



The Way of the Cross

LENTEN REFLECTIONS



JESUITS[®]
USA Midwest
Province

Introduction

The Way of the Cross began in the earliest days of the Church as pilgrims to Jerusalem retraced Jesus' steps in his final journey to Calvary.

Beginning in the 1500s, when it was not feasible for everyone to visit these holy sites in person, replica shrines were erected around Europe. Eventually, the practice developed into the set of fourteen stations that we know today, found in almost every church.

The Stations of the Cross tend to take the form of paintings or reliefs on church walls. They are often prayed during Lent as a mini pilgrimage between stations in a church. The visual representation of these scenes helps people imagine the events of the Jesus' suffering and crucifixion. Often, as in this booklet, a reflection accompanies the image, offering a new context or perspective.

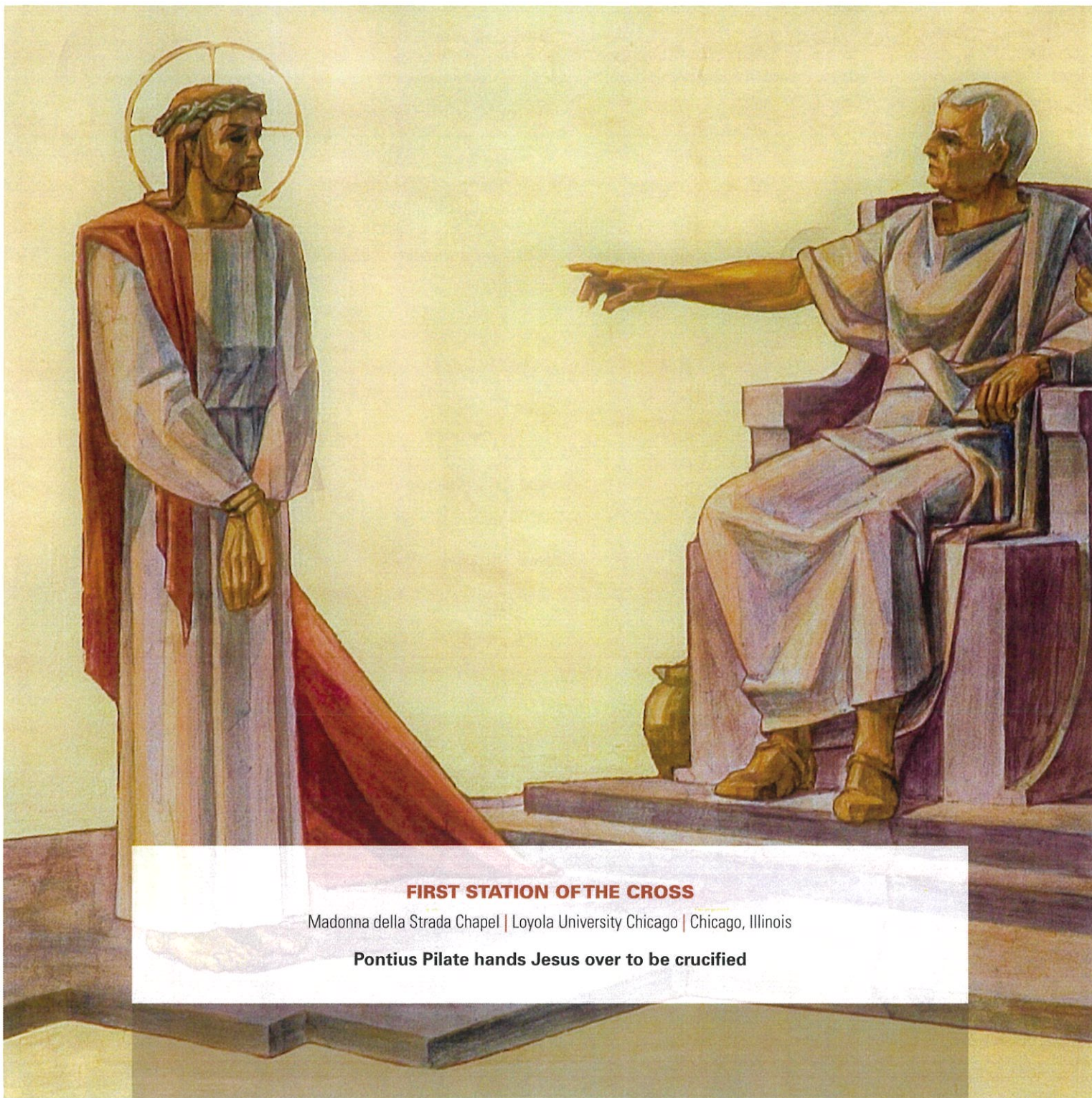
This booklet contains images of the fourteen stations, representing various works of the Midwest Province. Each station includes a reflection written by a Jesuit or lay person from our ministries, inviting diverse perspectives of Jesus' experience on the day he died.

Lenten blessings,

The Midwest Jesuits

To listen to an audio version
of these reflections, visit
jesuitsmidwest.org/stations





FIRST STATION OF THE CROSS

Madonna della Strada Chapel | Loyola University Chicago | Chicago, Illinois

Pontius Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified

STATION 1

Jesus Is Condemned to Death

I've always been struck by the assassinations of people who stand up for what, in the eyes of God, is just, good, and holy: President Abraham Lincoln, condemned for daring to abolish slavery in this country; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., condemned for daring to dream of a colorblind world; St. Oscar Romero, condemned for daring to stand up for the poor and downtrodden. And before all of them, Jesus Christ, savior of us all, condemned for daring to include all whom this world would write off as unworthy.

Yet, even as religious and political authorities were condemning him to a shameful death to end his life on earth, God was stretching out his arms to welcome his son, the savior of us all, back to himself in the kingdom of heaven.

Reflection Questions:

Who are those in your community who may be unjustly condemned, in large or small ways? How is Jesus inviting you to respond?

— Father Raymond Guiao, SJ, president of Saint Ignatius High School in Cleveland, Ohio.



Loyola University Chicago
Chicago, Illinois



SECOND STATION OF THE CROSS

Jesuit Retreat House on Lake Winnebago | Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Jesus willingly accepts and patiently bears his cross

JESUS BEARS HIS CROSS

STATION 2

Jesus Carries His Cross

Two thousand years of Christian faith train us to see the cross as a symbol of salvation or perhaps self-sacrificial love. But in Jesus' day, the cross signified a singular shame. It was the most humiliating and brutal way the Romans could execute someone they perceived as a threat to their empire. It was a punishment so inhumane that no Roman citizen could be crucified, no matter how grotesque or grave the offense.

Jesus' teaching and healing ministry—marked by inclusive, merciful love—is met with barbarism and revulsion. When Jesus takes up his cross, he exposes the cruelty that results from the human impulse toward fear, hatred, and violence.

Jesus takes up his cross in fidelity to the God he called father. We also see Jesus' solidarity with us in the mystery of suffering and death. Where there is failure, a wound, or any kind of suffering, there he is.

