



**CATHOLIC
MOBILIZING
NETWORK**

END THE DEATH PENALTY • ADVANCE JUSTICE • BEGIN HEALING



Holy Week Reflections 2026

Reflections to bolster your prayer through the journey from
Christ's execution to his Resurrection.

Palm Sunday — “Crucify Him!”

By Sr. Theresa Aletheia Noble

All four Gospels recount a haunting moment in Jesus’ passion: the crowd’s cry, “Crucify him!” The same voices that once shouted “Hosanna” now demand his death. It’s not just a historical detail; it reveals the indecisive cowardice of the human heart. And the tragedy is not just that the crowd rejects Jesus but that they do it together, caught up in the mimetic fervor of imitation and rage.

Responsibility and moral agency disappear in the rage of a crowd fearful of isolation and losing status. All the crowd’s anxieties fused into a single demand, “Crucify him.” We all know this moment well, the moment of choosing self-preservation or comfort over truth and sacrifice. And yet, this moment is not just about personal weakness. As Pope Leo XIV reflected in his homily for Ash Wednesday:

“Naturally, sin is personal, but it takes shape in the real and virtual contexts of life, in the attitudes we adopt towards each other that mutually impact us, and often within real economic, cultural, political and even religious ‘structures of sin.’ Scripture teaches us that opposing idolatry with worship of the living God means daring to be free, and rediscovering freedom through an exodus, a journey, where we are no longer paralyzed, rigid or complacent in our positions, but gathered together to move and change. How rare it is to find adults who repent—individuals, businesses and institutions that admit they have done wrong!”

The cry “Crucify him” was not only the failure of isolated individuals; it was the eruption of a structure of sin already present in the religious milieu of the crowd—political expediency, religious self-protection, mob psychology, and institutional fear converged in that moment into one terrible chorus. If we are honest, we recognize ourselves in that crowd. We all have chosen comfort over courage, approval over fidelity, silence over witness. We all participate in systems that discard the inconvenient, shame the vulnerable, or silence the prophetic.



When Jesus hears the crowd, he is not surprised. He is here to die for these sins. As the shouts grow louder, he continues in his Father's will. He does not silence the mob with power. He receives their violence into his own body and he prays, "Father, forgive them." The Passion reveals both the frailty of the human heart and the depth of divine mercy. It also calls us to something more: to step out of rigid complacency, to repent personally and collectively, and to begin an exodus from the "structures of sin" in our world, including the religious "structures of sin" that bind us.

Reflection Questions

1. Where do I see myself demanding "crucify him!" in our world today? Where in my personal life, and in the systems I participate in, might I be contributing to a "structure of sin" that wounds others?
2. What concrete step of repentance or courageous witness is Christ inviting me to take, even if it means standing apart from the crowd?



Sr. Theresa Aletheia Noble

Sr. Theresa Aletheia Noble is the co-founder, with Sr. Danielle Victoria Lussier, of the Sisters of the Little Way of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. The community is dedicated to listening and solidarity with people on the fringes of the Church, especially people who have been wounded, scandalized, or abused by members of the Church. Their latest project is *Descent Into Light*, a limited-series podcast on adult abuse in the Church. Learn more at sistersofthelittleway.com.



Holy Thursday — The Washing of the Feet

By Fr. Andrew Jones

On the night of the Last Supper Jesus did something his disciples did not expect: he adopted the role of servant to wash their feet. This startling act reveals the essence of the New Covenant: God offers intimate communion to all—even to those who will fail him.

Jesus knew what would unfold that night. Peter would deny him. Judas would betray him. The others would also abandon him. Yet Jesus washes their feet anyway. In doing so, he reveals something essential about God: communion is offered before repentance or loyalty can even be proven. God does not wait for perfection before drawing near.

The covenant relationship God offers humanity does not shrink in the face of failure. Scripture uses the Hebrew word **חֶסֶד** (*hesed*), often translated as “steadfast love,” to describe the Divine posture. God remains faithful even when his people are not. He stays in relationship even when it has been wounded by sin, always seeking the restoration of communion.

