

Knit Together

in community and prayer

Newsletter for the Province of Asia-Pacific

Third Order, Society of Saint Francis

www.tssf.org.au

Easter 2025

50+ noviced and at least 13 professed in PNG

**Mandy Wheatley
Provincial Minister**

Easter greetings sisters and brothers!

We are a penitential Order of Franciscans, and we remember that on our Easter journey we have God's joy travelling with us as our companion.

Through Lent we are asked to give something away and take something up for the sake of knowing Jesus' joy and pain as our Saviour, Lord and friend.

As a penitential Order, many of us will give away worldly habits which damage our relationship with God.

Many others will take up a cause in the name of God's justice and mercy; such as helping out as a volunteer for a food kitchen or writing letters to represent the voices of victims of injustice.

My Lenten practice this year has been to spend 14 days in PNG, bringing the love of Christ to the Franciscan Third Order sisters and brothers in three regions: Popondetta, Alotau and Goroka.

Some have travelled by foot for four days and three nights, crossing crocodile infested rivers, sleeping on the ground in the bush and walking along beaches from Ambasi to Popondetta.

We have visited remote parishes (on unbelievably boggy roads) to witness professions and admissions to the noviciate.

25 Novices in one area, 25 in another – and more to come!

So far there have been 13 professed. Many will immediately become Novice



*Welcome to Martyrs
School Chaplains House*

Counsellors to family members and friends in the village or church.

Our order is growing fast here as people search for meaning and hope. Seekers (Enquirers) are counted in their scores in some deaneries.

Everyone here sends you their love, and they are working very hard, with few resources, showing initiative and determination to pray, study and work to honour the name of St Francis.

Your prayers and love are absolutely felt by us all, as we know we are surrounded by God's love and yours.

Rita Simeni and I have moved through a totally different culture where there are huge differences in spiritual, physical, language and educational understanding than I am used to.

We encounter people who do and others who don't share in the humility, love and joy of living simply in God's presence, and sharing that love with others.

Sometimes they are within the Order as well as outside. Your prayers are appreciated very much as my prayer life continues to grow.

With the First Order (SSF) and Melanesian Brothers, (MBH) we have attended the opening of the new Chaplains house, at Martyr's School in Popondetta.

Rita and I met and shared time with the new Bishop of Dogura, Bishop John Dubabagi, in Alotau.

We have attended Regional meetings under mango trees, in chapels and churches.

We have been fed and prayed for and loved.

This is what we are called to do in St Francis – to share with others the love of Christ. May you be blessed in doing so wherever God has planted you.

In love, peace and goodwill,

Mandy and Rita



Brother Chris at the Martyrs School Chaplains House



*Left: Walking to the Martyrs School Chaplains House
Below: Warm welcome with Sisters Beverley, Edna, Anne and Nita with Novice at Community of the Sisters of the Visitation of Our Lady (CVL)*



Conference update

The Asia-Pacific Conference, One Province, Many Voices, Deep Listening, is to be held from Thursday 21st – Sunday 24th August at the Jesuit Retreat Centre, Sevenhill, in the Clare Valley, SA.

Sixty souls will have the opportunity to learn, celebrate, create, pray and worship together, and share our Franciscan stories, in the beautiful Ignatian Retreat Centre.

Some will be staying in accommodation in nearby Clare and will be transported to and from the Retreat Centre by minibus and by members who will be taking their own cars and are willing to carpool.