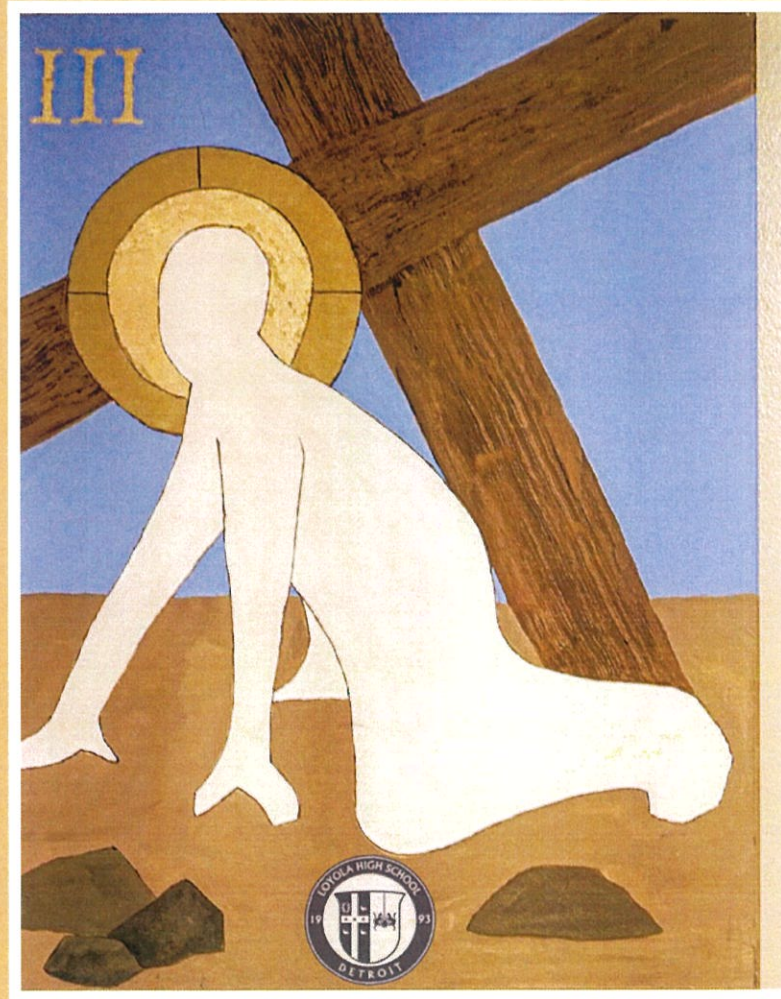
Imagine the scene as Jesus embraces this tool used for his own degradation and execution. What thoughts and feelings arise in you? Looking into his eyes, what does Jesus say to you? What do you say to Jesus?

Reflection Questions:

What cross seems heavy in your own life? What does it mean to imagine Jesus taking up his cross for you?

— Marcus Mescher is associate professor of Christian ethics at Xavier University in Cincinnati.





THIRD STATION OF THE CROSS

Chapel of the North American Martyrs | University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy | Detroit, Michigan

Weakened by torments and by loss of blood, Jesus falls beneath his cross

STATION 3

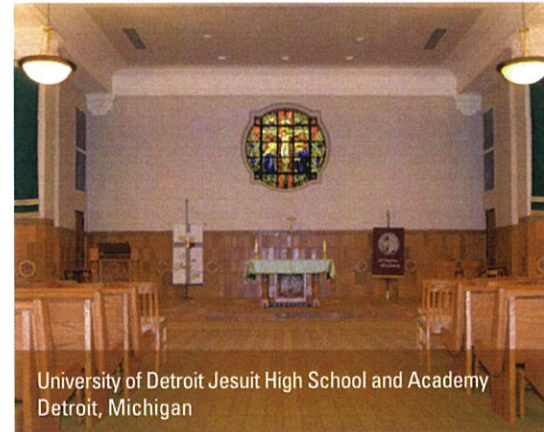
Jesus Falls the First Time

What do you carry? They say that we shouldn't compare crosses – that everyone is carrying something particularly heavy for them. They also say the relics of Jesus' cross would fill a ship if they were all collected in one place. My cross may not always seem so big. It's made up of my griefs, my individual sufferings, my struggles to accept my own limited humanity. And yet I fall under it all the time. Jesus shares my experience even there, even in stumbling over uneven ground and falling. Even Jesus, who walked on water, healed the incurable, and brought life to the dead...fell. What was Jesus carrying that day? Was he carrying the weight of the world in that cross, the combined weight of everyone's crosses throughout history, or was the weight of his own very personal cross his focus in that moment?

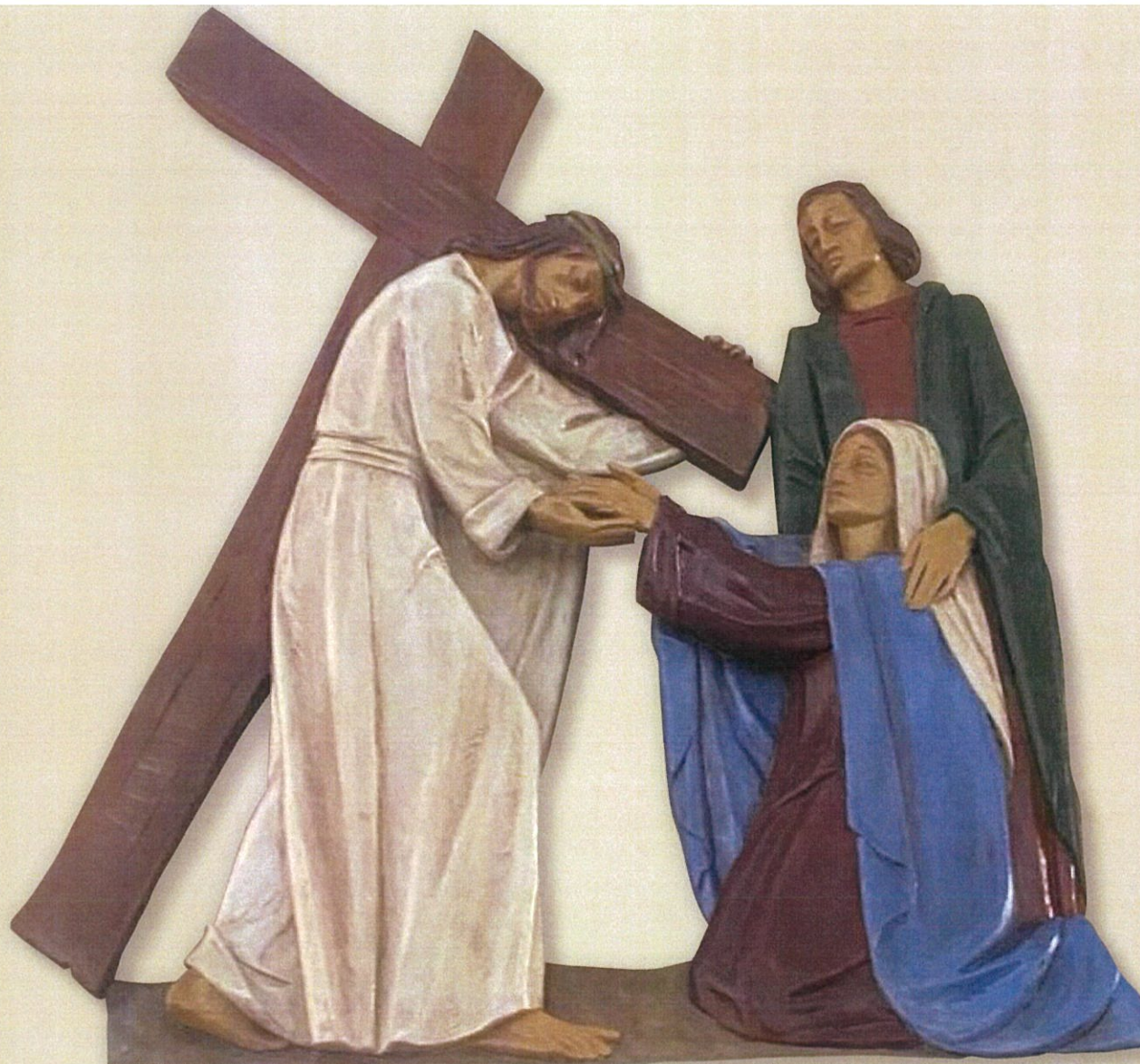
Reflection Questions:

What are the times in your life that you have stumbled under the weight of your burdens? How is Jesus inviting you to stand back up?

