

STATIONS OF CROSS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2021

FOR THOSE IN THE CHURCH: IN THE INTEREST OF SOCIAL DISTANCING, PLEASE REMAIN SEATED FOR THE DURATION OF THE STATIONS. THE CROSS BEARER WILL WALK THE STATIONS FOR EVERYONE IN THE CHURCH.

General visual description of the Church of St. Francis Xavier's depiction of the Stations of the Cross.

William Lamprecht, a German-born artist, one of the most prominent ecclesial painters of his day, painted the Stations of the Cross. The murals are unusually large, approximately eight feet tall by twelve feet wide, wrapping around the Church from the north wall of the east transept to the west transept. The stations begin in rich colors with Jesus wearing a red cloak over a purple garment under a clear blue sky, but the stations grow noticeably darker as Jesus is stripped of his clothes, and the sky darkens until Jesus' death in station twelve. The figures depicted look white and European reflecting the ethnic makeup of the 19th century congregation and the artist. In general, the bold movement of the twenty or so figures in each station convey drama and energy with Jesus and two or three figures typically dominating the foreground. A gold halo always surrounds Jesus' head as well as the head of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Large buildings and palm trees complete the background.

CALL TO PRAYER: WE GATHER THIS EVENING TO PRAY THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE.

As we walk with Christ, let us walk also with the victims of racism and White supremacy down through the ages in the United States.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown a bright light on the structural racism that continues to afflict people of color making them three times as likely to die from Covid-19 as non-Hispanic Whites.

As we approach the first-year anniversaries of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Brianna Taylor and George Floyd, we remember all people of color who have been innocent victims of police or racial violence.

As we associate the suffering of Jesus with the suffering of racism's victims, may our hearts be stirred to profound sorrow that stirs us to eradicate the stain of racism and white privilege from our Church and from our nation.

*We adore you O Christ and we praise you.
All: Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*



THE FIRST STATION: JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

Wearing a purple tunic and red robe, Jesus is led / pushed forward towards the street, where His Cross awaits Him. Pontius Pilate, seated on a throne behind Jesus, is washing his hands of the condemnation.

Jesus, disenfranchised from the religious, political and economic power structures of His day, treaded on the margins of society, challenging the status quo. He embraced the outcast, poor, sinners, marginalized, sick and suffering. Providing signs and healing, all His actions were meant to teach mercy. Ultimately, His response to people's deepest needs led the ruling elite to feel an impending loss of control from their imposition of legalistic religiosity and judgments of others. So they sought to silence the messenger and preserve their power.

Fear of losing power fuels our justice system still. American society and its institutions are dominated by white privilege, social policies, and conscious and unconscious racial bias which prevents our brothers and sisters of color from ever realizing their own true potential. Mass incarceration of young men of color is a national crisis.

Over 1/3 of those executed by capital punishment since 1976 have been people of color. Supreme Court justice Harry Blackmun said, in his famous dissent in a death penalty case "the biases and prejudices that infect society generally influence the determination of who is sentenced to death, even within the narrower pool of death eligible defendants selected according to objective standards."

Death sentences continue to be carried out in our city streets to men and women of color, from law enforcement, from random gun violence and from inadequate health care.

The burdens and failures of the United States justice system fall most heavily and unfairly on communities of color.

The response to our petitions will be **God of Justice, hear our prayer.**

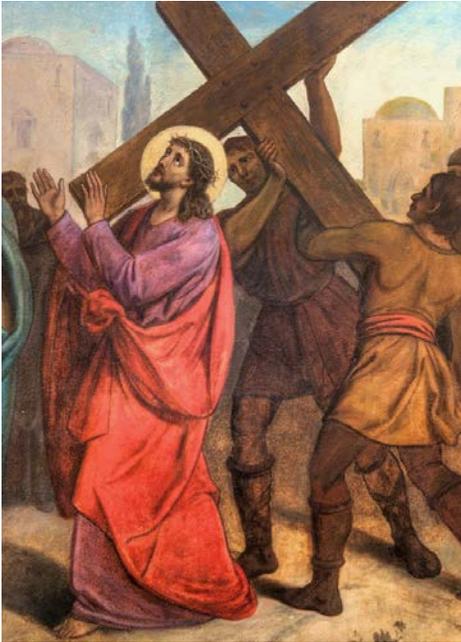
Let us pray. Help us, O God, to have the energy and creativity to work towards the abolishment of capital punishment in this country. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

Helps us also to find ways to encourage our church leaders to speak out against the government sanctioned execution of all people and to bring the love of God to those who sit behind prison walls. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

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SECOND STATION: JESUS CARRIES HIS CROSS

Still in the same tunic and robe, Jesus looks beseechingly up to Heaven; while two Roman Soldiers, in short white military tunics, lower the heavy wooden Cross onto His shoulders. Members of the jeering crowd, in various colored tunics and robes, point the way to Calvary, the Crucifixion site.