Jesus’ posture while washing the feet of his disciples also reveals something about restoration itself: it requires vulnerability. Kneeling before his disciples, Jesus places himself in a position where his offer of service can be misunderstood or even rejected. Peter does exactly this, refusing at first to let Jesus wash his feet. Yet Jesus does not withdraw from Peter’s resistance. Instead it becomes an invitation to communion: “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me” (John 13:8).

After washing their feet, Jesus tells them: “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet... I have set you an example” (John 13:14–15). His disciples—and by extension all disciples of Christ—are called to imitate this same posture.

For Catholics, this means remaining in relationship with those who have done wrong or caused harm, refusing to abandon them. Justice shaped by the Gospel seeks accountability, but also healing and the restoration of communion. Jesus models this with his own disciples through the washing of their feet which is an example of humble service, steadfast commitment to relationship, and even an anticipation of reconciliation after betrayal and death.



Such a posture can shape our approach to the criminal justice system. It can influence our ministry with those who are difficult to work with due to their own wounds. Our mission at the City of St. Jude Parish is “to provide hope to the hopeless,” and very often those who are the most hopeless suffer from a lack of steadfast love in their lives. They feel cut off from family, from society, and even from God. In working towards Gospel-centered forms of justice we too can follow the example of Jesus who leads by example.

Reflection Questions

1. What could “washing feet” look like for you in your own family, ministry, workplace, and parish?
2. How does the example of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples illustrate the concept of restorative justice?



Fr. Andrew B. Jones

Fr. Andrew Jones is the pastor of The City of St. Jude Parish in Montgomery, AL. The City of Saint Jude Parish provides hope for the hopeless by proclaiming to everyone they encounter that no-one is truly without hope who has a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.



Good Friday — Who will you be?

By Emmjolee Mendoza Waters

I remember enjoying Holy Week as a kid. While the readings were long, I actually looked forward to them, especially waiting for the bolded lines in the missal so I could jump in with everyone else. I got to speak with the crowd.

I remember so clearly saying: “Crucify him, crucify him.”

I said it loudly; almost proudly. I felt like I was part of something bigger, part of the crowd, part of the story. We all said it together: crucify him.

As a child, I don't think I really understood what I was saying. Looking back now, I'm certain that I didn't understand. I knew the story ended with Jesus on the cross, but I didn't grasp my role in it. I didn't understand the weight of my complicity, my participation in the death of our Lord — nor did I realize that this was something that still happens today.

In my work with Catholic Mobilizing Network, seeking to end the death penalty and advance justice and healing through restorative practices, the cry of ‘Crucify him!’, becomes not only an ancient cry, but the current call of our own day.

The details today look different: orange jumpsuits instead of purple robes, leather straps instead of nails, but the human weight remains. A person condemned. A person declared beyond redemption. A person killed by the state.

As I reflect on the Passion today, I imagine myself in the story once again. I wonder, would I still be the person in the crowd calling for Jesus' crucifixion like when I was a child? Or would I find myself elsewhere in the Passion story, like some of the brave individuals we hear about when we pray the Stations of the Cross?

Those who Jesus met on the road to Cavalry are still with us. I think of Simon of Cyrene, pulled from the roadside to help carry the cross when the weight became too much. Today, there are still Simons who help carry the cross: the spiritual advisor who sits with people on death row, the lawyer who refuses to give up, and the advocate who dignifies the condemned. They all help carry the cross.



Then there is Veronica, moved by compassion to wipe Jesus' face. A small, tender act in the middle of Jesus' horrific journey. I think of those who walk alongside families — those on death row and victim's families — who offer mercy where the world expects indifference. Even corrections staff who treat those in their care with dignity.

I think of the women who weep, who meet Jesus on his journey and mourn the suffering he endures. The weeping women are still present at every execution today. They are the people praying outside prison walls, holding vigil, grieving what the state is about to do.

