

FABER CENTER

FOR IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

## Holy Week Retreat



April 9-12, 2020

Presenter: Michael Dante, director

## Welcome:

Welcome to this retreat. And, thank you for taking some time to pull up a chair and spend some time with God. Holy Week is a special time for the Christian community. We remember the final days of Jesus's earthly ministry and enter more fully into the Paschal Mystery. This year's Holy Week is especially meaningful as the COVID-19 pandemic is sweeping across the world. Our regular liturgies that allow us to more fully enter the mystery of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are not being publicly celebrated. And, yet, the power these services offer is still present to us. I offer these short reflections to enter the depths of this week and encounter God's transforming love.

In this retreat, I offer a reflection about the day, suggest some scripture passages for your prayer, and provide some questions for journaling. Hopefully, these will provide you the opportunity to reflect more deeply and find solace and hope these days.

Know that I will be keeping you in my thoughts and prayers as you move through these special days.

Peace,  
Michael

## Suggestions for entering a time of prayer:

Begin the prayer period by taking some easy deep breaths and relax your body. Then ask for what you desire, for example, to know and love Jesus more deeply. Next read slowly the scripture passage.

Here are two approaches to explore more deeply how God may be speaking to you.

### *Imaginative Prayer:*

Enter the story. This can happen in several ways, depending on what comes naturally

1. Become actively involved in the story and become one of the characters in it. Whom do you feel most drawn to or identify with in the situation? What does it feel like to be that person? What are your thoughts and reactions throughout the story?
2. Remain yourself in the scene and interact with the characters. Talk to them and ask them questions. Notice your reactions to the answers they give. Move around with them and tell them how you react to their situation.
3. Become a spectator in the story and watch it unfold, as in a movie. Where does the scene take place? What are the people saying and doing? What is the mood of the people involved? How does Jesus respond, what is his attitude? How do people react to Jesus?
4. N.B. Don't be compelled to enter and imagine the text literally. Rather, trust in God's gentle leading and let your imagination take off. It's ok if the story begins to take on a dynamic of its own and "ends" differently from the way it does in the Bible.
5. Next, as you move through this contemplation, pay attention to feelings, insights, and desires that become stirred up in you. Ask the Lord to make you aware of what he wants to show you, what he wants you to know.
6. Finally, consciously gather up your thoughts and then turn to God. Talk to God as a good friend who loves you. Share your thoughts and feelings. Notice how God responds and what conversation follows.

### *Meditative Prayer:*

- Start to notice any words or phrases that stay with you.
- Take each of the words or phrases and think about it. What does it mean? Who said it? What was the speaker feeling? To whom was it addressed?
- Then, think about what all this means to you: to your personal history, your life, your job, yourself.
- Finally, consciously gather up your thoughts and then turn to God. Talk to God as a good friend who loves you. Share your thoughts and feelings. Notice how God responds and what conversation follows.

## Review of Prayer:

Afterwards, it is important to review your prayer and journal. Notice any of your insights, stirrings within your heart, any energy, memories, or movements within you. The work of the Holy Spirit is at work; it is just a matter of paying attention to what is happening. Take some time to write down what happened, what you felt, who you spoke with, did your mode change during the prayer, what made you uncomfortable, etc.

Holy Thursday  
“People of the Table and of the Towel”

Reflection:

Maundy or Holy Thursday has been a special liturgy for me. Hearing and reenacting the washing of the feet speaks to the deep love Jesus has for us. For me, a person nearly blind, the foot washing has a unique appeal. I recall those times when my feet were washed. I still can feel the warm water, the hands of the person rubbing them, and the softness of the towel patting them dry and sometimes a kiss on the top of my foot. Or, when I was the one washing, I recall the many feet I washed and dried. They were large and small, smooth and rough. Each was connected to a person with their own story and the miles those feet had traveled. Footwashing is a very physical, tactile, vulnerable, and privileged place to share with another person. Yet, this year, this ritual will not be publicly celebrated. Consequently, I feel a sense of loss and sadness. And yet, Jesus’ invitation still calls us to wash each other’s feet. How? In a time of social distancing and limited human touch, how can we live this invitation?

In a similar way, hearing the stories of Jesus sharing a final meal with his friends has been a source of comfort to me. Jesus knew his death was approaching, and his friends also sensed something ominous was at hand. In their own time of fear and anxiety, they gathered to celebrate the Passover. During this meal, Jesus wanted to give his friends a gift by which they could still remember and remain in relationship with him, the breaking and eating of the bread and blessing and drinking of the wine. He gave them the gift of himself. Yet, in our current time, we do not gather with friends. Restaurants and dining halls are closed. Stay at home orders are in effect. Gathering with friends in our time of need seems nearly impossible.

Yet, as I take all this into prayer, Jesus’ invitation to be a person of the table and of the towel still rings true to my heart. I may not have the rituals to celebrate it and yet, how can I live it today? For me, I may not be washing feet, and yet I am focusing more on the miles and journeys walked by the people I accompany. Being present to their stories and hearing them with reverence is one way I am trying to respond. Who knows how our prayer may bring forward other ways. We may become more aware of the hungry in our city. St. Ben’s meal program is still in need of food. Marquette’s backpack program is still feeding the hungry. The elderly in nursing homes may find a letter from a caring stranger a source of comfort. So, this day, I invite you to ponder how can each of us be a person of the table and of the towel.

