or nailed. The sufferer would have already been tied or nailed to it and would have struggled to carry it to the place of his execution. There he would have been hoisted up to the top of the upright where he would eventually die of suffocation and exposure. It was supposed to be just as horrific as we might imagine it to be, since the sufferer—no longer human in the eyes of passers-by—would have been subjected to their mockery and torment and would have been unable to defend himself from whatever further physical insults they might have inflicted upon him or whatever further injuries he might have suffered from animals. All a rollicking good time in Roman eyes and very effective crowd control. As inconceivable as it may seem, it remains a legal method of execution in some parts of the world even today.

The crucifixes we see today in our churches and homes tend not to reflect its horror. Some depict a Risen Jesus, in order to reflect the connection between Jesus’ death and Resurrection. After all, many thousands were crucified, so that horror was not his alone, but only Jesus rose. On others Jesus seems, if not already risen, to be in a sort of serene repose. In New York City’s Dominican Church of St. Vincent Ferrer there is a famous statue of Jesus in the vestments of an archbishop, to remind onlookers that Jesus’ act was a sacrifice offered on our behalf and is recounted in every Mass ever offered. In the 11th century there was, for a time, a trend to depict the crucifixion in all of its historical horror, so that it wouldn’t be sanitized in the minds of the Faithful. Perhaps the same impulse led to the manner of its portrayal in 2004’s film The Passion of the Christ. Be that as it may, whenever we see a crucifix we are reminded of Jesus’ self-giving on our behalf and should be moved to humility and gratitude that he, infinitely innocent, suffered this for our sake.
LENT RETREAT: WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

WEEK FOUR:

REFLECTION 2:

Cyrene was a town in what is now eastern Libya. In Jesus’ day it had a large Jewish population which even maintained a synagogue in Jerusalem which Cyrenian Jews could use when in Jerusalem for any reason. Some suggest that Simon was chosen as a result of some sympathy with Jesus, but there’s no evidence of that in the text. He was compelled to help and so he did, but the action must have had some lasting influence because his sons Alexander and Rufus are named in a way which implies the early Christians reading or hearing the Gospel would have been familiar with them as fellow Christians.

Why would Jesus have needed help? Because the torment of the previous day’s scourging and mockery followed, doubtless, by lack of sleep and anything to eat or drink would have substantially weakened him and rendered him barely capable of walking, let alone carrying a 100 pound wooden beam to which his arms and hands had already been tied or nailed. So when we read about Simon of Cyrene’s help we are reminded of Jesus’ real humanity and his real physical fragility. He was not somehow just masquerading as a human. In Jesus, God took flesh and suffered as any human being would suffer. He needed support in this hour of need just as anyone of us would. In fact, we are constantly offered the opportunity to be Simon of Cyrene for our brothers and sisters in their need when they seek our support.

Whenever we recall that, in our brothers and sisters, we see the face of God because Christ dwells in them as truly as he dwells in us. In reaching out to support them we are comforting Christ in our own day, lifting a burden which might have been insupportable were it not for our presence there.
LENT RETREAT: WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

WEEK FOUR:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

Meditate on this piece of artwork:
Simon of Cyrene
https://www.moddermanbiblicalart.com/simon-of-cyrene.html

CALLED TO ACT:

Give a big smile (even if only visible through your eyes because of your mask) to everyone you encounter. Look at people rather than past them, at the ground, or at your phone, and take that moment to see Christ in them.
A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' At that time, people will say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?"


When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. [Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."]

LENT RETREAT: WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

WEEK FIVE:

REFLECTION 1:

It's hard to tell how well-known Jesus was in his own day. It's hard even to tell how long the so-called Public Ministry—that latter period of his life, which began after he left Nazareth, moved to Capernaum, chose his disciples and moved around Galilee teaching and healing, and culminated in his Passion, Death and Resurrection—lasted. Maybe as little as six months, some say, although most estimate that it lasted about three years. It was not a time when people travelled much or when communication was at all easy, so it's hard to say how many people would even have been aware of him. But these women were aware of him and, unlike most of the men who followed him, they were not embarrassed to be known as his followers nor did they abandon him in his last moments of great need. Not that they could do much. In those days, much as in our own, women did not ordinarily wield the same sort of power as men. But if they lacked the power to free the man they so evidently loved, no one was going to prevent them from being by his side.

And in that little has changed. Who stands up for him today, reading his words to those gathered to hear them? Who puts their name on a list to bring his Body and Blood to feed those who hunger for it? Who teaches children how to say his name and pray to him for all those in need? Who signs up for committees, sets up chairs and takes them down again, bakes cookies and makes coffee, cleans and rearranges the church after Mass, plays music to raise our minds and hearts? Of course, there are men who do so, who serve him as selflessly as anyone could possibly expect, and for them and their commitment and energy we're profoundly grateful but, if we're being honest, they're far outnumbered by women.