— Molly Mattingly is the director of music ministry at St. John's Parish and Creighton University campus ministry in Omaha, Nebraska.



University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy
Detroit, Michigan



FOURTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Chapel of the Sacred Heart | Cristo Rey Jesuit High School | Chicago

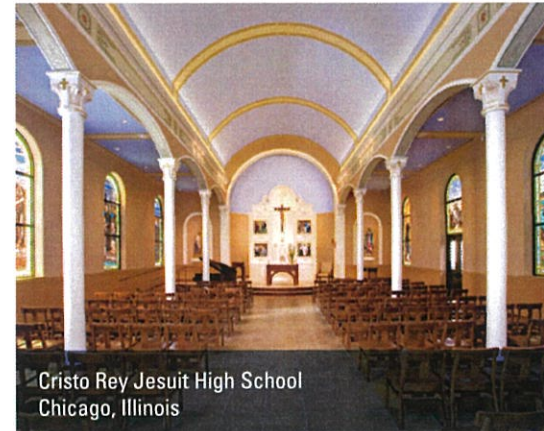
Jesus meets his mother, Mary, who is filled with grief

STATION 4

Jesus Meets His Mother

A Black mother keens upon hearing her only son is riddled with bullets. A South American mother marches with the Mothers of the Disappeared. A Jewish mother lights Sabbath candles while weeping over the death of her daughter, a rabbi killed in a hate crime at the synagogue. A mother wails as she gets the news her son is pistol whipped and beaten for being gay. Mothers across the world mourn for their children lost to violence or disease.

Each mother bears the pain of her sons and daughters. Like Mary, she stands in solidarity with her children. She holds them in her heart as only a mother can.



Cristo Rey Jesuit High School
Chicago, Illinois

Reflection Questions:

Whom are you invited to care for? How do you help bear their pain?

— Sr. Susan Kusz, SND, is the associate director of the Jesuit Retreat House in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.



FIFTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Chapel of the North American Martyrs | Walsh Jesuit High School | Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

Soldiers force Simon of Cyrene to help carry Jesus's cross

STATION 5

Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

He's curious about all the commotion, the screaming. His name is Simon. He's from Cyrene, in northern Africa. He sees a man, bloodied and sinking under the weight of a cross, on his way to a horrible death.

The soldiers force him to help the condemned criminal. Imagine how close this brings Simon to Jesus. They are cheek to cheek. They look into each other's eyes.

Simon will never forget that look, those eyes that communicate at a level much deeper than words: pain, but also gratitude.

Just like with Simon, crosses are sometimes forced upon us. They too are the cross of Jesus who continues to suffer wherever his beloved brothers and sisters suffer.

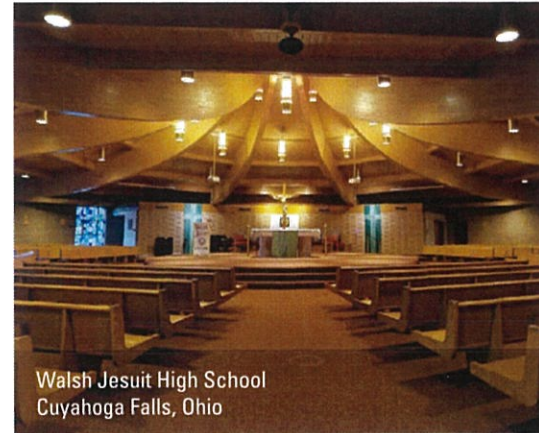
When the cross is laid upon our shoulders, Jesus is very close to us, as he was to Simon. We, too, can look into the eyes of Jesus and share an intimacy that is only possible when suffering is shared.

Reflection Questions:

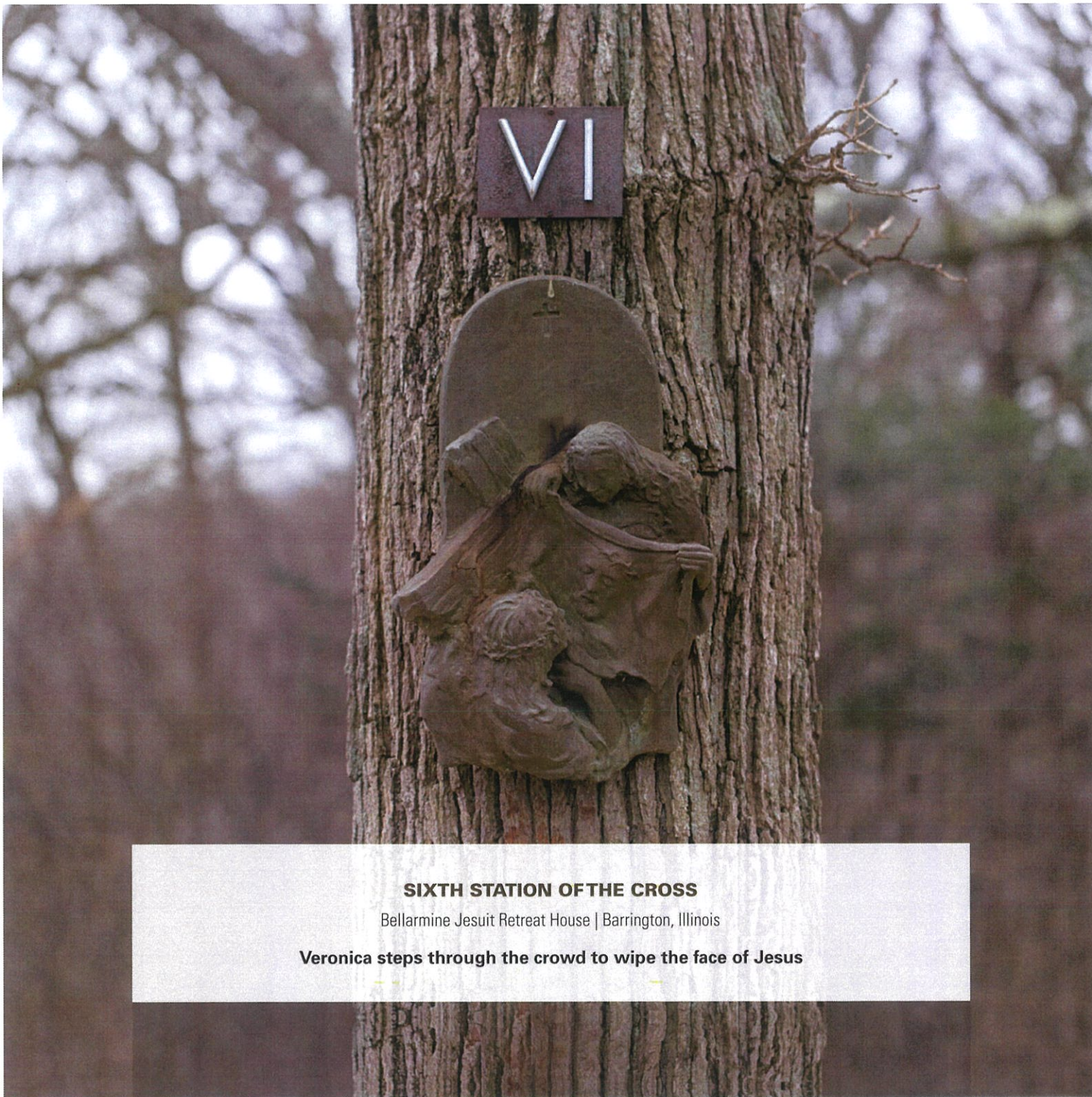
Who is someone in your life or in your community who is suffering right now?

