



Catholicsmobilizing.org
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**CATHOLIC
MOBILIZING
NETWORK**

ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY.
PROMOTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.

A Prayer Vigil for an Execution



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Opening Song:

Tree of Life, Marty Haugen
(Suggested)

Opening Prayer:

God of mercy,
We gather to pray for an end to the many acts of violence
occurring in our society.
We pray for in a special way all those impacted by the use
of the death penalty.
Guide us with your love and compassion, O God, as we
strive to be vessels of your mercy and live in a way that
lifts up the dignity of all life.
Help us to live the path of discipleship and faith as we
work to end the death penalty and promote a more
restorative justice system.
Amen.

1st Reading: Luke 23: 33-35

“When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. [Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”] They divided his garments by casting lots. The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God.”

Closing Prayer:

Loving God,
as we go forward to continue our work for life we ask to
be filled with your mercy and grace.
Help us to not grow weary of this task to end the death
penalty,
but to remain steadfast in our mission to spread
reconciliation and compassion.
Teach us the ways of your grace
as we lift up the dignity of human life and break down
the walls of hatred and violence.
In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Closing Song:

Jesus, Remember Me
(Suggested)

For all those impacted by violent crime and acts of grave harm, especially _____ (name of victim and family members - optional). May all the victims of crime and their families know your healing power and be transformed by your mercy. We pray, **God of mercy, hear our prayer.**

For all those on death row awaiting execution, especially _____ (name of person awaiting execution). May they know your unending love and forgiveness as children of God. We pray, **God of mercy, hear our prayer.**

For all of us here today and all those working to end the death penalty in our society. Allow us to be a vessels for your mercy as we work for reconciliation and transformation. We pray, **God of mercy, hear our prayer.**

The Lord's Prayer

Let us know join hands and pray together as Jesus taught us...

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass
against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen**

Reflection (Suggested -Adapt as Necessary)

Forgiveness is a vital part of our faith; it is something we are called to do everyday and something we ask of and receive unconditionally from God. While a central role in Jesus's ministry and our call to discipleship, the forgiveness we receive on the cross can be understood as profoundly unique. What is it that we "know not what [we] do"? What act is so important to our human nature, so inescapable that Jesus must take the time to intercede for us from the cross? What if, rather than seen as a pardon for our many acts of violence or for the greatest act of violence we committed that day on the cross, Jesus was forgiving for those times when we do not have the strength to do so? In this act from the cross, Jesus can be seen as forgiving beyond the human capacity. What if God, in that moment, provided forgiveness for the unforgivable?

Victims of grave harm need healing and mercy. Tragedy and loss, violence and harm are things we must not gloss over. Mourning and lament are vital paths all who experience violence must journey through. In forgiving us, all of us, on the cross Jesus created space for those who seem beyond the task of forgiveness and of being forgiven. This act allows the spirit to accompany us and feel without blame the fullness of our human emotion.* From the cross, from the point of death, Jesus creates for us a space to both feel and forgive. May we not forget this gift. May we find the space and strength to feel our gravest wounds and yet live with mercy towards all human life.

*Sonia David, MDiv, "Luke 23: 33-34" Lecture, *The Paulist Center's Seven Last Words Ecumenical Service*, Boston, MA, April 14, 2017.

2nd Reading: Matthew 27:45-46

“From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

Reflection (Suggested -Adapt as Necessary)

How do we understand God’s silence in times of great suffering? How do we reconcile a God that loves humanity with the harm and violence that occurs throughout society? How do we understand the disregard of human life in the death penalty and the inherent dignity of each human person? If we have the courage to remain at the cross with Jesus at this very moment, we begin to understand what it means to live the Christian life. In Christ’s suffering and death on the cross is revealed a God whose solidarity is willing to bear the suffering of this broken world.*

We, in turn, are also invited to share in that suffering. We are called to do more than just witness, however; and must fulfill the call to live in a way that not only shares in the suffering of our world but takes action to address that suffering. Our merciful acts that lift up the dignity and life of the human person begin to fill the silence we feel in these grave moments of suffering.

*O. Ernesto Valiente, “Mark 15: 33-34” Lecture, *The Paulist Center’s Seven Last Words Ecumenical Service*, Boston, MA, April 14, 2017.

Our lament for all those lives lost by the violence of crime and the use of the death penalty serves as acts of faith, a protest that never accepts God’s silence but joins God as we stand with and for all who suffer in this world. May we have the courage to remain at the cross and be inspired by the abandonment felt by all those, like Jesus, left to die at the hands of the state.

Intercessions

For Pope Francis and those in leadership within the Church, as they work to end a culture of death and promote a culture of life. Give them strength as they work to end all that which threatens the God-given dignity and value of human life. We pray, **God of mercy, hear our prayer.**

For the lawyers and legal teams who work to try and save the lives of those on death row. May they be filled with your strength and grace so as to never tire of the fight for all life. We pray, **God of mercy, hear our prayer.**

For all prison personnel asked to carry out executions. May they always know your grace and compassion as they are asked to perform grave acts of harm. We pray, **God of mercy, hear our prayer.**