Scripture Passages for Prayer:

Jn 13:1-11 – Jesus washes the disciples’ feet  
Lk 22:7-23- The Last Supper

Questions for Reflection and Journaling:

- ✚ Whose feet need to be washed in your life today?
- ✚ Who are the hungry in your community that need to be fed?
- ✚ In what ways can you be a person of the table and of the towel?



Good Friday  
"The Way of the Cross"

Reflection:

Fear. Loss. Death. The COVID-19 experience feels like a huge boulder dropping into a lake. It hits me heavy and hard. It goes down deep, and it stirs much up within me. Fear, loss, and death all seem so very close right now and are so closely linked with Good Friday. These experiences are right here at Marquette and shared by millions across the globe.

Fear is palpable to me. I am unable to see faces where it is often expressed, yet, I feel it hanging in the air like a specter overhead. Scores of people hoarding food and toilet paper speak to this deeper fear sweeping across our country. I hear news reports about where the virus has spread to next. I hear tales of healthcare workers risking their lives as they try to respond to this pandemic. I hear stories of parents fearful about their children and children fearful about their at-risk parents. This invisible and omnipresent virus leaves many of us feeling vulnerable and afraid.

There is a poignant sense of loss. The residence hall my wife and I live in is eerily quiet. I miss the sounds of students laughing in the common spaces. I miss our campus being so vibrant with life and energy. When I walk through Central Mall, it seems like a ghost town. I feel the loss of normalcy. The regular rhythms of activities, people, tasks have been taken away. I hear from seniors and those leaving the residence hall that this is not the spring they wanted or imagined. Happy times and making memories with friends are not happening the way they and many of us with special events planned wanted. I hear stories of faculty and staff missing the in-person contact with students coupled with the struggles to work in a virtual reality. I hear the stress of different administrators as they scramble to cover the financial losses and still take care of people.

Death seems so close at hand. As the death toll rises, I feel the heaviness of those left to mourn. I know people that have lost friends and family due to the virus. The stories of mass graves send a shudder down my spine. The death of people and fear of death is heightened at this time. For many of us we are becoming acutely aware of our mortality.

And here it is today, Good Friday. As a people of faith, we attend to fear, loss, and death as we accompany Jesus to the cross and his own death. At times like these, all we can do is bring all our experiences to the foot of the cross and share them with the man of sorrows who knows suffering and death. We can find the courage to lament and grieve over a heartbroken people in a heartbroken world. The COVID-19 virus for many people is a Good Friday moment. In it, Jesus invites us to accompany him, to enter that quiet stillness. He calls us to be with him to listen to the pain around us and look squarely into the mystery of suffering in the world. This is an uncomfortable experience for many, and yet we are not alone. As we make this journey to the heart of death, we are choosing to live by being fully present to today's reality.

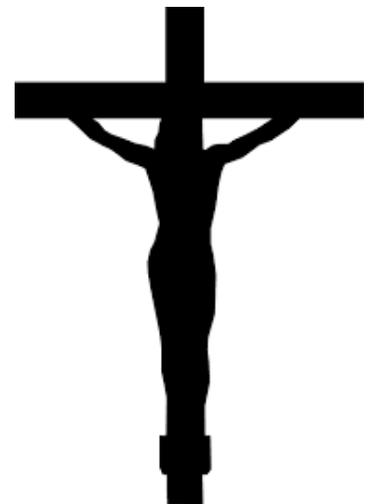
Scripture Passages for Prayer:

Mk 14:32-42 – The Agony in the Garden

Lk 23:26-49- The Way of the Cross

Question for Reflection and Journaling:

- ✚ In what ways are we becoming aware of our mortality? How does this awareness influence us now?
- ✚ What losses are we facing now? How are we grieving them today?
- ✚ What messages do our fear and anxiety communicate to us?



Holy Saturday  
“Waiting in the Unknown”

Reflection:

In *Frozen II*, one of the main characters, Elsa, sings her song about venturing into the unknown. It is both beautiful and haunting. It speaks about the uncomfortability of going into unfamiliar places. The small child in me keeps hoping for the Disney happy ending and the ending of this surreal reality. Alas. Elsa’s 2-hour adventure is not quite the world we live in today.

Uncertainty and anxiety seem to be catch phrases for what many people at Marquette are experiencing. I hear the anxiety of students about having to complete 18-credits online. Some are overwhelmed with the volume of e-mails they are now receiving and are not sure how to focus in a virtual learning environment. Other students are unsure about what post-graduation life will be. I hear from staff concerned about being paid. Their work is highly student or customer based, and the stay-at-home order means their work is not happening. I sense the concerns about the fall class enrollment. As a tuition-based school, the uncertainty of students coming also bring financial uncertainty. The uncertainty of how to plan the type of classes and residence experience for the summer and fall terms in this ever-changing reality is a huge stressor for the institution.