How can you help share that individual's burden?

— Father Jim Kubicki, SJ, is the director of St. Francis Mission in South Dakota.



Walsh Jesuit High School
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio



SIXTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Bellarmino Jesuit Retreat House | Barrington, Illinois

Veronica steps through the crowd to wipe the face of Jesus

STATION 6

Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

We cherish the faces of those we love. I relate to Veronica and her desire to run to Jesus and ease his suffering. I imagine he has been her beloved teacher and friend. She knows he will die soon and cannot bear to see the pain, sweat, and blood on his face any longer. She ponders what she can do to ease his pain? She bravely pushes her way through the crowd, past the soldiers, to go to him and offer her caring presence and a gesture of tenderness. Her courage inspires me.

He pauses and offers her his gratitude with love in his eyes, accepting her kindness. As she wipes his face the gift becomes hers.

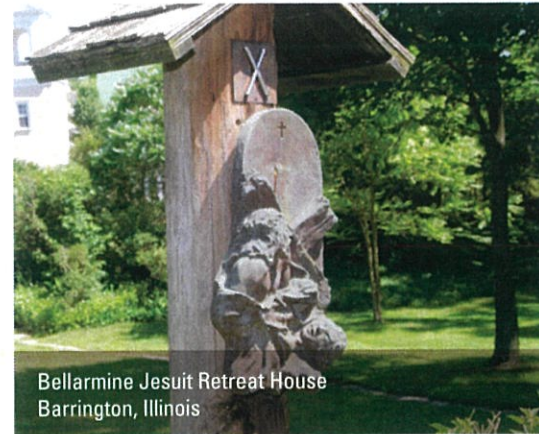
In this moment together, they find that connection provides consolation. With this they can go on.

Veronica teaches us that we are called to recognize suffering and reach out with compassion. Jesus shows us that when we seek him, no matter what the circumstance, he is fully present loving us.

Reflection Questions:

Who in your life may need their physical needs met? How can you extend compassion in a way that shows your love?

— Erin Maiorca is the executive director of Bellarmine Jesuit Retreat House in Barrington, Illinois.



Bellarmino Jesuit Retreat House
Barrington, Illinois



SEVENTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Saint Thomas More Catholic Community | Saint Paul, Minnesota

Jesus falls beneath the weight of the cross a second time

STATION 7

Jesus Falls a Second Time

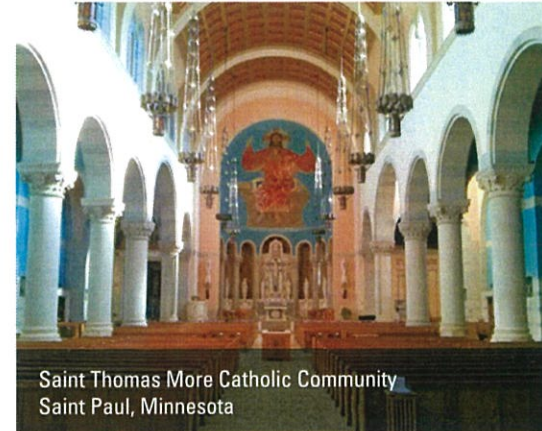
Jesus' second fall is another reminder of his humility and humanity. Such physical fragility in his final hours harkens back to the fragility in which his life began – in an animal stall to a mother weathered by poverty, travel and delivery. Like his birth and death, so too were his years of ministry spent in the fragile margins of society.

From manger to crucifix, Jesus turned on its head the world's definition of power and strength, and gave us a new understanding of where and how to encounter God. His second fall urges us to let love repeatedly bring us to our knees. He invites us to continually engage in the pain, injustice and suffering of humanity, not to turn our backs or quit when we become weary. With each fall, he assures us that if we immerse ourselves in such humble fragility, we are certain to find Jesus there.

Reflection Questions:

What stirs in your heart upon contemplating a fragile Jesus on his knees? What personal fragility or pain can you ask Jesus to help you carry? Where might this fallen Jesus be asking you to encounter him in today's suffering humanity?

— Amy Ketner is the director of Hispanic/Latino ministry at St. Mary Student Parish in Ann Arbor, Michigan.





EIGHTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Cuneo Chapel of the North American Martyrs | Saint Ignatius College Prep | Chicago, Illinois

Jesus tells the women to weep not for him but for themselves and for their children

STATION 8

Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Halfway through his painful journey, Jesus turns to the women who are crying and suffering with him and says, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” He reminds them that people who love also experience suffering and worry.

These unnamed women of Jerusalem call to mind the many women who ministered with and supported Jesus. As we remember the challenges of the past year, we can see that hidden labor like theirs has sustained many people and families and that we have also had many reasons to worry and to weep.

There is a paradox here in the way Jesus asks us to weep while at the same time also giving us hope, just as Good Friday is meaningful to us because of the hope of Easter. In sadness and difficulty, we reach out to support each other, and we remember our ultimate hope in God’s enduring love.

Reflection Questions:

In times of suffering, when have you experienced hope? Who has reached out to you to offer hope? Who might need a message of hope from you?

— Beth Franzosa teaches in the religious studies department at Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School in Indianapolis.





NINTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Saint Francis Chapel | John Carroll University | University Heights, Ohio

Weakened almost to the point of death, Jesus falls a third time

STATION 9

Jesus Falls the Third Time

Some years ago, I knew a very successful businessman who was also a recovering alcoholic. When he told his doctor that he was becoming confused and sometimes lost his balance, the doctor – who had known him for years – presumed he was relapsing. A second opinion, however, diagnosed a brain tumor the size of a grapefruit.

The surgery to remove the tumor was necessary to relieve his distress. Unfortunately, it was malignant, and radiation could only slow, not stop, its growth. His situation was compounded when the surgical site became infected. Between the effects of the radiation and the struggle with the infection, he was mentally and physically exhausted.