Beaten and bruised, Jesus placed the cross on His shoulders, in His hands. A journey to Golgotha, along familiar paths, but lined with new imperatives. A journey shattering the law, ultimately offering pardon.

How many people in our community carry crosses of injustice, violence, betrayal, insults and hate? Straining their hearts to see mercy, they see people quickly turning away from their painful suffering. Like a vanishing mirage on the distant horizon, hope disappears. Who do we see carrying the cross of the coronavirus in our city, in our country, and in our world? Those already oppressed because of their race; color; ethnic or national origin; age; disabilities; gender identity; sexual orientation; religion; imprisonment; immigrant or refugee status; or poverty. Are we too busy to notice, absorbed in selfish pursuits, numb with indifference or will we be visible, tangible, concrete instruments of mercy in our daily living?

Let us pray that we may find the face of Jesus in the faces of those we meet who bear the weight and the wounds of racism and other forms of oppression. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

Let us pray that we may respond to those wounded physically or psychologically by racism or other forms of oppression as Jesus would — with acts of loving service, healing, compassion and solidarity. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

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THIRD STATION: JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME

Weak after the Scourging at the Pillar and the Crowning with Thorns, Jesus Falls for the First Time under the weight of the heavy Cross. While being whipped by the attending Roman Soldiers, Jesus is mocked by the crowd.

Laboring under the weight of the Cross, Jesus slowly sets forth on the way to Calvary. His agony in the garden has exhausted His Body; He is sore with blows and wounds; His strength fails Him; He falls to the ground under the cross.

Let us pray. We have fallen as a nation under the weight of racial and religious profiling; may we have the strength of Jesus to stand up against intolerance. For this we pray.

All: God of justice, hear our prayer.

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FOURTH STATION: JESUS MEETS HIS SORROWFUL MOTHER

Pushing through the crowd, the Blessed Mother, dressed in a blue cloak and white head scarf, sees her Son and holds out her hands, imploringly to Him. Jesus, sadly and painfully, looks at Mary, and, knowingly, their eyes meet.

Mary's heart is broken as she sees her beloved son humiliated and tortured, soon to die on the cross. The crowd mocks and taunts Jesus. She feels their cruelty and lack of humanity. She too is in agony. There is no one who will help.

Today we see the sorrowful women who mourn their children taken by senseless violence, illness that could have been treated and the hopelessness of poverty, drugs and gang membership. When we embrace the full measure of a pro-life vision then we shall encounter the sorrowful mothers in our own society who refuse to be comforted because their children are no more.

Let us pray. Help us O God that we and our Church shall be a refuge and light to young people who search for the meaning and promise of their lives and seek freedom from violence and danger. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

That families who struggle financially, emotionally and spiritually might find a welcome and sustaining helping hand in faith communities throughout the country, and that our nation will put the welfare of human beings over the welfare of corporate executives. For this we pray.

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FIFTH STATION: SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS JESUS CARRY THE CROSS

Simon, from the North African city of Cyrene, dressed in a yellow cloak, is taken from the crowd and forced to carry Jesus' Cross for a time. Jesus, nearly on the ground in pain, looks thankfully at Simon.

Simon, from Cyrene in North Africa, comes to Jerusalem and while a passer-by, he sees Jesus falter on his long, slow death march to Calvary. The soldier-executioners force Simon to walk behind Jesus bearing the cross. Simon's single recorded act of kindness and his encounter with Jesus change him, and they have never been forgotten. His sons, Rufus and Alexander, later become known among early Christian believers.

We live in a culture that carries the collective cross of deeply historical and systemic racism. We also carry our own uniquely shaped racial burdens based on the family we are part of, the neighborhoods where we have been raised and live, the Church and parishes to which we have belonged, the schools we have learned in, the workplaces we have worked in, and those we have called friends. Though initially voluntold, Simon becomes the first to take up the cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Today we are called to become Simons who take up and confront the cross of our collective and personal racism that only leads to sin and death. Like Simon and Jesus we are challenged to use our gifts to engage in acts of loving service to help our brothers and sisters who are devalued by the daily microaggressions and macroaggressions of racism, our nation's original sin.

