



JUST MERCY

A CATHOLIC STUDY GUIDE



CATHOLIC MOBILIZING NETWORK

ABOUT *JUST MERCY*

Based on the bestselling book by Bryan Stevenson, the film *Just Mercy* presents the stunning and true story of Walter McMillian, a Black man convicted and sentenced to death in Alabama in 1988 for a crime he did not commit. The film illustrates the structural racism endemic to our capital punishment system, and lays bare how this system devalues and cheapens all human life.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

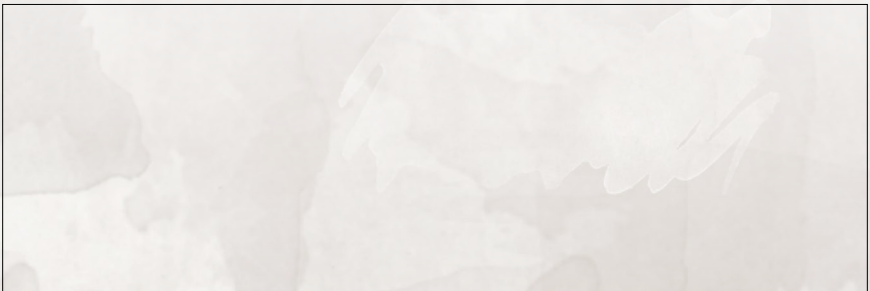
Through a series of thoughtful reflection questions and supplementary resources online, this study guide serves as an accompaniment to the film *Just Mercy* and offers viewers a way to explore the Catholic call to uphold the sanctity of life within the U.S. criminal legal system.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The questions below may be discussed in a group setting or contemplated in silent reflection. Feel free to record your answers directly in the guide, or in a separate place like a notebook.

Your *Just Mercy* Experience

1. Was there a specific scene in the film that you found gripping, interesting, or unexpected? Which scene was it, and why?
2. Was there a character in the film you particularly identified with? If so, why?
3. Did you find any examples of hope, resilience, or redemption in the film? Where?
4. The film does not feature the perspectives of the family of the victim, Ronda Morrison. What do you think they were feeling during the appeals of the case?



The Death Penalty and our Catholic Faith

1. Before watching *Just Mercy*, what did you think about the death penalty? Has your sense of it changed? If so, how?
2. How does your Catholic faith influence your opinion of the death penalty?
3. As Catholics, we are called to uphold a consistent ethic of life, regardless of whether a person is innocent or guilty. Describe how this makes you feel. Would you have felt differently about Walter's death sentence if he had been guilty of the crime?

Our Broken Criminal Legal System

1. In the film, during a conversation between Walter and Bryan, Walter says "In Alabama [...] you're guilty from the moment you're born." What do you think he meant by that statement?
2. Throughout *Just Mercy* there are many examples of oppression (systemic racism, poverty, lack of mental health services, and others). How might things have turned out differently for the men on death row had they not faced such barriers?
3. Our country's traditional legal system tends to focus solely on which law was broken, who is guilty, and how they should be punished. Does this way of addressing crime and harm reflect our Gospel values? If not, why not?

PRAYER

God Eternal Father,
You are the Living God.

Life is who you are,
Life is what you love,
Life is what you breathe.

Creation was made to house life; life is what you give.

Human life is your most beloved,
And what You most affirmed when you sent your Eternal Son
To take flesh,
To die our death,
And to rise again glorious.

Help us be a people of life —
A Church that can do no other
Than love what you so mightily love,
And defend what your Son so willingly died and rose to defend.

ARE YOU READY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?


Catholic Mobilizing Network offers tools for education, advocacy, and prayer around ending the death penalty.


For meaningful advocacy actions, church teachings on capital punishment and racism, collaborating organizations, death penalty data, and more, please visit the extended *Just Mercy* Catholic Study Guide at:

catholicsmobilizing.org/just-mercy-guide



catholicsmobilizing.org

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 @CMNEndtheDeathPenalty