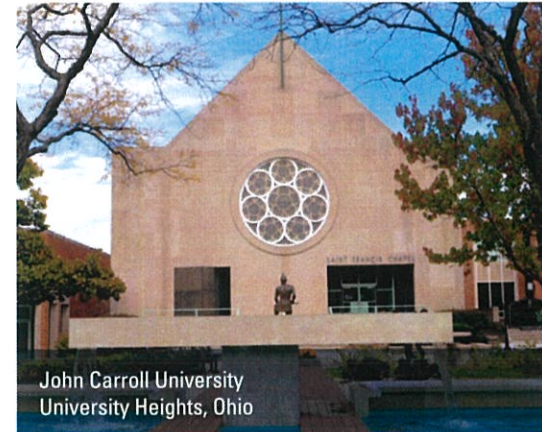
Finally, with very little time remaining, he regained himself and wanted to address his will. He had planned to leave everything to charity and the church, and that remained largely unchanged, but he also had a good friend whom he wanted to care for as well. On one of his lucid days, he asked me what he should do. I replied that he was a good man and that he should do whatever he thought best. He marshalled what little energy he had, called his attorney and re-wrote his will to ensure the care of a loved one.

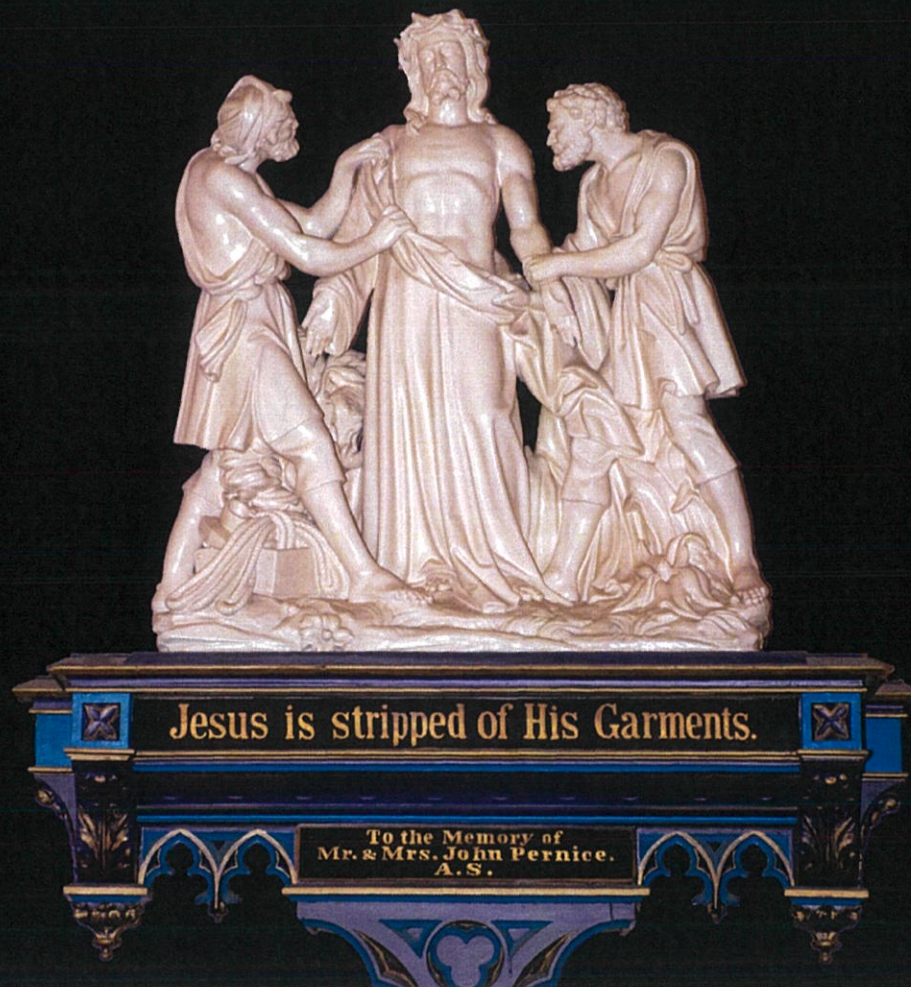
Did Jesus fall? Yes. Was he helpless? No. Despite the incredible physical and emotional pain, Jesus was able to rise again for those he loves.

Reflection Questions:

When have I experienced suffering that seems to never end? How can I take comfort in knowing Jesus is there with me?

— Father Steven Hurd, SJ, is co-director of Ignatian formation at Manresa Jesuit Retreat House in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.





TENTH STATION OF THE CROSS

St. Xavier Church | Cincinnati, Ohio

The soldiers strip Jesus of his garments, treating him as a common criminal

Photo by: Jay Joyce

STATION 10

Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

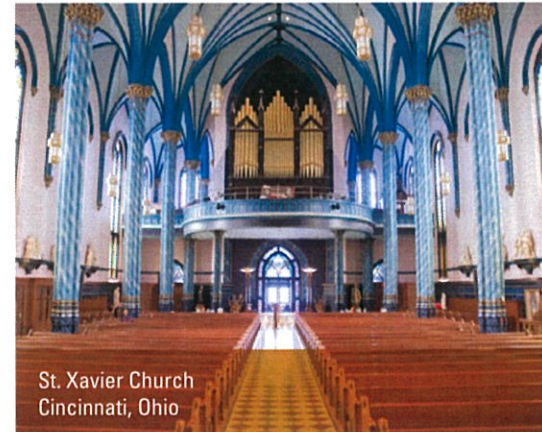
Of all the Stations of the Cross, this one might be the most dehumanizing. It's not just that the soldiers strip Jesus of his clothes to reveal his naked, bloodied body. Or that the soldiers are laughing as they do it. The worst part is that it is being done in a public manner—and all anyone can do is watch.

Throughout history, people have been publicly stripped of their clothes and their dignity in plain sight--whether it be enslaved persons that were stripped of their clothes before being sold like cattle, Jews who were stripped of their clothes before being sent to the gas chamber, children stripped of their clothes for pornography, or the filmed lynchings and shootings of Black lives (to name a few). The greatest sin is not that people in power strip others of their humanity. The greatest sin is that so many of us watch these heinous acts happen and we let ourselves be fooled into believing that we have no power to make a difference.