We are grateful to healthcare and other essential workers who followed the example of Simon and Jesus and rendered acts of loving service to help all of us during the time of the pandemic. Yet, we too are called to be Simons who move beyond acts of charity to advocate for policies that bring about social justice and root out the systemic structures upholding a culture of pervasive racism. We welcome the humility of Simon to accept the help we receive from those we seek to serve and to learn from them. Finally, we strive for the wisdom to see how we contribute to whatever racial and other inequalities our brothers and sisters suffer and to acknowledge our need for forgiveness.

Let us pray that we are never indifferent to the evil of racism because it denies the truth of our equality before God and with one another. All may not be guilty, but all are responsible. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the grace to do more than we understand so that we may understand more than we do in order to confront and eradicate the evil of racism that permeates our society, Church, parish, family, neighborhood, schools, workplaces and world. For this we pray.

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SIXTH STATION: VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

Veronica, emerging from the shouting crowd, kneels in front of Jesus, the white cloth opened in her hands before her. Jesus, looking lovingly at her, reaches out to Veronica and the cloth.

Jesus' face was not hidden from Veronica, as blood and sweat she wiped from his brow imprinted an indelible image on her cloth. Veronica noticed the suffering of Jesus and tried to alleviate that suffering in the only way she could.

The Center for Disease Control reports that Black, Latinx and Native American persons across our nation, are almost three times as likely to die from Covid-19 as are people who are white.

The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people of color highlights how structural inequities in healthcare, housing, education and high representation in frontline or essential occupations negatively affect health outcomes.

Unlike Veronica, how often have we who are white failed to see the impact of structural racism on the lives of people of color?

Let us pray that the white community may see the negative impact of structural racism and demand change. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

Let us pray that the white community may stand with people of color in their suffering and demand change. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

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SEVENTH STATION: JESUS FALLS FOR THE SECOND TIME

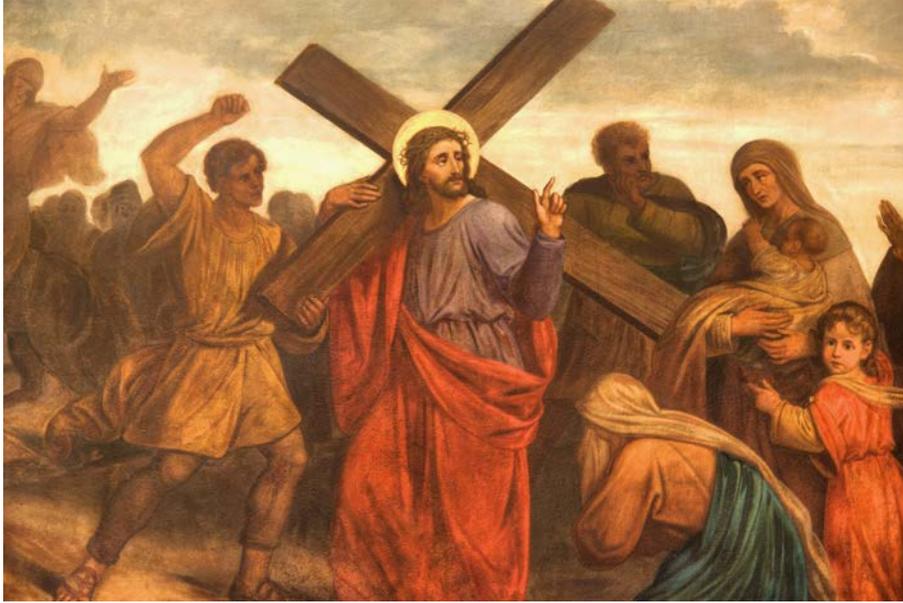
Exhausted from the heaviness of the Cross, Jesus stumbles and falls for the Second Time. The Roman Soldiers continue to whip and beat Jesus, while the crowd, even louder than before, deride Jesus.

Recall how Jesus' struggle to go on increased His pain and cost Him a constantly greater loss of blood until his strength failed a second time, and He fell upon the ground again.

Let us pray. We have fallen as a nation; when our police shoot down little Black and brown boys without consequence, may we have the strength to hold them accountable. For this we pray.

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EIGHTH STATION: JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

Continuing on the way to Calvary, Jesus encounters many of His women followers from Jerusalem, dressed in many colored robes and head scarves, crying and lamenting over the pain that He is suffering.

Jesus turns to them, telling them not to weep for Him, but for themselves and their children.