International visitors include:

Bala (Shanthi Balasundaram) – Colombo, Sri Lanka
Rachel Selvaraj – Kandy, Sri Lanka
Hyeran Helena Yang – Korea, Seoul
Kyongok Monica Park – Korea, Busan
Michael Twum-Darko – South Africa (Minister General)
Mary-Anne Twum-Darko – South Africa
Peter Bargh – New Zealand (Provincial Minister Pacific)

Keynote Speakers:

Bishop Chris McLeod – on the Voices of our First Nations People
Brother Christopher John SSF – on the Voice of Sister Mother Earth

Workshops:

- *Dadirri (Deep Listening)* – Bishop Chris McLeod
- *Grounded: in Christ, in reality, on the Earth* – Jan Down
- *Listening to the Voice of our Heart* – Cath Connolly, Spiritual Director and Harpist
- *Holy Listening* – Colin Valentine
- *Praying with Anglican Prayer Beads* – Mandy Wheatley (participants will have the opportunity to make an Anglican Rosary)
- *Icons and Art* – Sisters Sue, Cheryl and Catherine of the Community of Saints Barnabas and Cecilia (CSBC)
- *The Voices of St Trinian's of Mount Elsewhere* – Jeannie Minnis

Please contribute prayers, poetry, writing, artworks, anything that reflects the conference theme: One Province, Many Voices, Deep Listening.

Contact Jeannie Minnis 0427 478 069 or by email if you require exhibition space at the Conference, and forward contributions for printing to Jeannie Minnis jminnis4@gmail.com by July 1.

One Province, Many Voices



Deep Listening

Lifelong Formation Coordinator needed

Sally Buckley tsssf

Since at least 2011 the worldwide Order at IPTOC level has been considering how to encourage Tertiaries to continue their formation post profession.

The question was revisited at the 2017 IPTOC and a Task Force formed to explore it across the five Provinces.

In 2017 I was appointed Assistant Provincial Minister, and in 2019 our then Provincial Minister, Godfrey Fryar, asked me to represent the Province on the IPTOC Task Force.

Our work then was mainly brainstorming and putting together a report for IPTOC in 2023 on what Lifelong Formation might look like and the importance of a) one size *does not* fit all, and b) taking into consideration cultural, societal and educational norms for each Tertiary.

With the great diversity in our own Province this last has been a very important point.

After IPTOC in 2023, my time as Assistant Provincial Minister ended and Lyn Lord took my place as the Lifelong Formation Coordinator.

I am still facilitating the Task Force Zoom meetings every two or three months due to the fact that I have a licence. Both Lyn and I are now ready to step down, so a new Coordinator is needed.

We are sending a call out to anyone who might be interested in heading the Lifelong Formation in our Province. The Coordinator would:

- find and share resources with area groups, regions or even individuals;
- encourage us all in ongoing formation;
- join in inter-provincial meetings with other Coordinators, sharing ideas and resources (about four times per year); and
- report to Chapter.

I feel I have been very blessed during the five or so years I have been a member of the Task Force with the contacts I have made across the worldwide Order.

I hope that this might appeal to someone as a great way to serve the Third Order in our Province.

For further information, please contact me or Lyn; and if you are interested in the position, please contact our Provincial Minister, Mandy.



A retreat at Glasshampton Monastery

Max Wu

Novice, Hong Kong area

In accordance with my personal Rule of Life, I went on retreat at Glasshampton Monastery, Worcestershire, West Midlands, UK in November 2024. When planning, I reminded myself that the trip had to be of substantial meaning, something like going on a pilgrimage. This was the first time I had been for a retreat overseas.

Although I am an Asian, I have watched a lot of movies that feature the environment and life in monasteries. I have a great interest in getting a feel for monastic life in Europe.

I started off from London with a three-hour train ride to Worcestershire. It was already 3pm when I got there. The next bus for my destination was not for another two hours and it was getting dark. I decided on the taxi.

Thankfully, I came across a particularly friendly taxi driver. We chatted along the way and he promised to pick me up again. I was thankful for that.

Brother Michael was at the door to greet me. He gave me a guided tour of the whole monastery. I joined in the prayer routine right away. There were four daily offices: Lauds, Sext, Vesper and Compline, with Eucharist after Lauds. There was private prayer time after each office, when everyone sat in silence in front of the tabernacle. I enjoyed these periods of silent prayer, very similar to the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in Roman Catholic Churches where I came from. In the hours of darkness, when there was only one candle beside the tabernacle, the feeling of the presence of God, my own stillness and the peace in my heart were particularly intense.