It is to them that we, the Church, owe a debt of gratitude as old as the Gospels themselves. From his own Mother who bore him, to Peter's mother-in-law who served him as soon as she was able, to Martha who hurried to make him his favorite food and drink, to her sister Mary who wanted nothing more than to sit with him and listen to him talk, to the women who stood by his Cross so that he wouldn’t die alone, to Mary Magdalene who was the first to hear of his Resurrection, and on and on. The women of Jerusalem to whom Jesus spoke that day were only the first in this innumerable throng of those who want nothing more than to be at his side, to listen to him, to comfort him and to welcome him into their hearts and homes.
LENT RETREAT: WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

WEEK FIVE:

REFLECTION 2:

As we have already seen, no one needed a lengthy description of what this entailed. In the version cited here, Luke simply says “they crucified him...” Those early readers and hearers of the Gospel were all too familiar with what those words meant. They would have seen men hoisted up high, struggling to breathe as the weight of their bodies made it increasingly difficult, they would have seen birds of prey attack them, and passers-by pelt them with rubbish. They would have seen the distraught families standing by, caught up in a horror that we, thank God, can only barely imagine although it continues in our own day. This was not the serene falling asleep which many of our crucifixes show us, but we couldn’t stand a constant reminder of the historical reality, so we lessen its horror.

It is our Christian faith that the Creator of all, the Ruler of all things, the One who causes all things to come into being and who sustains it all, who lives in infinite Light and who knows only infinite Joy gave all of that up. God the Son, the Word spoken before all time, who knows all, loves all, understands all, emptied himself of all divinity so that he could share our lives. And he did it for love. Let’s put it in simpler, plainer words. He emptied himself because he likes us. He wanted to be with us in a way that could only be accomplished if he became one of us. He wanted to walk like we walk. He wanted to talk like we talk. He wanted to have friends. He wanted to get up in the morning and go to work. He wanted to enjoy sunsets. He wanted to have a family, to know what it is to have a mother.

And so, he did. God the Son came to be among us as a human being exactly like us. And how did we respond? When we human beings came face to face with Love made flesh, all we could think to do was kill him, to get rid of him, to make him go away. Not all, to be sure, but enough to make it happen because he was inconvenient and impractical and might have upset the otherwise comfortable status quo.

Why is it that we human beings are so resistant to love? This is surely as great a mystery as any other yet, while we’ve made progress in understanding so many things about the world in which we find ourselves, this conundrum—our resistance to love—remains as obdurate as ever. As soon as Adam and Eve saw each other in all their naked humanity their first action was to cover up and hide from each other. We do the same, don’t we? Rather than open ourselves to the possibility of being known and loved by another person, to say nothing of the God who created us and who is Infinite Love, we close ourselves up. Love offered is too often rejected, whether the one offering is the person with whom we might share our life or the God who created our life. Leave me alone, we say. The challenge of loving as we are loved is too much, because we fear that ultimately we aren’t even very likeable much less loveable. Love came to walk among us because, however fancily we might put it, he liked us and wanted to love with us and we said, “No. Leave us alone. Just leave us.” But even then he wouldn’t leave. Rejected by us, crucified by us, he came to live not only with us but in us. If only we’d realize that.
Watch this video:
Ignatian Lent: Nailed to Attachments
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVluqblqLac&feature=emb_logo

CALLED TO ACT:

Fast from complaining and instead offer gratitude, especially for all the sacrifices made by others that now benefit you.
STATION 11: Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."


STATION 12: Jesus Speaks to His Mother and the Disciple

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

-John 19: 25-27
In the Gospel according to Luke one of the criminals crucified alongside Jesus asks to be remembered by him when he comes into his Kingdom. Jesus promises him that his hope will be granted.

Saint Dismas, as he is known in our Catholic tradition, is remembered in the liturgy on March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation. According to ancient belief, we are conceived and die on the same day. One of the days on which, according to the calendar spelled out in the Gospel, Jesus might have died was March 25, so his conception is celebrated on that day. Thus he and Dismas were a kind of twin, both born on the same day and dying on the same day.

