

# Way of the Cross Prayer Service, Awake Milwaukee

This prayer service is based on a Way of the Cross written by students at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Boston in 2002, which is maintained on the [Voice of the Faithful](#) website.

*\* Please note that the service includes reflections written by survivors of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. Some of these reflection include specific details of abuse and may be upsetting or triggering to readers.*

## **The First Station: Jesus Is Condemned**

### **Luke 22:66-71**

When the day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

### **Reflection from Ann**

*The words of Jesus in this passage are: "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer" when the Sanhedrin priests ask him if He is Christ and their Savior. These words by Jesus are profound. They resonate with me personally, as when I have told some of my priest friends that I needed help with my faith and with the abuse I've endured, many have rejected me, instead of being pastoral. A priest friend planned to be there for me, but when he heard his other priest friends speaking of me, he regrettably chose their loyalties over mine. This kicked me to my core, as likely it did our Lord Jesus, when His priests betrayed him. Our Lord continues to be betrayed by His priests any time a survivor is abused as well as any time they go to a priest for help, and they are denied ministries of support by the priest who is standing in the place of Jesus on earth.*

*In such actions, I recognize, even though I don't want to, that in rejecting me in my time of need, they have also rejected Christ for Christ called them to be shepherds, and instead, they run away. They do not believe me, even when I have spoken the truth and they have spiritually pushed me aside to instead unite with their fellow priests and not answer the call to serve those in need. They discounted me and my need for healing, prayer, and support, to get past the actions of the other priests, clergy, and laypeople who have hurt me and others in such a deep way. It is my hope that no one else ever experiences a lifetime of rejection when help is needed from the Church. May there one day be an inclusive environment for those who have been abused and for those who have been rejected when they sought spiritual and pastoral healing.*

### **Isaiah 53:7-8**

Though he was harshly treated he submitted and opened not his mouth: Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers he was silent and opened not his mouth. Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away, and who would have thought any more of his destiny?

### **Reflection from Jennifer**

*"Like a lamb led to slaughter, he was silent and opened not his mouth" brings a sharp and searing pain to my heart. Abused as an adult woman, I know the heartbreak of walking into a church to have backs turned to me, or worse still, the old friends who look right through me as though I'm not there. I know the shock and horror of seeing myself slandered and called humiliating names on the internet for my family to read. They eagerly believe the gossip that I had an affair with a priest. They don't know that I was a recipient of his calculated grooming and mind-controlling manipulation in the name of God. They don't know that he forced me down as I cried out for him to stop as I fought to get him off me with every ounce of strength I had while he raped me and left my soul ravaged and broken that day. And I don't tell them.*

### **Let us pray:**

God of Justice, we pray for our church and our world. We pray with and for our sisters and brothers who suffer, but have no voice. Hear the cry of those who are most vulnerable and come to their defense. Make us attentive to their voices and their needs, that with Your strength, we may work together for justice and truth.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

### **The Second Station: Jesus Takes up His Cross**

#### **Isaiah 53:4-5**

Surely he has borne our infirmities and endured our sufferings: yet we accounted him guilty, afflicted and struck down by God. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities: upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

### **Let us pray:**

Jesus chose His cross and bore it out of love, but abuse victims and survivors made no such choice. Jesus who suffered, share your strength and courage with those who bear the burdens of abuse. When their cross feels too heavy, renew them. You tell us: "Come to Me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens. and I will give you rest." May survivors experience this rest.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

### **The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time**

#### **Psalms 69: 1-3, 19-20**

Save me, O God, for the waters have risen to my neck. I have sunk into the mud of the deep and there is no foothold. I have entered the waters of the deep and the waves overwhelm me. I am wearied with all my crying, my throat is parched. My eyes are wasted away from looking for my God.

You know how they taunt and deride me; my oppressors are all before you. Taunts have broken my heart; I have reached the end of my strength. I looked in vain for compassion for consolers; not one could I find.