This is a silent meditation monastery. There is very little conversation. The friars gave me a warm and friendly reception by exchanging eye-contact as often as we could. During meal times, friendliness is exchanged through the passing of food, salt and pepper. I realised all the more that the expression of friendliness does not necessarily require speech. With sincerity, love could be expressed through gestures. I think this is what Blessed Father Francis meant by purity of heart and brotherly love.

I experienced tranquility and peace throughout the retreat and



*Max Wu at
Glasshampton
Monastery, UK*

Paths to God – a taster

Anne Kotze tssf

I have always liked the idea of pilgrimage. Pilgrims have an aim and are never static. They move forwards.

‘I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.’ (Isaiah 48:17)

Christianity is a never-ending pilgrimage and perhaps for this reason, the early Christians were referred to as the people of the Way.

‘Saul went to the High Priest and asked him for letters to the Synagogues in Damascus so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.’ (Acts 9:2)

I find that for me there are five roads which lead to God:

1. The Emmaus Road – the way of the scriptures and the sacraments
2. The Jericho Road – the way of service
3. The Damascus Road – conversion
4. The Tabor Road – seeing God in beauty
5. The Jerusalem Road – the Via Dolorosa, the way of the cross

Anne Kotze’s exploration of the Five Paths to God can be found in the online pages of Knit Together. If you would like a printed copy sent to you, please email the editor: jeidown@protonmail.com



Anne Kotze at a TSSF fellowship meeting in December 2024. Anne is due to turn 100 on 2nd April.

A retreat at Glasshampton Monastery (cont.)

decided I would try to integrate the monastic Offices of the Hour and Compline into my daily life when I returned to Hong Kong. As I have a busy daily schedule, this would be a challenge.

There was one thing about the monastery that bothered me though, and that was the presence of a lot of insects. There were spiders which I dreaded, and two of them, huge ones, which I found in my room, kept me awake the whole night. This made me think about how to emulate Blessed Father Francis who is the patron saint of all created beings, spiders included. Some work on my part seems to be required.

On the last day of my retreat, after Eucharist and lunch, the taxi came. The driver continued to be chatty. He is Pakistani, married to an English wife and he has been living in the UK for 30 years. His family is Muslim. This driver and I became friends, which made me recall the story of Blessed Father Francis’ encounter with the Muslim sultan. The driver said that he found Christian friendliness in me. That made me realize more deeply Father Francis’ notion that our love for all people could be expressed across different belief systems.

I thank God for leading me to this retreat. I thank the Friars who received me and I thank the taxi driver for his service and friendship. I hope to go back there, or to other SSF monasteries for retreats and learning in the days to come.

Vale Winston Svenson tssf

18/1/1943 – 17/2/2025

Excerpts from a eulogy composed by Winston himself and edited by his family.

Winston's love of Jesus was evident early and he remained an active member of Christian families and organisations throughout his life.

From 1979 to 1983 he was the Principal of the Language and Business School of Australia where he taught English, History, Economics, Bookkeeping and English as a Second Language.

He was Principal of the Dalby Christian School from 1984 to 1988 where he established a pre-school and boarding school and extended high school into Grades 11 and 12.

During this time he was a member of (among other bodies) the Christian Uni Task Force Committee that led to the establishment of a Christian Uni in Brisbane, which was the first in Australia.

In December 1988 he resigned from the school to further his theological studies and his voluntary church and community work in St John's Anglican Church, Dalby and Blue Nurses Association. He taught RE in various Dalby District Schools, helped with church services and pastoral work and was appointed as a Lay Assistant.

In 1990 Winston was off on another adventure through the Anglican Board of Mission, to Martyr's Memorial School near the Kokoda Trail in Popondetta, PNG. He was initially appointed Acting Principal, becoming Principal a year later.

Winston was ordained an honorary deacon in 1992 by Bishop Walter, and became the School Chaplain. Further (external) theological studies followed in 1993–4. Winston was a volunteer worker for the Anglican Church of PNG in Popondetta, where he assisted the Diocesan Engineer on building projects. He preached and led services for the Franciscan Brothers and Sisters of the Visitation in their chapel.

