

**The 45th Annual Good Friday Pilgrimage for Peace
The Way of the Cross; The Way of the Migrant
Friday, April 18, 2025. 11 a.m.**

Introduction: Anne McCarthy, OSB;

Welcome: Bishop Persico

Station 1. St. Peter Cathedral

Handbell rings

**Announcement: Jesus is condemned to death
Silence condemns migrants**

Sung: Open wide my arms, that the suffering of the world may come in.
(once by cantor, repeated by all)

Scripture: The religious leaders of the day brought Jesus before Pilate, the Roman magistrate. They accused Jesus of declaring himself King—a threat to the Roman empire—though he had committed no crime. Only Pilate could condemn someone to death in the region. Pilate tried to deflect blame, even suggesting that Jesus was innocent.

In the end, though he “washed his hands of it,” Pilate made the decision and gave the order: Jesus was to die by crucifixion, a punishment used for enemies of the empire.

[pause for dramatization]

Contemporary:

Though the current American government is eager to condemn migrants—to incarcerate them and deport them to grave danger and immense suffering—the teachings of the Catholic Church insist that migrants deserve mercy and dignity. “Welcome the stranger,” Christ taught. “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me.”

This year, Pope Francis wrote, “I have followed closely the major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations. I exhort all the faithful of the Catholic Church, and all men and women of good will, not to give in to narratives that discriminate against and cause unnecessary suffering to our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters. Let us ask Our Lady of Guadalupe to protect individuals and families who live in fear or pain due to migration and/or deportation.”

Pope Francis reminds us that immigrants and refugees, many of them families with their children, who flee from danger, threats of violence, and climate disaster, are not dangerous and have human rights.

Today, we must ask ourselves if we take these teachings seriously, if we put them into practice. Can our neighbors who have fled violence in their homelands, now trust their parishes to support and protect them? Will the US Catholic community stand with and speak out for the migrants? Or will we allow our brothers and sisters to be deported, or turned over to a brutal government that has no regard for their lives? If we are silent or tepid in the face of this evil, then, like Pilate, we wash our hands of their blood.

Prayer/commitment statement

Together we pray:

Open our eyes

To the plight of the refugee

Open our hearts

To the suffering of those fleeing violence

Open our mouths

To protest cruel policies

Open our arms

To protect the vulnerable.

Closing song:

Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvanos, salvanos

Salvator mundi salvanos

(Continue singing as we leave the station)

Station 2 Emmaus Grove

Announcement: **Jesus carries his cross**
 Climate catastrophe causes migrant crisis

Sung: Open wide my arms, that the suffering of the world may come in.
(once by cantor, repeated by all)

Scripture: Condemned to death, Jesus was mocked and ridiculed by the soldiers. The soldiers made a crown out of thorns and put it on his head, and beat him with a dry reed. Then they placed a heavy cross beam on his shoulders and led him away. They forced Jesus to walk through the city, carrying the cross, to the place where he would be crucified. Time after time, he fell under the heavy weight and was made to get up. Step by difficult step, he walked on.

[pause for dramatization]

Contemporary Context: No one *wants* to leave their home, their country, the comfort of everything they know. They leave home because they *have* to. In our era of climate change, these perilous journeys are often caused by so-called natural disasters, the hurricanes, floods, droughts, and famines that leave people in impoverished countries with no way to sustain life and health for themselves and their children.

Consider the situation in Guatemala, where US corporations look for opportunities to acquire land to build palm oil plantations and to mine for minerals. Their deforestation worsens drought, creating crop failure so that small farmers cannot even feed their families. Nearly half of Guatemala's children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition. Young parents whose sons and daughters are starving know that if they want their children to have a chance at survival, they have no time to wait: they must build their lives in a place with more resources, more stability. They carry a heavy cross.

Can we in the US, a country that causes so much of the climate crisis, not help them to carry it?

Response: Prayer/commitment statement

Open our eyes
to the plight of the refugee.

Open our hearts
to the suffering of those fleeing violence.

Open our mouths
to protest cruel policies.

Open our arms
To protect the vulnerable.