Yes, the Simons, the Veronicas, the weeping women are all still present in the face of executions today. But at the same time, we continue to see people today who echo the call of the crowd, like those bolded words in the misal.

The phrasing has changed, but the spirit feels hauntingly familiar:

"They should get the death penalty."

"We're seeking the death penalty."

"We will pursue the death penalty."

We hear our political leaders say it. We hear our justice department say it. We hear it in courtrooms. And sometimes we hear it around our own dinner tables.

I often hear, "We're just following the law." But the story of Jesus reminds me how easy it is to pass responsibility. Religious leaders appealed to Pilate. Pilate appealed to the crowd. Each person had a role. Each person could say, "It wasn't really me."

And yet, it was all of them. And in ways I think we would rather not admit, it is all of us too.

So the question lingers for me: Who will we be? Will we be part of the crowd, swept up in fear or anger or even ignorance, crying out for death? Or will we step onto the road; shouldering weight, offering mercy, daring to weep?

In 2015, Pope Francis invited us into this contemplation during the Way of the Cross on Good Friday. He said, "We gaze at you, Jesus, as you are nailed to the cross, [...] And our conscience is troubled."



He says, "We anxiously ask: When will the death penalty, still practiced in many states, be abolished? [...] When will every form of torture and the violent killing of innocent persons come to an end? Your Gospel is the surest defense of the human person, of every human being."

On this Good Friday, as we gaze at Jesus nailed to the cross, our conscience should be troubled. Because now we know what we once did not. We know what it means to join the crowd, to speak those bolded words aloud, "Crucify him."

There is an invitation in this discomfort: not simply to remember the story or blindly speak the words, but to recognize our place within it.

With open eyes and awakened hearts, we ask: Who will you be this Good Friday?

Reflection Questions

1. As I imagine myself in the Passion story, who am I called to be?
2. How can I play a more active role in carrying the cross, showing mercy, and mourning the scourge of violence in our time?



Emmjolee Mendoza Waters

Emmjolee Mendoza Waters serves as the Director of the Death Penalty Abolition Program at Catholic Mobilizing Network. She brings 20 years of experience in education, advocacy, and ministry with a particular focus on young adults. During Emmjolee's tenure at The Catholic University of America, she helped build a culture of service and justice, rooted in Catholic Social Teaching.



Holy Saturday — Intentional Waiting

By Sr. Erin Zubal

Lent is about waiting, but not passive waiting. It's *active, intentional, hopeful* waiting.

Waiting can be joyful and hopeful, as well as dreadful and frightening. My community, the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland, knows all too well the experience of active, intentional waiting. Hope, grace and resurrection eventually showed up for us, but it was a journey to get there.

In 1980, Sister Dorothy Kazel, along with lay missionary Jean Donovan, and Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, were kidnapped, raped and murdered in El Salvador. For days, family, friends, sisters and the world watched and waited for word of their well-being, that they had been found and were coming home. But waiting soon gave way to mourning.

Fifteen years later, my sisters found themselves waiting again, with tragic familiarity. Sr. Joanne Marie Mascha went out for a walk on the motherhouse grounds and did not return. They waited, prayed, and hoped, and yet again the waiting gave way to mourning. Like the Churchwomen of El Salvador, Joanne Marie was raped and murdered, this time in our own backyard. And the sisters found themselves in the public spotlight, reliving the trauma of 15 years earlier, again grieving one of their own.

Daniel Pitcher, the man who killed Joanne Marie, was apprehended, confessed to her murder and was charged. Sister Maureen McCarthy, the superior of the community, was very clear that the sisters opposed pursuing the death penalty. But the prosecution persisted, and the jury returned its verdict on Sept. 10, 1995, convicting Daniel Pitcher of rape, kidnapping, aggravated robbery, and murder.

However, the jury, in filling out the verdict form, did not check the box for the death penalty, so Daniel Pitcher was instead sentenced to 50 years to life. Prayer, advocacy and unending perseverance by the sisters and their allies prevailed.