At the end of 1994, Winston left PNG to return home to Nambour, where he became a regular member of the Nambour Parish.

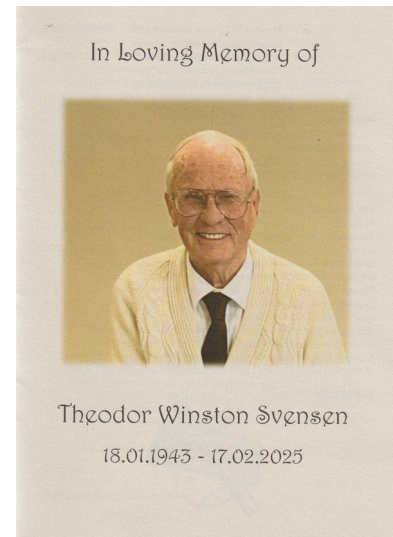
In 1995 Winston taught part-time at Caloundra Christian School which he enjoyed. The Principal there had just returned from teaching in China. He had been invited to go back, but wasn't able to, so Winston took up his invitation to go instead.

He then taught English to Chinese students in high schools and at the Sichuan International Studies University. Winston was asked to write a detailed course for future English teachers which is still being used today.

All schools were Communist controlled and Christians went to underground meetings. However, Winston would talk to students during lunch breaks about the Christian message and some became Christians.

A big part of Winston's spirituality has been through his involvement with the Franciscan Brothers. For years he held meetings at his home where Father James often came and led the Holy Communion service.

Up until recently Winston read the gospel and helped with the sacraments. Archbishop Jeremy granted him an Archbishop's Certificate.



Caring for our bodies:

The first step in caring for creation

Gemma Le Mesurier tssf

As Christians, and specifically Franciscans, the imperative to care – for the earth, for the climate, for the poor, for the sick, for the persecuted – is always before us.

Of course, all of these demands are too great for any one of us. The task before us can be daunting, overwhelming and relentless, especially if our efforts yield little measurable result. We can recycle, plant natives, support World Wildlife Fund, write to council, buy nothing new, turn off lights, avoid all single-use plastics, buy organic, and still temperatures increase and biodiversity decreases.

Our efforts to be better and do better and care better are important, but swimming upstream can be exhausting. The temptation, for me at least, is to succumb to the sense of overwhelm, and stick my head in the sand for a while. Unfortunately, for me, that often means indulging in sweets – reaching for the biscuits is my first impulse when I am stressed – and looking for other easy distractions, like binge-watching sitcoms, or scrolling on my phone, or both at once. It's not a noble picture, but sometimes it's hard to know what else to do when all your efforts make you feel like Sisyphus pushing that boulder up a hill over and over again.

This is a problem, and I am sure not only for me. With the needs of the world and of others being so great, it can be easy to overlook that we have been entrusted with one piece of creation that is truly ours to maintain – our own bodies. And this piece of creation that we inhabit is the foundation from which we are able to extend our love and service to the rest of creation. So it is necessary to care for ourselves.

St Francis, in his early life, took austerity to extremes. He subjected his body to physical deprivation and suffering. He believed that such mortification would bring him closer to God. At the end of his life, he came to recognise the error, and he apologised to his body, 'Brother Ass', for the way he had neglected and mistreated it. The body, like all creation, is a sacred gift to be treated with care and respect.

We often feel the pressure to act, to advocate, and to respond to the needs of the world, but without proper attention to our own physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, we risk burning out or becoming ineffective in our efforts. As the saying goes, 'you can't pour from an empty cup'.

Not coincidentally, the best way to care for ourselves is often to get rid of the processed food and start eating food as it was created, and to get off the screens and to get out into creation. Because it is not just us caring for creation, but creation caring for us right back.



Brother Ass

Could you write for this page on care for creation in crisis? I suggest about 350 words plus a photo if possible (at least 1MB please). Thank you!

