

The First Station: Jesus Is Condemned to Die
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Death Penalty

During his visit to St. Louis, Pope Saint John Paul II stated, “The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform.”

Jesus is executed by being nailed to a piece of wood, hung naked, exposed to taunts, reduced to an object of ridicule. State sponsored crucifixions continue today, only in place of wooden beams there is a gas chambers, electric chairs, lethal injections, and firing squads. Missouri is one of the primary states that still carries out executions in the United States, killing 119 individuals from 1989 to 2014*. As a people of faith who follow Christ, a victim of the death penalty, may we wake up and stand with those who are killed without any chance of restoration. We pray for a system that honors the dignity of every human person and encourages restorative justice for the improvement of society.

O God, forgive us for we know not what we do. Help us to work against the death penalty, to stand against state sanctioned death.

We adore you, Christ, and we bless you. By the power of your holy cross help us to change the world.

*deathpenaltyinfo.org

The Second Station: Jesus Takes Up His Cross
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Labor Rights

Pope Paul VI said, “If you want peace, work for justice.” Jesus, the poor one, bears the burden of his people. Carrying the cross, he carried them; he carries us. The cross is the whole history of hate, violence, rejection, and war. In accepting the cross, Jesus takes up the misery of humanity. The cross becomes God’s complaint—there is no justice, mercy, or peace when the children of earth are despised, despoiled, and made to endure indignity.

We renew our baptismal promise to live under no other sign of power than the sign of the cross. We take up the burdens others carry and reject all that hinders us from following Jesus in the way of the cross. Let our intention now be for those who work each day to provide for themselves and their families with little hope that their wages will ever be fair or their working conditions ever be right. We think of the farm workers who work to make the food we eat every day. We think of the labor conditions we cannot even fathom that are the reality for many of our brothers and sisters. We think of those who work hard to make a living- even those on our campus who work to keep us safe, fed, and healthy.

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The Third Station: Jesus Falls for the First Time
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Racism

“Racism is a sin; a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of

that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of races. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: "Treat others the way you would have them treat you." Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation." -Brothers and Sisters to Us, U.S. Bishops, 1979

As Christians, we are called to live in the world and not to be apart from it. Yes, we are called to be holy, or "set apart," but that means we have to rise above the standards our culture sets for us. In talking about racism, we must rise above the harmful language or actions in which we partake that contribute to racism. How often do you talk about diversity amongst your friends? When was the last time you did something to appreciate or learn about a culture that is not your own? We are called to combat racism and embrace the beauty of our differences, and thus, the beauty of human life.

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The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Abortion

"Laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion or euthanasia are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law." *The Gospel of Life*, 72

As Jesus walks towards the site of His crucifixion, He encounters His Mother. One can only imagine the pain that she feels as she watches her only son walk to His death. There is a connection between mother and child that is sacred and foundational, making this moment in Jesus' journey all the more central. In our own society, women are often faced with unplanned pregnancies and insufficient resources. As we walk this journey with Jesus, we must ask ourselves how we can support women in their time of need in order to protect and foster the dignity of both her life, and the life that she carries.

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The Fifth Station: Simon Peter Helps Jesus Carry His Cross Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Faith-Based Initiatives

"We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ. This love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support." Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*

With Simon we are pressed into service on behalf of others. We are recruited to help Jesus bestow our bread on the hungry, satisfy the afflicted, remove from our midst oppression, false accusations and malicious speech. These works of justice and mercy—actions we don't often choose for ourselves—teach us most about

loving others unselfishly and accepting responsibility for them. We cannot pick and choose the people we love or help. Everyone is worthy of our care.

We recommit ourselves to act in solidarity with the poor, the victim, the outcast and to recruit others on their behalf. Many Simons must respond to meet the pressing human needs in shelters, soup kitchens, houses of hospitality, hospices and places of sanctuary. Are we reluctant to associate with the poor, the victim, the outcast? Do we choose personal convenience over compassion, selfishness over self-sacrifice? Do we prefer to spend time, money and resources on personal wants while millions are without basic human needs? Do we seek the companionship of the comfortable rather than the friendship of the poor?

We recommit ourselves to act in solidarity with the poor, the victim, the outcast and to recruit others to work on their behalf.