Chant as we leave the station and begin walking:

Salvator mundi salvanos
Salvator mundi salvanos
Salvanos, salvanos
Salvator mundi salvanos

(Continue singing as we leave the station)

Station 3—St Benedict’s Education Center

Announcement: **Veronica wipes the face of Jesus**
 Migrant relief programs lose funding

Sung: Open wide my arms, that the suffering of the world may come in.
(once by cantor, repeated by all)

Scripture: A crowd of people looked on as Jesus—bloody, weakened, beaten and spat upon by the Roman soldiers—was led to Golgotha. Through the centuries, the story has been passed down of a courageous woman by the name of Veronica. Veronica was so moved by Jesus’ suffering as he was paraded through the city, that she stepped forward, defying the power of the Roman soldiers and oblivious to those jeering in the crowd. She did what she could: Veronica wiped Jesus’ bloody face with her own veil.

[pause for dramatization]

Contemporary Context: Countries all over the world receive refugees, people who are fleeing war, famine, floods, danger in their own countries. Many live for years or decades in UN recognized refugee camps, are vetted, and then sent by the UN to receiving countries who help them get on their feet.

Countless programs that aid refugees, including Saint Benedict’s Education Center, exist across the United States, many of them established well over a hundred years ago, during waves of immigration from Europe. They teach English as a second language and job skills. They help migrants find safe housing and legal representation. They offer counseling services and food pantries.

Today, under the Trump administration, the United States—one of the world’s wealthiest countries—will accept absolutely no refugees, leaving people languishing in camps as they wait for acceptance from other countries. And the refugee resettlement programs in the US have not received funding from the federal government in months, leading to mass layoffs and shuttering of their services. The newest Americans who would have benefitted from their services are largely on their own now. What kind of country pulls away a soothing touch from those who are suffering? What kind of country rejects compassion?

Response:	to the suffering of those fleeing violence.
Prayer/commitment statement	
Open our eyes	Open our mouths
to the plight of the refugee.	to protest cruel policies.
	Open our arms
Open our hearts	To protect the vulnerable.

Chant as we leave the station and begin walking:

Salvator mundi salvanos
Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvanos, salvanos
Salvator mundi salvanos
(Continue singing as we leave the station)

Station 4—Social Security Office

**Announcement: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
Migrant women meet danger and violence**

Sung: Open wide my arms, that the suffering of the world may come in.
(once by cantor, repeated by all)

Scripture: The Roman occupiers paraded criminals on their way to execution through the city of Jerusalem so all would see and fear Rome’s power. The message was, do not anger the Romans. Do not go against the empire. Jesus, bloodied and beaten, weighed down by the cross beam, was paraded in this way. But Jesus acted differently than others dragged to their execution. As he passed by the women of Jerusalem, who were weeping for his pain, Jesus looked at them. He saw them. They were focused on his suffering and death; and he saw their suffering, their oppression, their vulnerability. Jesus was moved with compassion and cried out to them: “Weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children.”

[pause for dramatization]

Contemporary Context: About half of the world’s migrants are women. They have had to leave their homes for the same reasons as men—poverty and scarcity, war and political violence—but face additional challenges. Less likely to be educated than their male peers, women can expect to be paid less than men and less likely to be hired for legitimate work. So women migrants find themselves forced to make impossible decisions for survival. Some seventy percent of trafficking victims are women, laboring as domestic servants or in prostitution.

Even more heartbreakingly, many female migrants must contend with the prospect of child marriage, for themselves or for their children. A Syrian mother of three living in a refugee camp told a UN interviewer that she could not provide for all of her children, and so her cousin—a grown man—offered to marry her fifteen year old daughter so that the child would become his responsibility. The immigration policy of the United States has even encouraged child marriage in recent years, by allowing people to apply for a spousal visa even if one of the spouses is a minor. With few avenues available to obtain a visa, many families allow their young daughters to marry predatory adult men so that they can pursue this pathway.

And women who journey to the US from Latin America face epidemic levels of sexual violence. The Remain-in-Mexico policy that Trump implemented has left migrants stranded in dangerous

areas controlled by cartels, who often kidnap women and rape them if they cannot pay a fee. Many arrive in the US pregnant as a result of these gang rapes, with minimal access to reproductive healthcare. Nor is the danger always from cartels: at the end of the first Trump administration, an internal report from the Department of Homeland Security found more than 150 complaints of Border Patrol and ICE agents abusing detained immigrants.