Due-date for next issue:

1st July 2025

Please send to:

jeidown@protonmail.com

Paths to God

Anne Kotze

(cont. from page 6)

1. The Emmaus Road

Read: Luke 24:13-35

This is our first road – the Way of the Scriptures and the Sacraments.

These men on the Emmaus Road had been powerfully attracted and influenced by the personality of Jesus but this had never been linked in their minds with the five great Messianic Prophecies in the Scriptures. If they had they would surely not have said, ‘We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.’

The prophecies were:

1. Who? Isaiah 9:5 – David’s line
2. How long? 2 Samuel 7:16 – reign for ever
3. Where? Micah 5:2 – born in Bethlehem
4. From? Isaiah 7:14 – a virgin
5. When? Daniel 9: 25 – the exact date He would be born.

So during our pilgrimage towards God we will find signposts and milestones in the Bible. Daily Bible-reading is part of our Rule, of course, and its teaching is profound. It is amazing how passages read and re-read can suddenly bring us a new revelation and a new understanding. The two men said, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us and opened the Scriptures to us.’

But it wasn’t even the way Jesus explained the Scriptures on the Emmaus Road which opened their eyes so that they recognised Him. It was the Sacrament... He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them. Then they recognised the Lord and so do we.

He is present in a special way in the Eucharist, Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Marriage, Holy Unction and Ordination. It is easy to lose sight of Him at some of these events but as tertiaries we have a special role to play by being deeply aware of His active presence.

There are three more things we should learn from those men at Emmaus:

1. They were prepared to share their bewilderment and their lack of understanding with Jesus.
2. They were prepared to listen as He taught them.
3. They wanted to share their supper and night’s lodging with this stranger whom they had not yet recognised.



*Path to The Abbey,
Gippsland*

2. The Jericho Road

Read Luke 10:25-37

The Jericho Road is the way of service. It is not very far from Jerusalem to Jericho but the road is dusty, very hot and enclosed by dry hills – a perfect place for an ambush. Both the man who was attacked and the Samaritan were travelling alone – unwise because of the bands of robbers living in caves in the limestone hills who found single travellers an easy target. The Jewish man was left, robbed of all that he had, naked and half dead.

Along came other travellers on the Jericho Road. First came a priest. If he touched the man and the man died the priest would be defiled and ritually unclean. He would need to go through a series of cleansing rituals before he could perform his priestly functions again, and so through pride, selfishness or laziness he went to the other side of the road so that he need not even come close to the victim.

The Levite represented the Law, the great Law of the God of the Old Testament. These were the people who reduced God's Law of Love to humanity's picky concern with tiny details, the Law being in their eyes more important than the person. He did not feel any compulsion to help the wounded man, no compassion for a man in dire trouble because this was a Samaritan and so beyond the pale. It needed Jesus to teach the world that Love can break all human-made rules.

The Jericho Road is the road of service – the way of giving of ourselves, our time, our money if we have it, our concern and our prayers. We should always remember that this last is perhaps the greatest service of all because it will give us the wisdom we need to give the rest of our service.

The Samaritan did not say to the Innkeeper, 'There is a poor chap on the road who is badly injured and needs help.' In the story he 'put him on his own donkey, took him to the inn and took care of him.'

On the road of service we recognise Christ in everyone we meet and then it is our joy to serve them. Mother Teresa of Calcutta says: 'My secret is quite simple. I pray and through my prayer I become one in love with Christ: and praying to Him is to love Him and that means to fulfil His words and His will.' Her joy is to recognise Christ in whoever she serves. She treats everyone with the loving reverence she would feel were it Christ Himself whom, dirty and dying, she rescues from the Calcutta gutter.

Our Lord shows us this way by serving us, by being our Healer, our Shepherd, our Teacher, our High-priest, our Advocate. 'I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go: I will counsel you and watch over you.' Psalm 32:8

It was when Francis held the leper in his arms that he realised he was holding Christ. Then he went to live with the lepers, washing their wounds, and feeding them with his own hands. He used to refer to himself and his followers as 'servants of God' and that is all he ever wanted to be because the servant of God is the servant of all. Service with love is a fail-proof way to draw nearer to God and to understand His teaching.