Nothing else is known of him, aside from the couple of sentences devoted to him in the Luke’s Gospel. So what can we tell from that little evidence? He was honest, humble, faithful and hopeful. He admitted a past of which he was not proud and which, according to his understanding, had brought him to his sorry end. He admitted past wrongdoing without any attempt at self-justification or minimising what he had done. He had not been a good man. But in making this confession he shows that whatever other faults he might have had, at last at this ultimate moment he was honest and humble. And he possessed some kind of faith. Probably not the sophisticated faith, with the accompanying technical vocabulary that would have allowed him to dispute with the Masters at the great medieval universities. But such a faith is neither asked nor demanded of us. It suffices to simply turn our gaze upon Jesus, the Savior, and ask to be with him, ask to be saved by him. We don’t have to understand the nuances of the great creeds, we simply have to trust. And hope. For Dismas’ other great virtue is his hope, hope that there’s no use-by date on the offer of forgiveness, no need to have built up a sort of divine credit rating of 800 or more to get a hearing before the divine judge. All we have to do is trust, and hope that trust is enough. And if we do that, we too will be with Jesus in Paradise and will be welcomed in by Dismas.

So there’s no need to beat ourselves up about our failings, all the times we’ve hurt others, been petty and unforgiving, harbored grudges, driven by the downtrodden without trying to help, all the untruths small and great which we have told, all the love we’ve rejected all the anger we’ve held onto and the apologies we’ve turned aside. We must honestly acknowledge, certainly, all of this. But the thing about love is that it doesn’t, can’t, be earned. It’s freely given or not given at all. And all we have to do to receive the gift is to want it. Just like Dismas, honest, humble, faithful and hopeful.
LENT RETREAT: WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

WEEK SIX:

REFLECTION 2:

It’s hard to imagine being part of this scene, hard to imagine when this Son spoke for the last time to his Mother and to his close friend. On the one hand, his concern is purely practical. Mary would have to live with someone, be cared for by someone. She would no longer have been young. Arrangements needed to be made, so Jesus was taking care of that, the thoughtful Son to the very end.

But there’s more going on here than that, of course. Whenever we read a story, or watch a film, either we identify with some character or we don’t. If we do, then we place ourselves in the story’s midst. We are the detective looking for the evil doers, the family matriarch or patriarch caring for the family…and on and on. So who do we identify with in this scene?

We might well be surprised with what tradition tells us in this regard. St. Augustine tells us that, in a very real sense, we are the Mother of God. By which he means that if Christ is ever to be born into this world, that is so much in need of him, that he must be born through us, in us. So, in this scene of unimaginable tragedy, we are the Mother. We stand with her, remembering the angel’s words, remembering the baby at the breast, remembering the toddler and boy playing, the young man working with and learning from her beloved spouse Joseph, wondering what the future held for him. We remember the conversation that must have happened, when he told her that it was now the time to leave her home, to gather disciples, to preach the Kingdom. And we remember that, not for the first time, she felt her heart pierced with the predicted sword as she feared for his future. And now she’s here, filled with love, overcome with grief, stalwart in facing the future. She would help his Kingdom come, help his Church to be born.

And, too, we are also the enigmatically unnamed Beloved Disciple. Tradition tells us that he is St. John, the Evangelist. Perhaps so. But modern scholarship suggests that we, the faithful ones reading the Gospel in whatever time and place, are the Beloved Disciple. We stand by him when others fall away, we are the first to know the reality of his resurrection. We ordinary people, not powerful, not sophisticated, lacking advanced degrees and elaborate gowns and robes. We ordinary people are the ones who, for millennia past and for millennia to come, are the ones who hear the word and respond to it, some in great acts of heroic sanctity, but others in the ordinary tasks of daily church life, setting up the chairs, putting out the books, filling cruets, visiting the sick, offering alms to the needy. We are the Beloved Disciple and through our faithful discipleship, the Son we love will be born into the world.
LENT RETREAT: WE WILL RISE TOGETHER

WEEK SIX:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

Listen to this podcast episode:
Lent Meditation 4: Three O'Clock Prayer Guided Meditation
https://nacms.org/epubs/podcasts/lent-meditation-4-three-o'clock-prayer-guided-meditation

CALLED TO ACT:

Give a financial donation to an organization that works to free the imprisoned or care for the vulnerable.
WEEK SEVEN:

STATION 13: Jesus Dies on the Cross

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; and when he had said this he breathed his last.


STATION 14: Jesus is Placed in the Tomb

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed.

-Matthew 27: 57-60
By the time St. Luke set down his version of Jesus’ death, the story had already been told and retold innumerable times. We have no way of knowing who it was that first told this Evangelist the version we have here. We do know that St. Luke was writing his Gospel at a time when Christianity was already suspect and Christians were anxious to make clear to the Roman authorities, no more kind and gentle in Luke’s day than in Jesus’, that they were no threat to the established political order. Neither Jesus nor they were seditious. They were not calling for any insurrection or uprising, nor had Jesus before them, although that was the crime of which he had been accused. St. Luke wants to make very clear that from the moment of his death Roman authority, personified in the centurion who pronounces him innocent, knew that there was no threat of political upheaval in Jesus or his followers. That Rome had nothing to fear in Christianity is one of Luke’s main themes both in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles.

