*** Franciscan-Clarian Spirituality Committee***

 ***The Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross***

 ***“Father, forgive them for they know not what they***

 ***do.”*** (Lk 23:34)

Mary Laubenthal, Associate

Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, NY

“Father forgive them…”. When Jesus cured a paralytic by saying his sins were forgiven, the Gospel says that he did this to show the scribes that the son of Man had the authority to forgive sins on earth. Why, then, did he ask his Father to do the forgiving now? In praying for his persecutors from the Cross, was Jesus setting an example for us by asking the Father to extend his mercy to them. Who are our “them”? Are there circumstances or situations in our life that have caused considerable harm to us or another that only the Father can forgive or are beyond what we seem able to forgive? My niece was murdered 27 years ago by two intruders. Although I have proclaimed that I forgive the perpetrators, I realize as I write this, that I have never prayed for them or asked God to forgive them. My forgiveness has been incomplete and challenged over and over as her children’s lives have unfolded.

“…for they knew not what they are doing.” Herod, Pilate and the chief priests know what they were doing, eliminating a threat. The followers of Jesus had expected the Messiah to become the King of the Jews and improve their lives. Their hopes dashed, faith shaken and fearful for themselves: did they know what they were doing as they scattered from the Garden or denied him? Where were those who had followed him from town to town? Did anyone voice a protest for what was happening to this innocent Man, the Son of God, our Redeemer?

St. Francis and St. Clare were truly persons of forgiveness, as well as peacemakers who became conduits of God's grace to others. We, too, can become like Francis and Clare when we pray for those who have caused us harm. This act of prayer frees us to love as God loves. God's grace has power not only to transform us, but those who have wounded us as well.

**PRAYER**

Father, help those who have suffered a loss or injury to be able to ask your forgiveness of “them” for their deed(s). Jesus, help us to be faithful to you and to live the Gospel courageously. Amen.