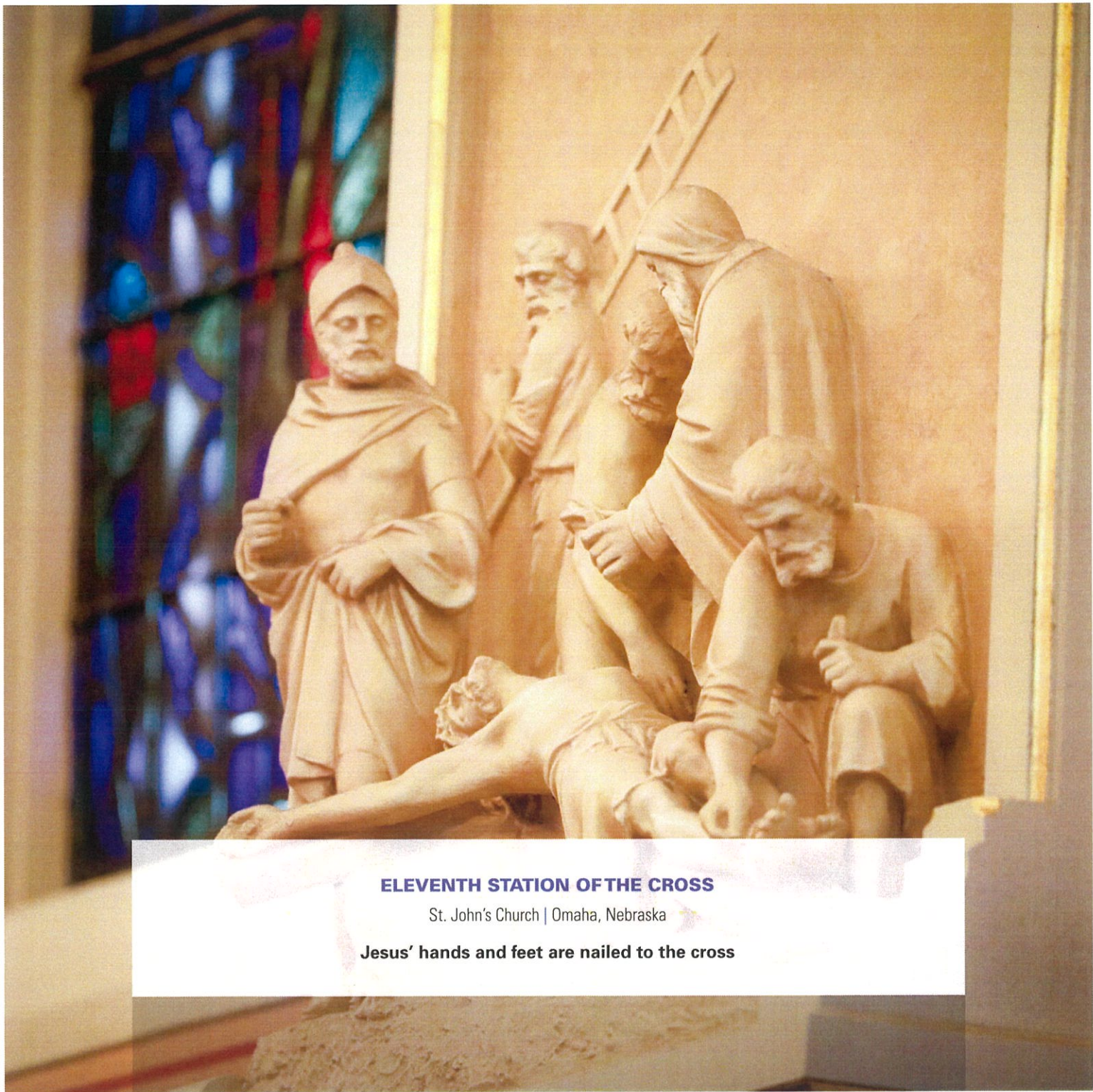
Reflection Questions:

When have I witnessed an individual or group of people being dehumanized by society? How is Jesus inviting me to stand up in solidarity with them?

— Jeff Sullivan, SJ, is spending his year as a transitional deacon serving as a campus minister at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. He will be ordained a priest in June.



St. Xavier Church
Cincinnati, Ohio



ELEVENTH STATION OF THE CROSS

St. John's Church | Omaha, Nebraska

Jesus' hands and feet are nailed to the cross

STATION 11

Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

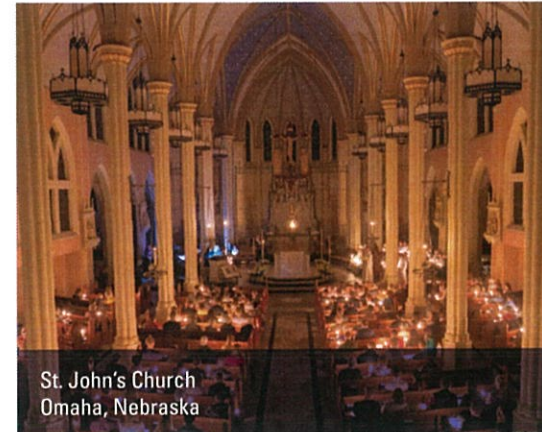
As iron pierces flesh, the son of God is vulnerable and alone. A man who lived life with open arms is readied for death, his welcoming and saving arms spread out onto the cross. Though his family and friends had walked with Jesus in life, they cannot join him on the cross. Those gathered at Calvary could be forgiven for losing hope as they witnessed soldiers driving nails through Jesus. This is the worst possible outcome that they could imagine for their beloved son, friend, teacher, and savior. Perhaps they think, “Where is God?”

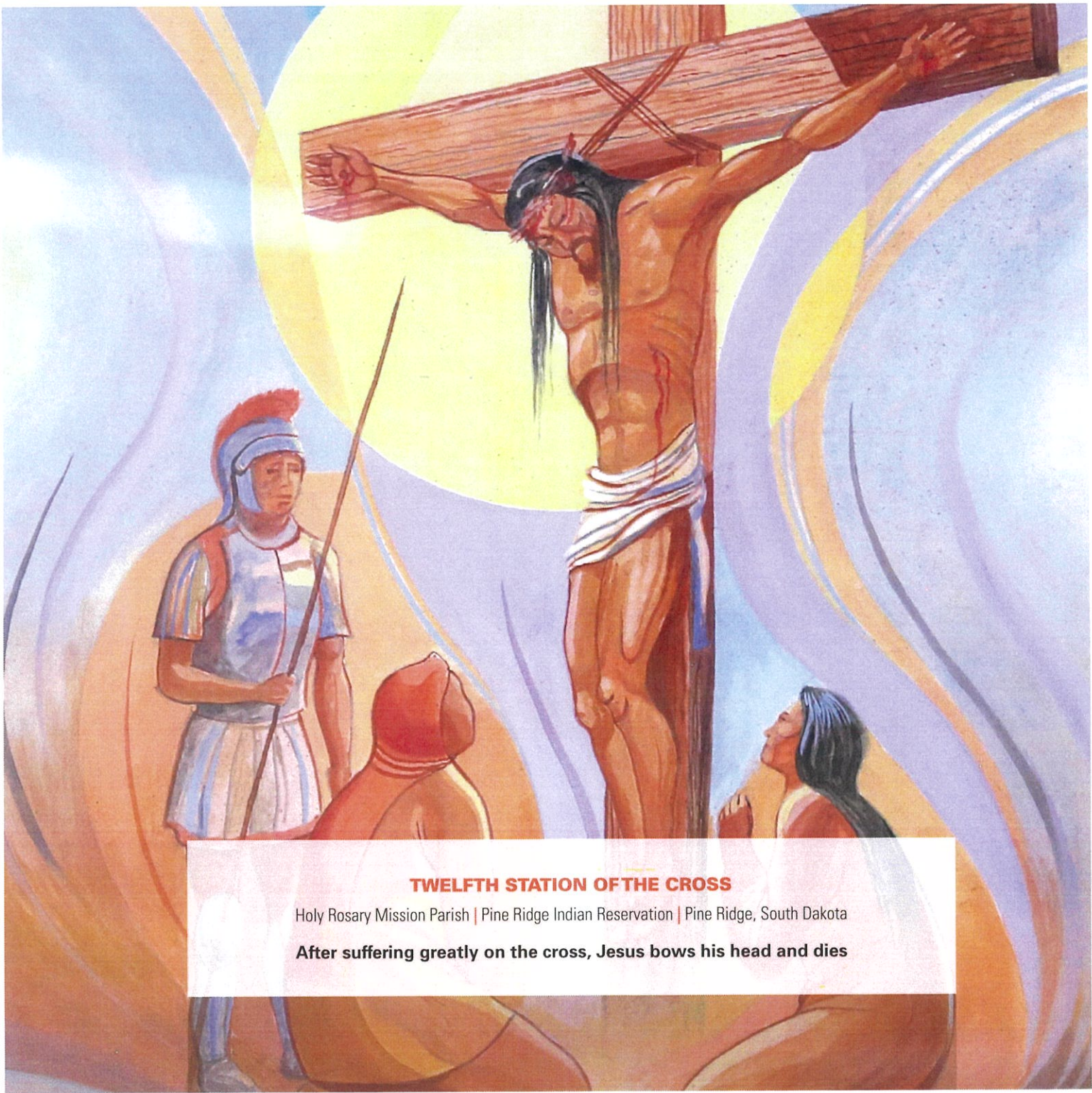
This question echoes in our modern lives. When we experience tragedy and loss, doubt can shake our faith. But God is always found in the same place: on the cross. Jesus suffered for us and remains with us in our own suffering. When we find ourselves in ruin, we should know that we are not there alone.