### **Reflection from Deborah**

*Where is God now? Where was He then? When all you once believed in—your family, your church, your faith—seems a lie, you wonder if there really is a caring God. When I found out that my abuser was a serial abuser, a priest that had been passed from parish to parish and no one stopped him, I had nothing to cling to. Who could I trust now? Even God seemed like a liar.*

**Let us pray:** For all abuse victims suffering from taunts, disbelief, and being ignored, especially from church officials to whom they reported their story of abuse. We pray for the endurance and steadfastness that you provide, and for their ability to rise again each time they are brought down.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

### **The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Sorrowful Mother**

#### **Mark 3:31-35**

Jesus' mother and brothers came: and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my sisters and brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

#### **Let us pray:**

For children and adults who have been hurt by their ministers, we pray. For mothers and fathers, spouses and friends, who have borne the pain of their loved one's suffering, we pray. For all our sisters and brothers who are angry, ashamed, saddened and disillusioned by the crimes that have been committed within the Body of Christ, we pray.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

### **The Fifth Station: Simon Helps to Carry the Cross**

#### **Ecclesiastes 4:7-10, 12**

I found this vanity under the sun: Those who are solitary with no companion: with neither child nor sister nor brother, endlessly laboring alone. Two together are better than one alone. If one of the two falls, the other will lift them up. Woe to those who are alone! For if they should fall, they have no one to lift them up. Where one alone may be overcome, two together can stand. A three-ply cord is not easily broken.

**Let us pray:**

Faithful God, You promised to remain with Your people until the end of the age. Be near our brothers and sisters who suffer the trauma of sexual abuse, especially those abused by ordained, religious, and lay ministers in the church. Direct Your people and your ministers to accompany them so that they may be supported and encouraged in their struggles and receive your healing and consolation.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

**The Sixth Station: Veronica Offers Her Veil to Jesus****Corinthians 15:35, 37, 42-43, 47-49**

Someone may say, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come back?" What you sow is not the body that is to be but a bare kernel. The seed is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown humble: it is raised glorious. It is sown weak: it is raised powerful. The first Adam was from the earth, earthly; the second Adam, from heaven. As was the earthly one, so also are the earthly. And as is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.

**Reflection from Emily**

*The name "Veronica" is a name meaning true, "vera", icon. She is described in this Station as one who was granted and bore the true image of Christ through an act of compassion.*

*Finding people who understand the spiritual and emotional aspects of what I've been through has been difficult. Mentioning my spiritual struggles related to my abuse, wondering if God really loved me when it felt as if he'd handed me a snake when I asked for a fish, at a Catholic mother's group brought only blank stares and a hasty change of subject. Others ask repeatedly if I've forgiven my abuser; not understanding that such forgiveness isn't a single decision: it's a series of them chosen again and again, a slow painful journey rather than a leap.*

*On my journey though, I have found people who haven't turned away from the ugliness of my story, who have been willing to listen to the enormity of it, even if they can't fully understand it. Those people are new Veronicas, those who are willing to bear an image of Christ to me in my struggle. For them, I am truly thankful.*

**Reflection from Mike**

*As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse by clergy, praying this Station, I am moved by what Veronica did. Veronica had the clarity of her faith to look past all of the public perception and outcry which caused Jesus to be condemned to death. That was all distraction to her. As Jesus approached, carrying his cross, with her strength and courage, she saw real human need and she responded with what she could. On the surface, wiping Jesus' brow, may not seem like much. On a deeper level, she made a heartfelt connection, which provided Jesus comfort in his time of need.*

*As I continue to carry my own cross of my childhood trauma, I have experienced tender and sweet heartfelt connections from others which has comforted me and calmed my anxieties. My wife, not being able to comprehend all that I've been through in my youth, yet caring for me with all of the little things she does each day, on the surface may not seem like much, but has meant the world to me. My friends, many priests, co-workers and other survivors of sexual abuse, have all in a variety of ways big and small, "wiped my brow" giving me comfort and encouragement to continue on.*

*Veronica's actions are a model for the real, heartfelt difference we can make for someone in a crisis. My hope and prayer is we can emulate Veronica's clarity of faith, look past all distractions, to the real human need in front of us. Any connection, like wiping sweat from Jesus' face, can provide comfort and make a difference.*

**Let us pray:**

O Creator and Bearer of all that is, You formed human beings to be in Your image and have given Your faithful ones new birth through water and the Spirit. May the love of Jesus be inscribed in the hearts of Your people, bearers of the image of Christ Who has died and risen to free them from fear and shame and make them bearers of light to the world.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

**The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time**

**Psalm 31:9-11**

Have mercy on me, O God, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. I am the scorn of my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my friends: those who see me in the street flee from me.

