

Vigil at the Time of an Execution

GATHERING HYMN *Be Not Afraid* (Bob Dufford, SJ)

GATHERING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Response: Amen.

Leader: We have gathered here in prayerful response to the many acts of violence in our society.

We offer our prayers in remembrance of _____, in compassion for her family, and on behalf of all those who are victims of violence.

We pray for _____ and for his executioners.

Holy Spirit of God our Creator, inspire us. May our presence here be a living sign of God's justice, compassion, and mercy. We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Response: Amen.

SCRIPTURE

First Reading: (*Gen 4:8–16*) A reading from the book of Genesis.

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out in the field." When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD then said: "What have you done! Listen: Your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil! Therefore you shall be banned from the soil that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the soil, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a restless wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD: "My punishment is too great to bear. Since you have now banished me from the soil, and I must avoid your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth, anyone may kill me at sight." Not so!" the LORD said to him. "If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged sevenfold." So the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest anyone should kill him at sight. Cain then left the LORD's presence and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

The word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Pause for silent reflection.

Second Reading: (*Matt 5:38–48*) A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the

good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
The Gospel of the Lord.

Response: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Pause for silent reflection.

Third Reading: (*Matt 6:14–15*) A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.
If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Response: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Pause for silent reflection.

INTERCESSIONS

Leader: In faith and hope, let us place our petitions before the Lord.

Please respond: *Our Creator is kind and merciful.*

Response: Our Creator is kind and merciful.

Leader:

That all victims of crime and hatred may know your healing power and be transformed by it, we pray to the Lord. (*Response*)

That all whose lives are taken by the state, especially _____, may trust in your promise of salvation, we pray. (*Response*)

That Governor _____ and _____ executioners may be comforted by you, who are Mercy and Justice, we pray to the Lord. (*Response*)

That we may have the courage and prudence to speak and act without violence, we pray to the Lord. (*Response*)

That our society may be transformed by people of peace, we pray to the Lord. (*Response*)

That our hearts may be open to your gifts of reconciliation and unconditional love, we pray to the Lord. (*Response*)

Holy God, Creator of all that is, seen and unseen, hear the intentions that are in our hearts. (*Invite participants to share their petitions.*) We pray to the Lord. (*Response*)

ACT OF OFFERING

Leader: Now let us offer one another a sign of peace.

A Prayer for an Execution

by Dale Recinella, Catholic Lay Chaplain on Florida's Death Row

Lord Jesus Christ,

In all of human history, You are the only God Who

- Has sat in the death house,
- Walked the "Perp" walk to the place of your killing,
- And suffered execution.

As I sit on the cold, concrete floor of this death cell,

Barely twenty feet from where I will be killed,

I have nothing

- Not a cup,
- No property,
- Not even a sheet.

The clothes on my back belong to the state.

My very body belongs to the state.

Lord Jesus, You also were stripped and left with nothing.

There are crowds outside the prison chanting for my death.

Lord Jesus, You also heard the crowds chanting for your death.

And, there are my mother and a few friends—very few friends—standing by me to the end.

My Lord Jesus, your Blessed Mother and the holy women and John—only John—stood by you to the end.

And, there are the guards.

Some have been kind. Some have not been kind.

So it was with You, Jesus, and the guards on your death squad.

Some mocked and struck You.

Yet others testified to your divinity.

Oh Lord, they are coming for me.

They are coming to take me and kill me.

I am terrified.

My Lord, You have traveled this ground before.

Stay with me, Jesus.

They are here, Lord.

Oh please, lead me through this, Jesus.

Oh my God, they are really killing me.

Lord, remember me in your kingdom.

And forgive them, Lord.

They do not know what they are doing. Amen.

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CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Each of us needs the Lord's guidance and mercy. We humbly place before him all that is in our hearts, and we ask his blessing now and always, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Response: Amen.

Leader: Let us go in peace.

Response: Amen.

CLOSING HYMN *Amazing Grace* (John Newton)

This prayer service was adapted from a service developed by the Diocese of Covington, Office of Justice and Peace.