



**CATHOLIC  
MOBILIZING  
NETWORK**

END THE DEATH PENALTY • ADVANCE JUSTICE • BEGIN HEALING



# **Holy Week Reflections 2025**

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

# Palm Sunday — Reflecting on Imago Dei

By Lori Stanley

Palm Sunday signals Jesus's path to the cross and juxtaposes the honors he received upon entering Jerusalem with the suffering and violent torture that would follow. As bodies of onlookers hugged the road, Jesus made the journey to enter the city. Riding on a donkey and clothed with peace and humility, I imagine he nodded and smiled at those waving branches and singing his praises about his miraculous works of healing.

But with just enough tension, fright and pressure, the same crowd that welcomed Jesus's entry into town held little regard for him hours later. How quickly emotions can swing to the extreme without spiritual grounding. Rooted in ignorance, contempt and damaging narratives, the passion captures the mob's hatred toward Jesus.

Psalm 139:13-14 celebrates each human life as being "knit together" in our mother's womb and that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Our creative and loving God purposefully forms us in the dark and anxiously awaits our arrival into the world with gifts to fulfill our respective purposes.

Visiting Selma, Alabama — which I did with Catholic Mobilizing Network in August 2024 — puts this scripture on its ear! It's been 60 years and churches are still segregated with ushers assigned to doors to intentionally control the entry of blacks into their sanctuaries. On the day I heard this, I wrote in my journal, *imago Dei* "Genesis 1:27, God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Vitriol for black bodies could still be felt around the city as I walked through a park along the National Historic Trail taken by MLK and protestors. Our tour guide pointed to a tree that had been used for lynching a Black man and a partial confederate monument still standing; both giving a sinister nod to white supremacy narratives that challenge *imago Dei*. As I walked from one end of the Edmund Pettus Bridge to the other, I imagined how the Black foot soldiers courageously and humbly journeyed to protest unfair voting rights 60 years ago.



Like Jesus, they entered the bridge nonviolently and unarmed. Yet, their solidarity dissolved suddenly when they were brutally attacked. Police on horseback overtook the crowd, violently swinging clubs and spraying tear gas.

**What began as a protest in pursuit of justice and liberty developed into a “Bloody Sunday”.**

While only three protestors died, hundreds were traumatically affected by the police brutality they received and/or witnessed. Acknowledging trauma, respecting the dignity in each person, and creating safe spaces to share lived experiences will directly impact leaders’ ability to courageously address unjust policies and standards.

*Imago Dei* continually invites us to accept God’s love on a personal and intimate basis. Accepting myself as loved by God helps me to surrender to Christ’s work in me. In turn, God’s love moves me to continually strive to be Christ for others and to see Christ in others.

On this Palm Sunday, I invite you to consider:

1. When have you been silent when you should have spoken out?
2. How can you be braver in sharing your faith?



**Lori Stanley**

Lori Stanley is the Executive Director of Loyola Institute for Spirituality in Orange, CA. She has been a practitioner of Ignatian spirituality for 20 years and uses its tools to address social injustices and to answer the call to accompany, educate and empower others to discover God’s deep personal love for them. Lori has a MA in Pastoral Theology with a concentration in Spiritual Direction from Loyola Marymount University.



# Holy Thursday — Becoming Eucharist

By Don McCrabb, D.Min.

The Eucharist is a restorative practice. It gathers strangers together and forms us into a community. It holds the tender truth of our failings and unleashes the power of our faith in the innate dignity of every human being. The Eucharist restores our humanity and sends us forth on a mission of hope.

The Church gives us two stories about the Eucharist. The first, told by Saint Paul (1 Cor. 11:23-26), summarizes what we learn from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus, when he was celebrating Passover with his disciples — the night before he died — took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, “This is my body that is for you.” Then, after supper, he took a cup of wine saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

The second, from the Gospel of John, has Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. “Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” (Jn 13:12-15)

**Bread, wine, water — these are all elements that restore us when we are hungry, thirsty, stressed, dirty, tired.**

Sometimes it is helpful to imagine ourselves in the scene — to be there with Jesus and the disciples. Yes, it is a “special occasion,” like Christmas and Easter for us, but it is ordinary in the sense that it happens every year. There was little variation in the ritual, and there was a stronger value on tradition. And, for the disciples, it was free of all the commercialism we experience today. I remember a homily by Fr. Joe Kozar, SM, back in the 1980’s, who said that women washed everyone’s feet before dinner. Passover was a tradition, with accepted roles, valued and embraced by the people under the occupation of Rome.

As you imagine the scene, how do you think the disciples gather around the table? Was it U-shaped? Did people sit at the table or did they recline? Was it more like a circle — like friends around a campfire — or formal, like a state dinner?



I believe it was more like a circle. The circle, the integral component of the restorative circle process, is a place where broken relationships are healed because the wounded have a voice; injustice, harm, and violence are clearly seen; and the dignity of every person is recognized and honored.