Walking the road of service is not easy. We may not choose to serve only the sweet-natured person. We must serve the awkward and the

unlovely. And – the other side of the coin – we should be ready to be served by others and this takes patience and humility. Once again looking to Jesus as our example we know He was served by Martha in her home; by Peter's mother-in-law who got up from her bed 'and began to wait on Him'; by Mary Magdalene who anointed Him, of whom Jesus said 'she has done a beautiful thing for me', and by Simon of Cyrene who helped to carry His cross.

3. The Damascus Road

Read Acts 9:1-19

Our third road is the Damascus Road – Conversion.

Saul's is perhaps the most dramatic conversion of all time. He was trained as a Pharisee and a Rabbi by Gamaliel, a great teacher in Jerusalem. His whole life he had been straining to be the perfect Jew, to live up to the tremendous demands of this Jewish Law which had over 500 rules and regulations.

Conversion may be a gradual process and not like Saul's thunder and lightning. We may have been followers of our Lord for years but then one day we don't just hope – we believe.

It takes a lot of courage to go down the Damascus Road. We are asked to change into someone of a different character – a radical change.

We need to say, I have been wrong.

We need to say, I need help, Lord.

This is usually difficult because it is such a blow to our pride and self-esteem.

We will need humility to accept help along the new road. For some it may mean experiencing real suffering from those who do not understand the change in us; something experienced, of course by St. Francis in his home town of Assisi. For others it may be a quiet change of heart and attitude and a new joy in the worship of God.

Francis Thompson the poet, who incidentally was a Franciscan Tertiary, felt this same need to flee.

I fled him down the nights and down the days,
I fled him down the arches of the years;
I fled him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind...
Yet was I sore adread
Lest, having him, I must have naught beside.

St. Francis' conversion was brought about by his imprisonment and his illness. So often it is when we are given time to think, time to be silent, time to be idle, that we are able to hear our Lord's voice saying, 'Follow me'.

4. The Mount Tabor Road

Read: Matthew 17:1-8

'The heavens are telling the glory of God.'

'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness', but also, I believe, 'O

worship the Lord in the holiness of beauty.’

A high path this, and perhaps not for everyone, but I think we should think a little more about this way to be led to God and we may find that we have walked along it almost without knowing it.

There are two facets to seeing God in beauty:

1. There is the beauty of God’s creation; nature in all its glory of colour, form and grace.
2. There is the beauty we experience through art, music, poetry and movement which may also be revelations of God. God gives the talents, and creative artists, in their search for Truth, can lift our souls.

Great art of eye or ear links humanity to God because artists of all kinds are creators. Br Alban SSF once said, ‘Anything which enriches life, which adds something to the total human achievement, may be seen as part of a process of relating all things back to God the Creator.’

I have hesitated about including the Mt Tabor Road because some people have no inborn conception of beauty, or perhaps are tone-deaf to music which to another may be a deeply religious experience. Those who are colour-blind may not be able to appreciate a painting, but few are unmoved by the beauty of the natural world – sometimes, indeed, using it as an excuse for not worshipping God in church – ‘I’m nearer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth’, etc. as the song says.

A sky brilliant with stars, turquoise sea between pine trees, a single perfect flower, all draw us along the path to God.

On this mountain road to Tabor, then, I believe we must seek and learn how to reflect the goodness of God which is perfect beauty. In the Principles of the Franciscan Third Order we read: ‘The chief form of service which Tertiaries have to offer is to reflect the love of Christ, who in his beauty and power, is the inspiration and joy of their lives.’

I believe, too, that we should take time to stand and stare, to make thanksgiving a large part of our prayers; that we should not hurry on when we see or hear something beautiful but use the experience to praise God for all the beauties which surround us And not just the beauties of nature but also the tremendous gifts of beauty given us, by God’s largesse, through the hands, eyes and ears of artists down the ages.