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The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes Jesus' Face
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Restorative Justice and the Prison Industrial Complex

"We are still a long way from the time when our conscience can be certain of having done everything possible to prevent crime and to control it effectively so that it no longer does harm and, at the same time, to offer to those who commit crimes a way of redeeming themselves and making a positive return to society. If all those in some way involved in the problem tried to . . . develop this line of thought, perhaps humanity as a whole could take a great step forward in creating a more serene and peaceful society."-Pope Saint John Paul II

As Jesus pushes on He is met by a woman named Veronica. There is nothing that Veronica can do to stop Jesus' execution from moving forward, so she does something simple, honest, and vulnerable. She steps out of the crowd to wipe the blood and sweat from His face. Her simple gesture is remembered because she recognized Jesus' dignity when so many others did not. Sometimes we feel that we cannot do anything to impact larger social change. A major issue facing our country is the prison industrial complex. Issues as large and complicated as this are difficult to grapple with, which makes them all the more important. The prison industrial complex refers to the intersection of government and industry that uses surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social, and political problems. We must recognize that these actions are not solutions because they do not seek the restoration of the human person. Take small actions like Veronica in restoring the dignity of each and every human person. These small actions may lead to larger ones that can challenge unjust systems that find profit in the imprisonment of persons.

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The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Marginalized in Society

"How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their heads? . . . Christians must learn to make their act of faith in Christ by discerning His voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty."--Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

The violence of the system degrades, keeps down, rejects and never forgets failure and weakness. So many in our society fall again and again under the burden. We have names and categories for them: alcoholics, addicts, abusers. It's so easy to see them as problems rather than persons with individual stories. It's so easy to forget how many are victims of our failed educational, economic and legal systems, scapegoats of racism, sexism and intolerance. Actually, it's a miracle that the journey continues at all and that anyone marginalized by the system gets up again.

We remember that the power of God's Word is revealed in the work of our hands, in the call of the prophets and in the transformation of society. We commit ourselves to endure in this work.

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The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Women's Rights

"The feminine genius is needed wherever we make important decisions. The church cannot be herself without the woman and her role... We have to work harder to develop a profound theology of the woman." Pope Francis

Women play a vital role in society, and the neglect to care for them as a whole is an issue of social justice. The unequal distribution of pay between men and women, the accessibility issues around the world, and the continued exploitation of women is *our* issue. It is a man's issue and it is a woman's issue. The way in which we perceive each other, as not just objects for our own use but as our brother or sister in Christ, is vital to how we will treat one another.

God our mother, God our sister, God our friend- cry out to us with the promises of change, and help us to become one as equals, rather than divided by the terms of our identity. Help us to recognize the importance of the work women do for you and your people, and guide our hearts so that we as a society may value this in the proper way.

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The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Human Trafficking

How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: "Where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labor? Let us not look the other way." Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

As Jesus neared the end of the way, he was tired, afraid and had little strength left. It is when we are vulnerable that we are most likely to fall. How difficult it is to struggle to our feet and begin again.

The world knows this and tries to destroy men and women who stand against injustice. Torture, illegal imprisonment, malicious lies are designed to beat the bodies and whip the spirits of those who proclaim freedom and hope to the people.

After falling a third time, Jesus refused to surrender and rose to face his fate and confront his executioners—a person in possession of self and of truth. Sustain us, Jesus, with your steadfast spirit. Help us to not "look the

other way." Help us now to remember our brothers and sisters around the world who are a part of the evils of human trafficking today. Change our hearts so that we may be transformed to compassion and to action.

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The Tenth Station: Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Poverty Rights

"To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren" (CCC 1397).

Jesus came into a broken world so that He might show us how to fix it. Only through God's love and mercy will we ever see a world in which poverty does not exist. Until that time, however, we must do all that is in our power to combat the forces that push people farther and farther down until they do not have anything left. When we see the homeless person walking down West Pine, are we annoyed, or do we see the face of Christ? Do we feel compassion in our hearts or do we use our bodies to walk faster? Lord, take away our anxieties and our fears about meeting the poorest in our community. Bring our hearts closer to you through bringing us closer to your people. Mend the lives of those who continue to remain in the vicious cycle of poverty. Let us be those agents for change as we see the poor in our midst.