Other Gospel writers have other concerns. In St. John’s Gospel, Jesus’ last words are “It is accomplished,” or “It is finished,” perhaps maybe even a paraphrase like “I’ve reached my goal.” In John, Jesus’ death is the capstone on his life, the inevitable result of the life he’d lived.

Matthew has Jesus cry out in apparent despair, “My God, my God what have you abandoned me?” But it’s not despair but a quotation of the beginning of Psalm 22 which passes through grief and loss to confident faith in God. In Matthew’s version of these events, the dead begin to rise, the very world trembles and the Temple curtain, veiling the Presence of God from unpriestly eyes is torn. Now God can be found in the midst of human life, in the midst of human suffering.

In Mark, the centurion, a Roman like those who first read or heard this Gospel composed in Rome, simply says, “Truly this man was God’s Son.” In this way Mark’s Messianic Secret is finally revealed. Yes, Jesus’ presence among us is marvellous and he dazzles us with his words and deeds, but we are ultimately brought to faith not by marvels but by the realization that God is present for us, accompanies us, especially in suffering. Jesus’ true identity is realized by a Roman centurion, a pagan just like those listening to the Gospel, and he proclaims Jesus’ identity without being silenced, unlike all the others throughout the Gospel story, because he realizes it at the moment Jesus dies. Something about the way this man died moved the pagan to faith. It was not marvels and miracles, as wonderful as they are, but how he faced death that made faith an inescapable conclusion to him.

Few of us will experience a miracle, one of those inexplicable moments when God interrupts the normal course of history and intervenes somehow, but we all experience death. The deaths of those we love, the deaths of the innocent who suffer throughout the world and throughout time, our own deaths. And however alone we, or they, might feel at that moment we can take comfort in these words. We are not alone, because the One whom we follow has gone before us, accompanies us on our path and upholds us in our sorrow.
REFLECTION 2:

Less than a week earlier Jesus had been hailed as King of Israel upon his entry into Jerusalem. People had shouted “Hosanna...Save us now!” and covered the ground with cloaks and palm branches as had been done for the Sons of David hundreds of years earlier as they entered their Holy City, seated like Jesus on the donkey which in those days had been the king's alone to ride and protecting his sacred royal feet from the dirt on which we ordinary folk had to walk. They recognized him as King but when, in the intervening days it became clear that there would be no army, no war, no bloodshed, that Jesus’ notion of Kingship was far removed from what the crowd expected and wanted, their enthusiasm had disappeared, and adulation had become condemnation. “Hosanna” was heard no more, having been replaced by “Crucify him.” So the authorities had done their bidding and Jesus was now dead and his body needed to be put somewhere hurriedly because night was falling and religious solemnities were following during which dead bodies could not be displayed.

Certainly no arrangements had been made for this eventuality, utterly unforeseen as it had been by those who followed him. Only recently they had been arguing among themselves as to which of them would get the best jobs in the administration of his upcoming royal government. Now his closest followers seemed all to have fled, aside from some women who were watching from a distance. Joseph of Arimathea, apparently a wealthy man who had an unused tomb nearby, had the body released into his care. Rather hurriedly he wrapped the body in a shroud, doubtless intending to see to the other funeral rituals when time allowed after the holy days to come had passed, and placed it in the tomb. The tomb was closed. But Jesus was not alone. Two women stayed with him, to watch over him. Mary Magdalene, his faithful friend, and another woman identified only as “the other Mary” sat where they could see the tomb. They would not allow him to be alone even if all his other followers had fled from fear or were prostrate with grief. They would wait and see what happened next.

And so do we. We wait with them, remembering his promise that he would rise in three days but not understanding how that could happen. So we wait, with his friends. In grief at his death but in the hope that, in him, the otherwise inconceivable might come to pass, that death might be defeated, first for Him and then for all of us. In the meantime, we wait.
WEEK SEVEN:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

Listen to and pray with this hymn:

Stabat Mater -
13th-century Christian hymn to Mary, which portrays her suffering as Jesus Christ's mother during his crucifixion.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4US4PSZF278

CALLED TO ACT:

Fast from all noise (music, podcasts, TV, videos, unnecessary conversations, etc.) and embrace the silence.
Retreat prepared by Anna Maria College Campus Ministry in special celebration of the 75th Anniversary, 2021