Those of us on the journey of restorative justice believe in the simple power of the circle. It is a joy serving as a facilitator in CMN's restorative justice formation program, Conversations in Communion: Parish Dialogues for Connection and Understanding. The program intentionally, as did the Synod on Synodality, invokes the Eucharistic feast in its name: Conversations in Communion.

Through Conversations in Communion, we use restorative practices to advance the spirituality and structural reforms of synodality, leading to a deeper and more authentic communion, greater participation and a healthier co-responsibility, and a robust sense of mission.

In a circle, as in Eucharist, we drop all pretense like Jesus removing his "master" robes. Our talking piece is bread and wine. We remember stories of faith and tell our stories of doubt and uncertainty. We gather the wisdom of the community and chart a way forward. Just like the Eucharist, we leave the circle to give to others what we have received.

### **We become Eucharist.**

As we celebrate this Holy Thursday, and recall this story of Eucharist, I invite you to consider the following:

1. How would you describe the "last supper" scene? Where are you in it?
2. Where do you see the connection between Eucharist and restorative justice?



### **Don McCrabb, D.Min.**

Don McCrabb, D. Min. is a facilitator for the Conversations in Communion Companion Training. He served in campus ministry, priestly formation, and mission.



# Good Friday — The Women at the Foot of the Cross

By Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy

*“Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister. Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdala.” (John 19:25)*

Today’s Good Friday gospel reading is heavy. We remember the Passion story: Judas, Jesus’ disciple, betrays him. In defense of Jesus, Simon Peter cuts off the ear of a high-priest’s slave and then proceeds to deny Jesus three times. The crowd shouts, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Jesus carries the cross to which he will be nailed; the instrument of his torture. Soldiers divide his clothes and cast lots for his tunic. And Jesus hands over his spirit.

If you are feeling the weight of Good Friday, it is for good reason. The scene paints a grim, dark picture that all hope is lost.

**While Jesus willingly accepts this fate to carry the weight of our sins so that we may be saved, in historical terms, it is the scene of state-sanctioned murder.**

Like the mob that condemned Jesus, we still sentence people to death in the U.S., blatantly disregarding the sanctity of each and every human person. Or, like the crowds on the road to Calvary, we jeer at those beleaguered by the weight of their death sentences, relishing in their torment. The injustice of capital punishment persists today and is worthy of our action.

Yet, in this Jubilee Year of Hope, I want to draw your attention to another, perhaps less pondered scene within the Passion narrative so that even in the face of this darkness, we may take heart. When I fall into moments of despair and need to access a depth of courage otherwise seemingly out of reach, I do well to remember the women at the foot of Christ’s cross.

Amid the horror of this Good Friday on Calvary, a whisper of hope breaks in: the Gospel tells us... “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister. Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdala.” Here in the chaos of the persecution and crucifixion, it would have been rather easy for them to flee the scene. Or to fall into the trap of believing God had given up on the world. Yet these women never leave Jesus.





Unbeknownst to the women, it is in this darkest scene at the foot of the cross that their faithful presence points toward a fountain of forgiveness that has the power to overcome vengeance. They stand before what is the destruction of death forever.

**These women present at the cross are the embodiment of witness to hope, bridging the gap from utter despair to God's ultimate promise for our salvation.**

So on this Good Friday, let us remember that in our moments when all hope seems lost — God's abundance and restoration may be temporarily hidden from our view. It is at these times that we too, like the women, are called to stand steadfast. By our very presence, we witness that through Jesus' death, God's eternal promise lives for each of us.

Let us consider:

1. Where might you stand as a witness to hope?
2. Might you be sensing an invitation here?



**Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, M.T.S.**

Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy has served as CMN's executive director since 2017. She champions CMN's trailblazing mission to end the death penalty and promote the healing practices of restorative justice.



# Holy Saturday — Waiting in Darkness

By Sr. Barbara Battista, SP

We call this day “Holy Saturday.” We spend this day, between death and resurrection, in quiet remembrance, as a somber vigil at Jesus’ tomb. This is not simply a re-enactment. Holy Saturday invites us to ponder the “tomb time” between Jesus’ death and resurrection.

For Jesus’ early followers, this was not necessarily a waiting time. They had no idea what came next. This “tomb time” is a waiting time for us — a part of the whole Death/Resurrection story. We wait in silence, in grief, in searching for meaning. Why did Jesus need to be crucified? For what purpose? What did it accomplish? How has it changed how we see ourselves and how we choose to live? And for what do we wait?

Waiting is a fact of life. We wait for Spring flowers, for Summer tomatoes, for all sorts of breakthroughs, we wait. We wait through the last days leading to the death of a loved one, or the birth of a child. Now we wait for migrants to be welcomed and treated with respect or for our Constitution to be honored, and given its rightful place in policy deliberations. We wait for justice to prevail.

What if this day of waiting is an invitation to consider how we ‘crucify’ others individually and communally through systems and structures we support or at the very least tolerate?

A man named Will LeCroy was killed by the federal government in the darkness of a brightly lit room, while strapped onto a cruciform table, with numerous observers behind glass walls. I stood inside that chamber, praying aloud the Divine Mercy Chaplet at Will’s request. Will was killed in our name, ostensibly to say that killing is wrong.