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The Eleventh Station: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Violence

"What we believe, where we are, and how we live out our faith can make a great difference in the struggle against violence. We see the loss of lives. We serve the victims. We feel the fear. We must confront this growing culture of violence with a commitment to life, a vision of hope and a call to action."- US Conference of Catholic Bishops

Jesus knew in his own body the force of violence, the power of fear and the domination of those intent on destroying him. All might, all evil, all hostility struck against him and he fell. But he stood again, faced the power of violence, and absorbed it within himself. Jesus' lifestyle of personal nonviolence was chosen long before he faced the cross and execution. His first word, "repent" was the call to be nonviolent and obedient.

Every time we fall, giving in to hatred and revenge, we promise to rise again and recommit ourselves to the nonviolent Jesus. We will strive to be peacemakers in our daily lives, offering an alternative to the violence that is so pervasive in our culture and world. We will strive to point to violence and to confront it with a return to love in our daily actions.

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The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Religious Liberty

"Religion [cannot] be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life." Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

It is done. It is finished. But what is over? Certainly not the life of Jesus, not his promise of the victory of justice and peace and freedom? No, the reign of God is just beginning. Let us be changed, not just in our hearts, but in our lives.

What is done and finished is the reign of destruction, violence, death and sin. Now the peace of God reigns, but what a harsh and dreadful peace it is. Do you want to be a peacemaker? Jesus shows us that in being stretched between two enemies we become reconcilers, transforming enmity into love, adversaries into friends. Peace comes through nonviolently resisting injustice unto death. O God, into your hands we commend our lives. Incarnate in us the peace of Christ and give us to the world.

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The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross
Issue: End of Life Care

“Our witness to respect for life shines most brightly when we demand respect for each and every human life, including the lives of those who fail to show that respect for others. The antidote to violence is love, not more violence.” *Gospel of Life*

Jesus was beaten and bruised, whipped and scourged, until just moments before his death. He did not deserve to die with that sort of disrespect, and yet most people could not see how much love he had within him. Most people could not see how much love he deserved. As Jesus lives in us, we live in each other. Let us treat one another with both the love within us and the love others deserve, even until the moment.

How do we treat those who are approaching death in our society? What sorts of messages does our society send to those on their deathbeds? Lord, help us to turn our eyes to you when we are in the face of death. Help us to know the dignity in each day, in each moment, as it was given to us by You. You are the author of salvation and the source of life. Live deep in our hearts. Dwell in the places where we cannot see you, but dwell to work in the slow, steady way that you do. Though finding you make take an entire lifetime, help us to know that our lives are made to be holy, especially when it comes time for their end.

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The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: Environmental Rights

“Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other.” *Caritas in Veritate*

The body of Jesus was returned to the earth. It was interred with the waste, the refuse of society. The earth took back its creator and maker. The womb of Mother the Earth received the flesh of the Sun of Justice, just as Father the Sky embraced his last cry and prayer. All of earth groans and is in agony, awaiting resurrection.

A few followers, too, wait in hope, ready to witness to what is still invisible, the glorious freedom of the children of God, the coming to fullness of justice and peace. O God, be merciful to us your children. Let us be signs of hope and peace in the world and give you glory by our lives. As stewards for God’s creation, let us pray now for the accomplishments we can achieve on God’s earth with the promise of eternal life in Heaven.

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The Fifteenth Station: Resurrection (after Easter)
Issue in Catholic Social Teaching: War and Peace

"We ask the risen Jesus, who turns death into life, to change hatred into love, vengeance into forgiveness, war into peace. Yes, Christ is our peace, and through him we implore peace for all the world."- *Pope Francis, Urbi et Orbi*

The violence of the arms race and nuclear war madly flings the earth toward destruction. The threat of death hovering over nations is the harshest indignity for human beings to bear. Why? Because all humanity is one and our glory is that of the children of God.

In baptism our bodies become temples, dwelling places for God. No longer slaves to violence, our bodies are now instruments of justice and reconciliation. With our bodies we promise to make peace by nonviolently resisting evil. With our bodies we promise to create a sacred space that brings life to a weary,

war-torn world.

God, we stand before you, naked in body and spirit. You alone know the violence raging within us. Give us the grace to disarm our hearts. May we be stripped of everything that provokes violence, causes division and demeans humanity. Call us to a restored faith in you, and light a fire in our souls that honors the new life we have in You.

We adore you, Christ, and we bless you. By the power of your holy cross help us to change the world.