Reflection Questions:

In times of suffering or loss, what has happened to your faith? How have you experienced Jesus there with you?

— Patrick Bittorf is the vice president of advancement at Christ the King Jesuit College Prep in Chicago.





TWELFTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Holy Rosary Mission Parish | Pine Ridge Indian Reservation | Pine Ridge, South Dakota

After suffering greatly on the cross, Jesus bows his head and dies

STATION 12

Jesus Dies on the Cross

Jesus hung there. A couple of hours passed as he gasped for each new breath, numb, naked, bloody. The crowds looked on – isn't this the prophet? The wonderworker? The man who called disciples and gathered crowds?

He touched the sick and healed them; nails now fix his hands to a cross. His lips spoke challenge or comfort; they now groan and thirst. His eyes looked out with love; they now sag and flutter. He cast out demons; now the demons seem to have their way with him.

He opens his eyes and sees his mother and his beloved disciple. He manages a last word of comfort: "Take care of each other."

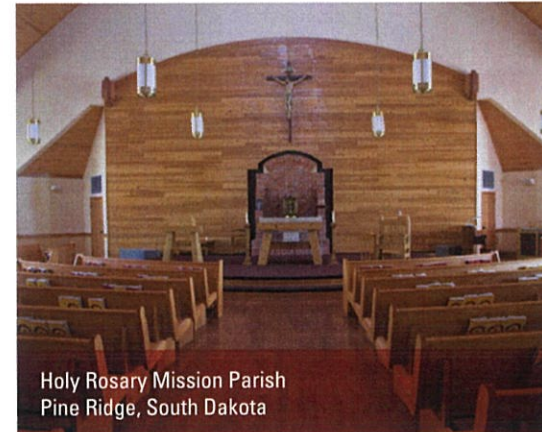
In his last, dying breaths, he gives himself back to his Father: "It's over; into your hands I entrust my spirit."

Most of us don't end our days with such drama. We've done our job; we've lived our festive days and ordinary times.

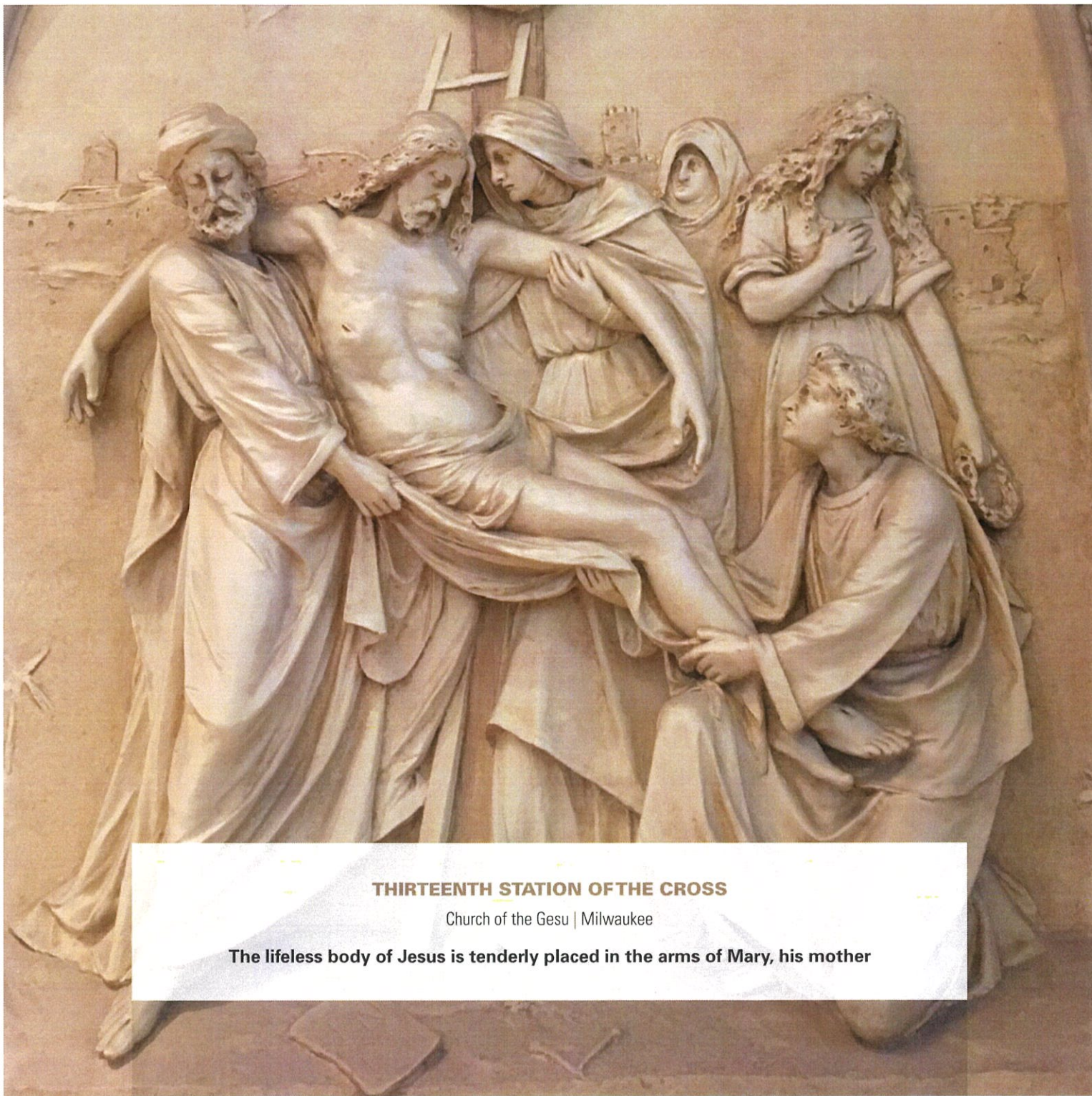
Reflection Questions:

What is the mission the Father has entrusted to you? Can you echo Jesus' words, "It's done"?

— Father Ed Schmidt, SJ, is on the staff of the Center for Mission and Identity at Xavier University, and engages in pastoral ministry at Bellarmine Chapel, both in Cincinnati.