5. The Calvary Road

Read John 18:19-42

Our last road is the road from Jerusalem to Calvary, the Via Dolorosa, the Way of the Cross, the way of suffering.

St. Francis of Assisi knew why we can be joyful in our pain – because it is the only thing of our own which we can offer to God. Everything else comes from God, and we are only returning to Him what is His. He describes perfect joy to Brother Leo like this:

Above all grace and all gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ vouchsafes to His friends, is that of overcoming one’s self, and for the love of

Christ gladly bearing pain, insults, disgrace and hardship. We cannot glory in any other gifts of God as they are not ours but God's. But we may glory in the cross of tribulation and affliction, for that is ours.

Jesus suffered all types of pain. He knew hunger and cold and physical agony. He knew the mental pain of rejection and betrayal. He experienced the shattering spiritual pain of feeling forsaken by His Father on the cross.

Let us follow Jesus on that road of suffering from Jerusalem to Calvary, the Via Dolorosa. Not many churches have the Fourteen Stations of the Cross on their walls these days but that is what we will use today with just a small comment on each step of Jesus' journey.

i Jesus is condemned to death

Pilate said, 'Don't you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?'

Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me were it not given you from above.'

And Pilate handed Him over to them to be crucified.

God is not the author of all events but He is the master of all events.

ii Jesus is made to carry His cross

Jesus the carpenter, the woodworker, carries the wooden beam on which He is to die.

'He chose to bear our grief and sorrow: and to give up His life on the cross.'

iii He falls under the cross

He has been sent from one court to another all night. He has been stripped and scourged and now His body is weak.

'By the power of the Holy Spirit He took flesh of the Virgin Mary and shared out human nature.'

iv Jesus sees His mother

The pain, the patience and the courage of Our Lady watching the agony of her Son seems to be one of the greatest lessons she teaches us. She was there for Him. Are we there when others suffer?

v Simon of Cyrene helps to carry the cross

He was just anyone picked out of the crowd. What an indignity! How insulting to carry the cross of a condemned man! It says they had to force him but by helping our Lord he and his family were changed for life. We know his sons Rufus and Alexander became Christian leaders.

vi Veronica wipes Jesus' face

She did it as an act of compassion for Jesus, but He said, 'When you do a compassionate act for the least of these you do it for me.'

vii Jesus falls a second time

Even without His cross Jesus is in exhausted agony but He is thinking, not of Himself but of the women in the crowd weeping for Him.

viii He speaks to the women of Jerusalem

He tells them to weep for themselves and their children because of what they are seeing enacted on that first Good Friday.

Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy upon us.

ix Jesus falls a third time

Always we see things in Trinity. Was He remembering His three temptations when he did not fall? He gave his life to banish the darkness of sin and death.

x Jesus is stripped of His garments

Francis asked to be stripped of his poor sackcloth habit when he lay dying because even that was more than Jesus had.

‘They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.’

xi He is nailed to the cross

Crucifixion was a death only for slaves and the worst of criminals. This is Christ identifying with every sinner. No sin can separate us from the love of God if we turn to him in penitence.

‘Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.’

xii Jesus dies

This was a man, a human being. There need not be a lonely death for anyone because God says, ‘I, too, was there.’

xiii He is taken down from the cross

It is finished. God Incarnate has split the curtain of the Temple, which divided God from humans.

‘We praise and adore you, O Christ. By your cross and precious blood you have redeemed the world.’

xiv Jesus is laid in the tomb

He has come to the end of His suffering way, the highroad of the Via Dolorosa, and He has died for us in the fullness of His love. For without death there can be no resurrection.

We have been thinking together about the many ways by following which we can come to a new understanding of God and our Lord Jesus who walked all these ways before us.

The ways of the Sacraments, Scripture and Prayer; Service; Conversion; Beauty; and Suffering.

But there is another wonderful thought to leave with you. These are not only the roads which we tread to find God but they are also the roads along which our Loving Father comes to find us.