Uncertainty and anxiety are present in so many other places in our world. For example, it is acutely present in our healthcare arena. Doctors, nurses, and other first responders are constantly at risk for exposure, burnout, and PTSD. This jeopardizes themselves and their loved ones. I heard stories on the news that nearly 20% of the Detroit police force was exposed to the coronavirus. I hear reports of how hospitals are frantically responding to have enough staff, respirators, and protective gear. Many businesses have closed or have reduced hours. People are being laid off and seeking assistance. People are anxious about bills to be paid and pending mortgage payments. The larger economic slowdown and market variability leave many anxious. The anxiety of losing control of things we used to do is leaving many of us adrift, trying to find our bearings. Indeed, the world we are now living in has a huge amount of uncertainty injected into it. It may have already been there, and yet the COVID-19 virus seems to have removed any illusions we might have clung to.

Holy Saturday is a day that recognizes waiting, incompleteness, and suspense are part of the Christian experience. These feelings also are welcomed and have a time to be tended to. The brutality of the crucifixion has ended. Jesus’ body is buried, and the stone has been rolled before the cave. The ministry Jesus so actively pursued seems over. The women sit at the grave, not sure what to do. The disciples gather in the Upper Room, unsure what the future brings. All Jesus’ preaching about the Kingdom seems so far away and unattainable. They have lost their friend, their leader, their way. At a deeper level all creation was holding its breath with the death of God. Where was the world going? Is death and despair the final answer and end of our existence. The disciples’ time of suspense reminds ME of my own time of temporary of total blindness. I was physically in the dark, seeing nothing. I wondered what would happen next. Would any of my vision return? This day invites us to enter our own places of darkness, emptiness, the grave. We are called to simply be there. As we dwell in the suspense of nothingness, we become open to something even greater than we can imagine. It takes courage and surrender to go there. This is the invitation of Holy Saturday: to follow the examples of our ancestors in faith that went there before us.

Scripture Passages for Prayer:

Mt 27:57-61 – The Women Before the Tomb

Question for Reflection and Journaling:

- ✚ What distracts us from sitting in front of the tomb?
- ✚ How might God be speaking to and through our feelings of uncertainty?
- ✚ What places of emptiness in us or in our world are we being called to enter and simply remain waiting there?



Easter Sunday  
*“Life in the Midst of Death”*

Reflection:

Our niece turned 7-years old a few days ago. During our birthday check-in she was so excited to talk about her two cakes and all the fun she was having that day. Her younger brother, age 3, found a dead beetle during the call and shouted for Uncle Michael to come over and play with him. I smile in the memory of their joy. I have had various MiSTeams meetings where the sounds of laughing (and sometimes squabbling) children filled the background. Sometimes the family dog makes a spontaneous visit just to say “hi” and seek some attention. Speaking of pets, we are now the foster parents of a tropical fish! As I walk the Marquette mile, I have started hearing the songs of various songbirds filling the air and have felt the warm sun on my face. My heart is consoled as I call to mind the numerous Zooms and phone calls I have had these past few weeks with friends, who like many of us, are also confined to home. I recall a poignant conversation my wife and I had with a friend who overcame COVID-19. She is still weak and tired from the illness and yet survived. Life even during death remains.

I have heard stories in the news of acts of heroism. For example, a priest surrendered his respirator for a younger patient. Or, how people in Assisi sang to each other to bolster one another’s spirits. I have been touched by the neighbors of my parents who have been looking after them. Even here on campus, people are sharing poetry, Teams sights for inspiration and conversation, and more technically savvy faculty have been helping their colleagues navigate the virtual classroom. I have been present as ResLife staff and volunteers have shown such compassion to our students during the move out process, even packing up a student’s belonging while face-timing with them. Life and compassion continue to be present during sorrow and uncertainty.

Even at a deeper level, I hear and am hopeful of the opportunities this COVID-19 reality has created. For some people, it is bringing forward the space to ponder what their purpose in life is. As people become more aware of how fragile life can be, they are exploring what their true priorities are. Also, a gradual awareness of our collective humanity is emerging. We are all human beings, and we are all sharing this pandemic experience. This global awareness of our shared humanity which transcends countries has transformative possibilities in how we as a species want to live together on planet earth.

As the Christian community celebrates Easter Sunday, we are encountering Jesus risen who returns to console and comfort his friends. He calls Mary Magdalen by name. He walks with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He enters the Upper Room where the fearful disciples have gathered. He returns to comfort and bring new life. He invites us to share in this same ministry, to console those suffering and be a source of hope and new life. It is important to notice those small ways we have encountered the risen Jesus for they attune us to his dynamic presence. This new way of noticing then becomes the lens by which we view life. We gradually become people of the resurrection and thereby share in the risen Christ’s ministry of consoling and bringing life. This is truly Easter.

Scripture Passages for Prayer:

Jn 20:11-18 – The Appearance to Mary Magdalen

Jn 20:19-23 – The Appearance in the Upper Room

Questions for Reflection and Journaling:

- ✚ How have you been consoled and comforted these past few weeks? Whom have you consoled?
- ✚ When have you recognized life during death?
- ✚ How has your self-awareness expanded and your priorities been clarified during this time?