Holy Rosary Mission Parish
Pine Ridge, South Dakota



THIRTEENTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Church of the Gesu | Milwaukee

The lifeless body of Jesus is tenderly placed in the arms of Mary, his mother

STATION 13

Jesus Is Taken down from the Cross

We turn our focus to the physical form of Jesus' body, slumped now, devoid of life, is taken down from the cross by those who must have been his followers. They had hoped in him, imagined him as their future king. We experience the taste of defeat and despair which they surely must have felt.

In that lifeless body which bears the marks of every indignity and shame, we can also see other bodies as well—the murdered victims of racial injustice, the bodies of refugees washed ashore in the Mediterranean, the victims of poverty and homelessness.

Below the cross, we contemplate Mary his mother as she receives the body of her son in her lap and see every mother who mourns the loss of a child, whether to crime, addiction, abuse, or violence.

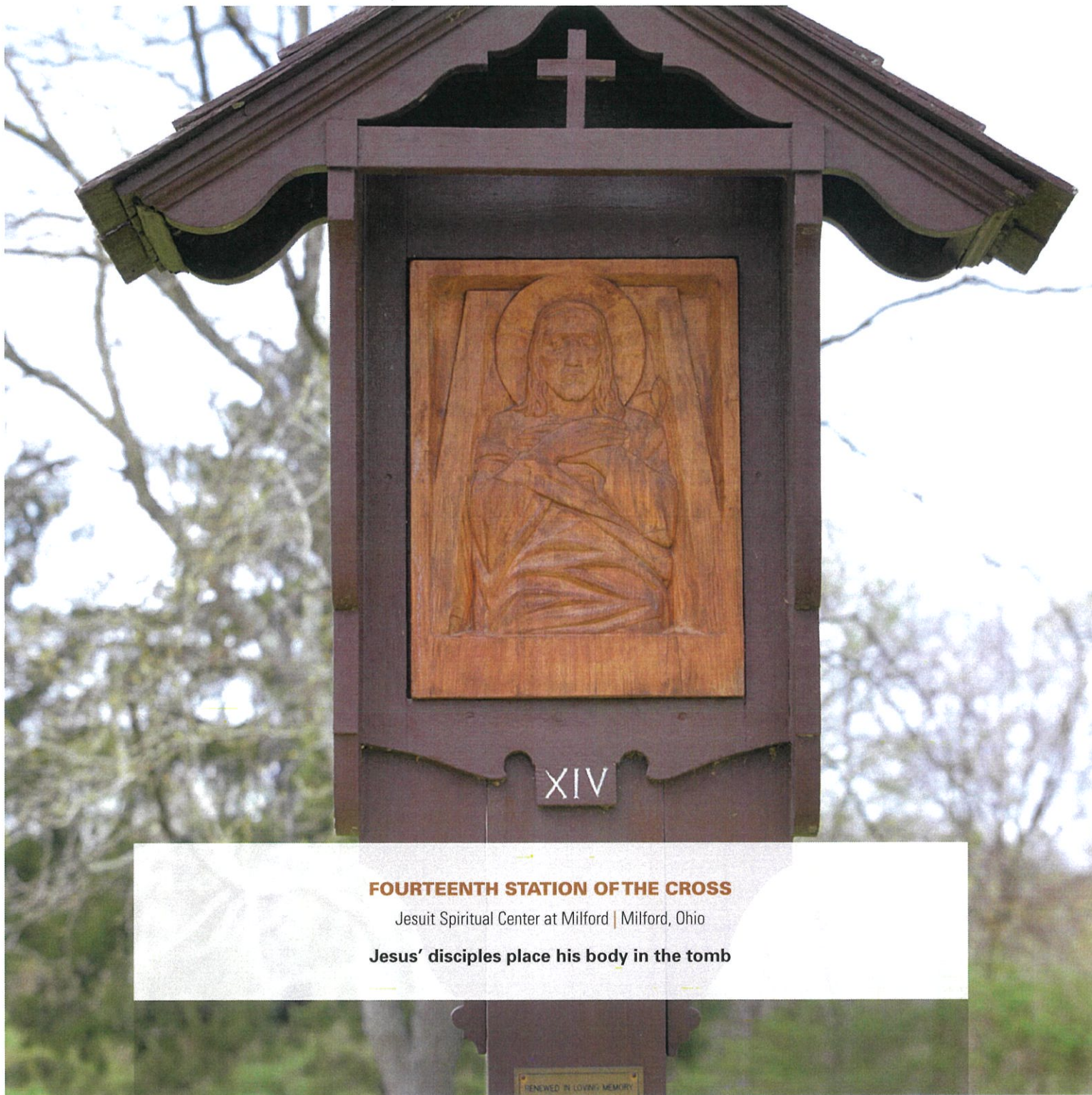


Church of the Gesu
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Reflection Questions:

How can you ensure that you do not turn your eyes away from suffering in your midst? How do you keep our hearts open to feel compassion for all the victims of our human cruelty and neglect?

— Father Gregory Hyde, SJ, is engaged in pastoral ministry at Gesu Parish in University Heights, Ohio.



FOURTEENTH STATION OF THE CROSS

Jesuit Spiritual Center at Milford | Milford, Ohio

Jesus' disciples place his body in the tomb

RENDED IN LOVING MEMORY

STATION 14

Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

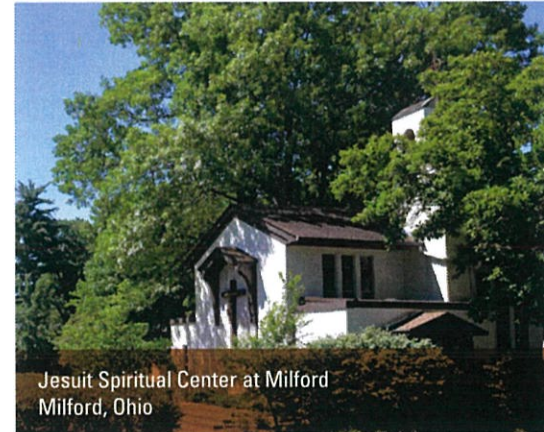
The lifeless body of Jesus now rests in the tomb. At the time, it must have seemed the end of a vision, of a dream, of hope. We, too, have often had to lay our dreams to rest. We have buried family members, friends, classmates, and loved ones. Unfulfilled expectations of success and unrealized accomplishments have left us asking where we went wrong. The current state of our country or Church can also resemble a tomb, with all confidence shattered. Yet, unlike those around Jesus, we know the tomb leads to something greater—to a transformation and a resurrection.

Help us, Jesus, to understand the significance of your time in the tomb, and to appreciate the sacrifice you made, which led us to the resurrection. Help us, as well, to unite our sacrifices to yours, with the understanding that in the end, as in the words of Julian of Norwich, “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

Reflection Questions:

When have you experienced a loss that seemed like an end? How might this time have been a preparation for something new?

— Brother Jim Boynton, SJ, is the interim principal at University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy.



Jesuit Spiritual Center at Milford
Milford, Ohio



Fear and Great Joy

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” This is my message for you.’

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

MATTHEW 28: 1-8

As Christians, we know that Jesus’ death is not the end of the story. We walk with Christ in his pain and death on the Cross, but then we wait in joyful hope for what we know comes next. On Easter, we celebrate his resurrection and his triumph over death. May we who are united with Jesus in his suffering be united with him in the promise of everlasting life.

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