**We wait for the killing to stop.**





Mary, the mother of Jesus, waited. In consenting to be the God-bearer, she allowed the Light of Christ to flourish. She waited at the foot of the cross AND at the tomb. Mary's fidelity helps us to practice that active waiting.

Mary's active waiting invites us to claim the possibilities in our waiting, in our fidelity. How do we stand witness to our belief, no matter the cost? Are we open to allowing pain and sorrow fully into our lives in a way that breaks us open to being vulnerable and courageous in our response? To being with others in their life circumstances?

This holy and 'in between' day comes at a time of deepening darkness in our nation. We are called to be formed into Christ in our actions and our words, to bring Christ's Light into systems that oppress others.

**Whatever the call, let us resolve to extend the Light of Christ however, whenever, and wherever we can.**

Today, I invite you to consider:

1. Has this time of waiting called you to be a Light-bearer? Perhaps to stand witness when others are being silenced?
2. Are you being invited to deepen your efforts to end the death penalty? Or to stand in solidarity with those persons pushed to the margins?



### **St. Barbara Battista, SP**

Sister Barbara Battista is a Sister of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Indiana. As her congregation's Justice Promoter, Barbara puts her energy into interfaith and intergenerational community organizing advocating for the common good for all creation. Racial and ecologic healing and restoration of wholesome and healthy practices supporting all life is central to her ministry. Time around a campfire or in a kayak is her happy place.



# Easter Sunday — Hope Never Fails

By Bishop Emeritus Felipe Estévez, Diocese of St. Augustine

As we celebrate the Lord's triumph over death, I can't help but think of the men in my own state of Florida whose lives have recently been taken by capital punishment. I pray that Edward James, who was executed on March 20, and Michael Tanzi, who was executed on April 8, may rest in peace.

I pray also for Moises Mendoza, James Osgood, and Jeffrey Hutchinson, who despite our consternation, are scheduled to be executed in the coming weeks in Texas, Alabama, and Florida. We pray for wisdom and spiritual support for these men. The prolonged wait to be killed is, simply put, a form of cruel torture in a society that considers itself civilized.

I had the special opportunity to visit with Michael Tanzi before his life was taken by the state. His spiritual director, Ernie Bono, asked me to bring him holy Communion and the last rites— the sacraments of the sick and dying—two days before his scheduled execution.

As St. John Paul II so often affirmed, the death penalty today is unnecessary. Pope Francis has further declared that it is inadmissible. For those who have committed terrible violent crimes, life in prison is enough punishment. Only God should determine the day we are born and the day we die. Incarcerated people never lose their inherent, transcendental and infinite human dignity.

As Pope Francis reminds us, this is the principal reason the death penalty must be abolished—not only in Florida but in every state in our country. True justice does not promote the ancient axiom *"an eye for an eye"* (Exodus 21:23–27; Leviticus 24:19–21).

**That has been superseded by the new covenant proclaimed by Christ: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* Every Christian who prays the Our Father echoes that same mercy when we say, *"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."***

In the 21st century, our criminal justice system must move away from punishment inspired by vengeance and toward a model of humane rehabilitation, restorative justice, and genuine reconciliation. Yes, to law and order. Yes, to a safe society. Yes, to justice for victims. But no to the extreme and final act of killing human beings which diminish all of us citizens.



Our celebration of Easter today did not come without first passing through Good Friday, when all of us were invited to kiss the cross. Why? Because our Savior, a prisoner, was killed by the state despite being entirely innocent.

The incredible paradox of God's mercy is that Jesus, the true Lamb, healed all of humanity from sin and death. And the prisoner next to him—Dismas—was the first to be saved.

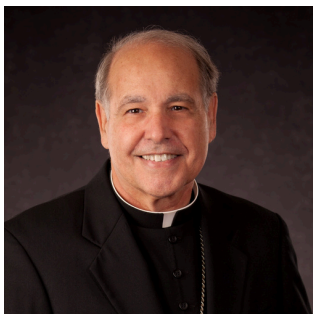
When I visited the house of Simon Peter, I saw an inscription on the wall: *O crux, spes nostra*— O cross, our hope. In this Jubilee Year of Hope, as the death penalty continues to be carried out in Florida at an accelerating pace, we are called to pray without ceasing for its permanent abolition. We do so in hope, relying on the one who sits gloriously on the throne of the universe and says: "*Behold, I am making all things new*" (*Revelation 21:5*).

I dream and pray that one day soon the state of Florida will end the violent practice of the death penalty once and for all—forever—because it is simply antiquated. Florida must embrace what is truly new.

### **Hope never fails.**

As we celebrate the Resurrection, may we each consider:

1. How will we bring Easter hope to the world around us?



### **Bishop Emeritus Felipe Estévez**

Bishop Emeritus Felipe Estévez was Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine from 2011 to 2022. In April 2025, he delivered communion and last rights to Michael Tanzi, who was executed by the state of Florida on April 9, 2025.