Jesus looks up and sees women crying for him as he carried his cross along the road to Calvary. All they can give him are their tears of anguish and despair. Jesus reminds them that they must care for themselves and their children. As they mourn and lament, their sorrow and dismay over injustice fill their hearts. They observe first-hand the sheer brutality, the violence, the injustice...far from the message of mercy Jesus spoke everywhere he went.

Many women of color are often employed at relatively low wages taking care of elderly white people, white babies and children, and cleaning the homes of white people. They struggle to find time for their own families. Such is the situation of many women of color who are forced into racially unjust economic labor. In addition, most of the victims of human trafficking are women and children of color. We must consistently be aware of the tragic connections between trafficking, migration, poverty, racism, and gender to destroy the roots of racial oppression and human trafficking.

Let us pray that God watch over all women and children of color and protect them from human trafficking. For this we pray,

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

Let us pray that we become more sensitive to their needs and be willing to listen and minister to them whenever possible. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

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NINTH STATION: JESUS FALLS FOR THE THIRD TIME

Overwhelmed by the heavy weight of the Cross, Jesus Falls to the ground for the Third Time. Ridiculed by both the Roman Soldiers and the crowd, Jesus is yet again forced to His feet by the soldiers, while the crowd admonishes Jesus by pointing towards Calvary.

Jesus, arriving exhausted at the foot of Calvary, falls for the third time. His weakness was extreme and the cruelty of His executioners was excessive; they tried to hasten His steps when He hardly had the strength to move.

Let us pray. We have fallen as a nation; when our elected officials will not uphold the Constitution of our country, may we find the strength to elect representatives that will. For this we pray.

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TENTH STATION: JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS CLOTHES

While the Cross is being readied for the Crucifixion, Jesus is stripped of His outer robe and tunic, left standing in only His white loincloth before the crowd, who angrily continue to leer at Jesus.

A psychological mockery preceded Jesus being stripped of his clothes. Then Jesus stands naked and vulnerable before a hostile crowd of strangers and His mother and a few friends, knowing he is about to be killed. What is He thinking? What is He feeling? Does He dare to look at the jeering crowds who have turned against Him just in one week?

We remember the enslaved people in our own American history when entire families of men, women and children were sold on a block. Their bodies touched, groped and explored in front of crowds and perspective owners of human beings, considered to be only 3/5 human. Did they feel Jesus' presence amongst them during this degradation and torment?

Let us pray.

Jesus, our brother and our friend, you and your mother knew the ultimate vulnerability and humiliation or being exposed and powerless, as you both stood up to oppression and injustice. Give us the courage to work together in solidarity to attack the political, economic, social and religious structures that refuse to hear and to listen to your people and thus perpetuate their torment. For this we pray.

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ELEVENTH STATION: JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

Laying the Cross flat on the ground, Jesus is pushed down on top of it, His hands nailed to the crossbeam and His feet, one on top of the other, are nailed to the vertical post. Above His head is nailed the inscription “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

Nailed to the cross, the powers of this world thought they would silence Jesus and His followers. In the act of torture, mercy appeared to vanish with each blow to the nails piercing His hands and feet.

Each day children living in poverty, especially children of color, take blows to their future. Food insecurity stunts their growth and inhibits their ability to learn. Neighborhoods are more likely impacted by toxic air pollution contributing to childhood asthma and long-term health concerns.

Early evidence suggests learning losses from the pandemic, though large for all students, will be largest for those who are Black and brown. This does not reflect a lack of effort on the part of families, but rather a magnification of structural inequities in school quality and home environments baked into our society. The legacy of racism may be more visible during the pandemic, but it operates all the time, making it harder for Black and brown children to succeed in school.

The cross of childhood poverty must not have the last word. May we sense the responsibility to be a living sign of mercy by caring for the most vulnerable, the children among us. Let us pray that we may find the political will to eliminate the unjust structures that crucify children of color. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for a future of equal justice for all children. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer

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TWELFTH STATION: JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

Hoisting the Cross up in place, Jesus' final agony begins, crucified in between two thieves. While the soldiers cast lots for His clothing and the crowd throws insults at Him, Jesus, suffering from pain, dehydration, and asphyxiation, breaths His last breath.

Death kills all hope and all dreams. Jesus' mother and his close friends felt the end and experienced the trauma of loss by His execution for being viewed as dissident, a disrupter of social institutions and a blasphemer. He died physically. They died emotionally. Let us pray.