This is not where the story ends. Almost 30 years after Daniel Pitcher took Joanne Marie's life, he sought forgiveness. And just like 30 years earlier, when the sisters were a resounding no to the death penalty, they were a resounding yes to forgiveness.



After the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday, the world waits in grief, confusion and unanswered questions. It is a day when violence seems to have won, a day when death feels final. It is also the day we sit with the reality of state execution — public, legal and violently enacted. Holy Saturday invites us to remain at the tomb and confront what execution does: it silences, it finalizes, it leaves families and communities shattered on every side. It calls us to advocate for an end to the death penalty, even as we wait at the foot of the cross.

Just as Lent moves us toward Easter, death can ultimately lead to healing and forgiveness. Our waiting was not empty; it was anticipation of resurrection. It was a very long pause, a holding of our breath in courage and hope, before resurrection joy.

Reflection Questions

1. How are we being called into active waiting this Lent?
2. Where can we find courage and hope in our time of waiting?



Sr. Erin Zubal, OSU

Sr. Erin Zubal, an Ursuline Sister of Cleveland served for 15 years as a social worker and educator in Catholic elementary and high schools in the Diocese of Cleveland. Today, she serves as Chief of Staff at NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice. Sr. Erin holds a Masters in Social Work Administration from Case Western Reserve University and a Masters in Educational Administration from Ursuline College.



Easter Sunday — Hope for Eternal Life

By Bishop Earl K. Fernandes, Diocese of Columbus

At “Baby Bishops School,” Pope Francis exhorted us to visit prisons to keep in contact with the harsh realities of life. Taking his words to heart, I offered Mass for those on death row in Ohio. One man at the Christmas Mass said, “Bishop, I hear you’re from Cincinnati. That’s where I’m from.” I asked, “Which part?” He answered, “Camp Washington.” I said, “Well, I was the administrator of Sacred Heart.” He said, “That’s my church!” I then asked, “Is your mother named Pat?” He nodded sadly.

His mother had recently passed. Every Sunday, she stopped me before Mass and asked for prayers for her son who was “in jail.” She never told me that he was on death row or what he had done, but now I stood before her son. I was happy to meet him and to offer Mass there.

Fortunately, there haven’t been any executions in Ohio for some years. We are working hard, collaborating with the Catholic Mobilizing Network and others, to make sure there will be none in the future. What I have come to realize is that we are not just dealing with “prisoners” but with people who have an inherent dignity and who are worthy of care and respect, despite their crimes, sins, and weaknesses.

This man was a true son to his mother, who loved him dearly. During this time of year, I think of another Mother who faithfully stood by the Cross and watched her Son die, not for His sins, but for ours. He was a Victim of injustice, but, who through His Death and Resurrection, reconciled us to the Father and to one another. We, who were sentenced to an eternal death, suddenly had our fortunes reversed and were given the hope of eternal life.

I met another man that day on death row. He converted to Catholicism in prison and received baptism. He wrote to me because he had been receiving hate mail from his family for converting. I met him privately to listen to his story. I encountered a man who had changed or who had been changed by God’s grace. I offered words of consolation and encouragement.



When I returned the following year, he asked if I remembered him. I asked, "Are things better with your family?" He smiled and said, "Well, this is my family, now and God is my Father."

Returning for Christmas Mass again this year, I was happy to see him. I often wonder whether this will be his last Christmas, but he keeps going. So too do the other men and women who are incarcerated and facing execution. Last year on Holy Thursday, I went to a prison to wash feet. Afterward, a Spanish-speaking man said, "When you washed my feet, for a moment, I felt free."

Christ, our Crucified and Risen Lord, brings freedom from sin and death. He is Risen! He is truly Risen! Alleluia!

Reflection Questions

1. Do I think of those on death row as persons to be loved or simply as prisoners who committed crimes?
2. Do I believe in the power of the Cross and Resurrection to change lives, including my own?



Bishop Earl K. Fernandes

The Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes was ordained and installed as the 13th Bishop of the Diocese of Columbus on May 31, 2022. He holds a doctorate in moral theology from the Alphonsian Academy in Rome.