**Reflection from Deborah**

*I was like a modern-day leper. The first bishop I talked to about the abuse told me that it was all in the past now, the seminaries are fixed he said! I guess I was just supposed to get over it already. And he bore no more responsibility. He seemed afraid of me, like I was the one that bore the fault.*

**Let us pray:** Help us, O God of all strength and compassion. Lift us up when we fall - faint from hunger, defeated by ridicule, silenced by force or threat, beaten into submission. Lift up survivors who are weary from not being supported, from being avoided, from being seen as a liability. Renew them and renew all your people, for gently You raise us and heal our weary souls.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

## **The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Weeping Women**

### **A poem by Gilbert Shaw**

Weep not for me.

Weep for the Church if it should speak of peace when peace is not

Weep for shepherds who neglect the flock and fail to seek the lost.

In the wide place between the city that is lost, seeking its own good,

And Mount Golgotha, the steep ascent that leads to life.

Human beings stand

In every age and time and place

Looking upon the sacrifice

Of innocence.

### **Let us pray:**

We pray in lament for our Church which has too often neglected its most vulnerable members, and for shepherds entrusted with their care who instead abused them, ignored them, or fostered a culture of silence and secrecy that protected abusers. We pray for truth to be revealed and justice to be done. We pray for a new culture of accompaniment and care in the Church.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

## **The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time**

### **Luke 17:1-2**

Jesus said to his disciples, "Occasions for stumbling are sure to come, but alas for those by whom they come! It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck than to be the downfall of a single one of these little ones."

### **Let us pray:**

God of Life, we turn to You, the source of creation, the source of healing, the source of forgiveness. We ask Your forgiveness for great pain and injury done to Your dearly loved children. We ask Your forgiveness for failing to protect Your children entrusted to our care. We pray for every survivor to know deep in their hearts that their abuse was not their fault, and to hear this message echoed in every person they encounter. Amen.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

## **The Tenth Station: Jesus Is Stripped**

### **Psalm 28:1, 3-4**

O God, my defender, I call to you. Listen to my cry! If you do not answer me, I will go down to the world of the dead. Do not condemn me with my abusers, with those who do evil, those whose words are friendly, but who have evil in their hearts.

O God, you know. Remember me and vindicate me. Avenge me on my abusers. Do not put me off: see what reproaches I endure for your sake.

### **Let us pray:**

God of salvation, heal our brothers and sisters who have been abused as adults, stripped of their dignity, preyed upon in their vulnerability. Raise them up with Christ, and restore to them their dignity as children of God.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

## **The Eleventh Station: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross**

### **2 Corinthians 4:8-11**

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

**Let us pray:** God of mercy and compassion, You became a human being like us in all things knowing our joys and sorrows, sharing with us the labor of love. You were faithful to humanity through abandonment, betrayal, humiliation, and torture. Do not let those who trust in You be crushed by terrors. Grant Your people the courage to remain with Your daughters and sons who suffer. Let us not become hard of heart. Help us to consider the sufferings of our brothers and sisters as our own, and to commit ourselves to opposing all that threatens their humanity and their lives.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

## **The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross**

### **Philippians 2:6-9**

We remember Jesus Christ, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and was born a human being. And having become in every way human, He humbled Himself in obedience to the point of death- even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.

**Let us pray:**

We look to you, O Jesus, Who poured out Your life for us. Be with us when we are weak, when we are lost, when we have been betrayed and deserted by those we loved and trusted. In our weakness grant us Your courage and strength.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

**The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken down from the Cross****Jeremiah 4:19-20, 23-26**

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly:

Disaster overtakes disaster, the whole land is laid waste.

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; they were quaking. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins.

**Reflection from Brenda**

*Jesus' death is not depicted as a singular event but rather as a cascade of destruction that emanates out into the surrounding world. Nothing and no one is left untouched. Fruitful land becomes a barren wasteland. Stable landforms are reduced to quaking. Human comfort and companionship flee. Silence is the prevailing sound. Multiplying images of destruction are an apt metaphor for the ripple effects of the abuse that occurred within my own family. Four of five siblings were abused without anyone knowing of another's abuse for decades. Societal shame surrounding sexuality closeted our suffering and ensured our silence, breeding profound inner turmoil and deep feelings of isolation and abandonment. The result: years of hyper vigilance, heightened anxiety, PTSD symptoms, two teenage pregnancies, three divorces, addiction, and suicide.*

**Reflection from Deborah**

*It was my husband who received my broken and beaten spirit after I found out the full truth of the abuser-priest. My husband wanted to help me heal but could only hold me as I wailed aloud during those times of remembering the abuse and watch as I fought depression and anxiety. How do you put together a shattered life? My husband too was so horribly wounded through secondary trauma—two victims of the same abuser.*