Crucified Jesus, seeing you dead, we remember the people of color who have been abused, humiliated and lynched or gunned down by their white oppressors or the police and by the systems that continue today to perpetuate this inequality of personhood. Help us to recognize the insidious nature of these systems that through policies and societal and cultural beliefs, still keep people down.

Give us the grace to create structures of hope for families who continue to bear the effects of systemic racism and bias in all aspects of their lives even during the Covid-19 pandemic.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer

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THIRTEENTH STATION: JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS AND PLACED IN THE ARMS OF HIS MOTHER

Jesus' lifeless body is taken down from the Cross and placed in the arms of Mary, His mother. Surrounded by Mary Magdalene and John the Apostle, all are sorrowful and weeping.

As Mary held her newborn son, she now holds His lifeless body. An unfathomable spear pierces her mother's heart! Is this the sorrowful ending to her fiat of Yes to a Divine call? It is almost unbearable for a mother to see her child die before she does. That is against the natural order!

Only Mary's faith and trust in God's mercy sustain her. Many African-American mothers have suffered seeing their children, particularly their sons, die from police brutality, mass incarceration, the death penalty, and lack of good health care. We have heard of Eric Garner and George Floyd, Black men whose murders made headlines, and statistics show that Black Americans, as well as other people of color, are killed by the police at a disproportionately much higher rate than White Americans. In addition, Blacks and other people of color have died at disproportionate rates from COVID-19 than White Americans due to inadequate health care and other factors beyond their control, such as poor housing conditions and low income.

Let us pray that families of color who suffer the unjust tragic loss of a loved one may find the courage to persevere and to continue in the struggle for justice. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer

Let us pray that African-American mothers who have lost their sons tragically may find the courage to persevere and to continue in the struggle for justice. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer

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FOURTEENTH STATION: JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

Jesus' body, wrapped in the white ceremonial Jewish burial cloth, is placed in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and an attendant. The Blessed Mother and Mary Magdalene watch from outside the entrance to the tomb.

Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man and a distinguished member of the Council, is also a disciple of Jesus, but only in secret. Once Jesus dies, Joseph bravely goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus. When Pilate approves, Joseph takes the body, prepares it for burial, and lays it in the new tomb that he had made for himself.

We currently live in a nation entombed within the sinful structure of racism where the only outcomes lead to not life, but to death, even death in a pandemic. We dwell in a land of darkness where those oppressed by systemic racism and racial violence are denied adequate housing, education, employment, healthcare, safe environments, and justice before law, as well as other fundamental human needs that support life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Grippled by the soul sickness of racial inequality, we stand in desperate need of Resurrection and all that is life-affirming. Like Joseph of Arimathea we must move from a faith rooted in fear to a faith grounded in courage and confidence. Joseph generously gave his own tomb as a resting place to spare Jesus the further indignity of a criminal's burial. Like Joseph we must move beyond the comfort zone of our privilege and wealth and commit our time, talent and treasure to build a society that reflects God's Kingdom in its inclusion, solidarity and bonds of peace. Like Joseph, we must be willing to take risks to do what is right: to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God from the darkness we currently endure inside the tomb of racism and racial violence into the light of Resurrection where freedom, equality and peace for all prevail.

Let us pray for a faith based on courage and love without measure that we may be never be afraid to do what is right to root out racism and replace it with a just society where all God's children may be equal and free to be themselves. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for those, known and unknown, who died without a proper burial during the eras of slavery, Jim Crow, the Black Code, and mass incarceration, and the racial violence and Coronavirus of our current age. May the hand of our God of love and mercy bury these dead and bring them home. For this we pray.

All: God of Justice, hear our prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus' friends are afraid that this is the end of Jesus. But as surely as spring follows winter and daylight follows the dark night, Jesus proves that death has no power over him, nor subsequently over us. New life always follows after death.

Jesus once said: "Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a seed." And so it must be with us. We pray for courage to take a stance and intervene if we witness racial injustice. We pray for all victims of violence, grant them eternal rest with Christ. We pray for peace and comfort for the families who have lost loved ones.

Let us leave our fractured and broken humanity at the foot of His cross.

Let us put down our racism, our prejudices and unfair judgments, our hearts of stone, our chains of apathy and complacency. Here we lay them down. May we now go forward in the hope that we shall be released from these burdens; released into the freedom to love, to see others as God sees them, to craft our earthly purposes more in line with God's purposes for us and for all creation.

We make these prayers in the name of Jesus, the beloved Son of God. Here in His torturous death as a criminal, He is still God's beloved. And so are we.

All: Amen.