**Let us pray:**

For all innocent victims to be taken down from their crosses and for those whose arms receive their crushed bodies and spirits. We pray for those survivors who have endured disaster after disaster, who found their abuse to be only the first chapter of a long and painful journey. We pray for renewed life for them and all those who have been humiliated and tortured.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

## **The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb**

### **Psalm 143:3-9**

My enemies pursue me. They have crushed my life to the ground  
They have left me in darkness like those long dead.  
My spirit is faint within me; my heart is dismayed.  
I remember the days of old; I ponder all your deeds  
The works of your hands I recall. I stretch out my hands to you:  
I thirst for you like a parched land. Hasten to answer me, Lord; for my spirit fails me.  
Do not hide your face from me, lest I become like those descending to the pit.  
At dawn let me hear of your kindness, for in you I trust.  
Show me the path I should walk, for to you I entrust my life.  
Rescue me, Lord from my foes, for in you I hope.

### **Let us pray:**

Font of all Grace, we ask you to restore to life those whose love has been killed by physical and emotional violation, those whose faith has been killed by secrecy and lies, those whose hope has been killed by the refusal to hear their voices and prioritizing self-protection over protection of the vulnerable. We pray for those who feel banished to the tomb.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

## **The Fifteenth Station: The Resurrection**

### **John 20:19-22**

On the evening of the first day of the week when the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." When he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. And the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you." And He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

### **Reflection from Larry**

*I lay dead in the tomb's darkness not for three days but for many, many, many days. Will I ever know any real sense of peace? Ever embrace my own dignity again? Will the pain and betrayal of abuse ever fade? The doors and windows of my heart, my feelings, my whole being are locked, out of shame and fear. My self-image and worth in ruin, I defer to Jesus: what he said, how he suffered, the way he endured. Little by little the stone rolls away and light pierces the darkness in my soul. I see love in his eyes, peace in his touch and the Spirit ready to heal, restore, renew. There is life after death, light after darkness. "I can overcome all things in the One who strengthens me."*

### **Reflection from Brenda**

*For years I suffered a recurring nightmare. In my dream, menacing shadow figures came upon me. Terrified. I tried with all my might to move my feet, but they wouldn't budge. I tried repeatedly to*

*scream for help, but nothing would come out of my mouth but pitiful groans. My husband, awakened by my groans, would gently shake me awake and my terror would recede. This went on periodically for years. One night, in my dream when I repeatedly tried to scream for help, suddenly my ineffectual groans changed to loud, clear cries of "Help! Help!". I felt such elation. My voice would be heard! I would be saved! After my startled and alarmed husband woke me, I explained as best I could that my screams hadn't indicated a greater terror, but quite the opposite. My screams, my voice, had defeated the terror. I felt tremendous wonder, joy and amazement and a new lightness of spirit. My night terror has not returned.*

**Let us pray:**

Christ of our suffering, be with us now as we hope for the resurrection. Let the Spirit move freely throughout Your people. May the voice of the Spirit no longer be silenced in any member of the Body of Christ. Bring us solace. Bring us hope. Bring us a renewal of Your Church.

Leader: Jesus, hear us.

Response: Jesus, be with us.

**Concluding Prayer**

We believe, loving God, that You are creating us, walking with us, helping us to be co-creators of a renewed church where all might flourish and thrive.

We believe, loving God, that You are calling us to compassion for our world, our neighbors, the least among us, and, tonight in particular, victims and survivors of sexual abuse.

We believe in a God Who is poor, Who lives in the streets, Who is the target of repression, Who has been a victim of abuse, a God Who knows our sufferings and calls us to be one with each other in this world and in our church.

We believe, loving God, that You are with us in history and call us to make real the words of the prophets, that we might heal the suffering caused by sin, secrecy, deceit, the misuse of power, and all structures of domination and oppression.

We believe in a God who is human, a God among us, a God who is revealed in Jesus, who calls us to build a world of life and love and to find in that work the transcendence of divine joy.

We believe in the community of faith planted on this earth to carry out the witness of Jesus, to nurture one another on this journey with love and tenderness, to heal all who have been crucified among us, to make whole the Body of Christ.

We believe in a world and a church where there are no longer rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, those with power and those without, those with a voice and those who are voiceless; but where all are welcome at the banquet table, sharing the one bread in the dignity and sacredness that God has bestowed on all creation through Jesus our crucified and risen brother.

God, bring this world and this Church into being, and reveal to each of us our call in bringing it to life with you. Amen.