Jesus weeps for these women. How can we not weep for them, too?

Response:

Prayer/commitment statement

Open our eyes
to the plight of the refugee.

Open our hearts
to the suffering of those fleeing violence.

Open our mouths
to protest cruel policies.

Open our arms
To protect the vulnerable.

Chant as we leave the station and begin walking:

Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvanos, salvanos

Salvator mundi salvanos

(Continue singing as we leave the station)

Station 5—Federal Building

Announcement: **Jesus meets his mother**
 Asylum seekers are sent away

Migrants fleeing violence are refused asylum

Sung: Open wide my arms, that the suffering of the world may come in.

Scripture: Mixing in with the crowd were disciples—very few disciples, most of them women—accompanying Jesus on his way. Occasionally, he caught a glimpse of them. And then, he saw her, his Mother: heartbroken, and present. How comforting for him to have her courageous presence as he faced death.

And what suffering for Mary, walking with her son to his death, watching as he was abused, and derided. Knowing his suffering. And yet, she wanted to be there, to be a comfort, to be a presence. Hoping he would see her. And then he did. He saw her. Their eyes met.

[pause for dramatization]

Contemporary Context: Imagine that you have fled Afghanistan, barely making it out alive when you were targeted because you had helped US forces. Imagine that the US gives you a special legal status, “humanitarian parole.” And then you work to get humanitarian parole for your elderly parents, or your children, or your spouse....your family still living in danger and fear under the Taliban in Afghanistan. The process is long. Your family members have been vetted extensively, have finally been cleared to travel to the US. Are even on the tarmac. After so long you can’t wait to finally be reunited, your family safe.

And then, the Trump administration cancels all humanitarian parole and refuses entry for those already vetted from Afghanistan. That’s what happened to our neighbors in Erie. And now, their family members are in increased danger because their intent to travel to the US is known by the Taliban. They are identified, marked.

Hundreds of those stopped at the last minute were unaccompanied minors with no one to protect them. If it was your daughter, not able to go to school in Afghanistan, what would you do? If this was your young son at risk of being kidnapped to be a soldier? How could these vulnerable people, these children, be a danger to us? Could there be any reason for the US to turn them away?

Their service to the United States has led to this separation, sorrow, and terror. But like Jesus and Mary, their terrible circumstances cannot sever the connection of their love.

Response:

Prayer/commitment statement

Open our eyes
to the plight of the refugee.

Open our hearts
to the suffering of those fleeing violence.

Open our mouths
to protest cruel policies.

Open our arms
To protect the vulnerable.

Chant as we leave the station and begin walking:

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Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvanos, salvanos

Salvator mundi salvanos

(Continue singing as we leave the station)

Station 6—Gannon University

Announcement: **Jesus is stripped of his garments**
 Students are targeted

Sung: Open wide my arms, that the suffering of the world may come in.
(once by cantor, repeated by all)

Scripture: The goal of crucifixion was not simply to kill off enemies of the Roman State one-by-one. It was designed to be torturous, humiliating, and very public so that it would strike fear into the heart of anyone else who might have wanted to rebel against the empire. As Jesus was stripped of his clothing, exposed, degraded and vulnerable, his executioners knew that they were sending a message to the world: If you upend the social order and threaten the empire's occupation, you will be completely destroyed.

[pause for dramatization]

Contemporary Context:

Last month, Rumeysa Ozturk, a university student in Boston was walking down the street, talking on the phone with her mother, when she was surrounded by ICE agents who threw her into a van and took her to prison. Originally from Turkey, the young woman came to the US as an international student, and is now incarcerated in an overcrowded facility in Louisiana. Rumeysa has not committed a crime or even been accused of one: she was arrested for co-authoring an op-ed article last spring criticizing Israel's war in Gaza. She is far from the only international student who has been imprisoned using her Constitutional right to free speech—the American promise to all people, not just citizens. Hundreds of bright young people, particularly those who spoke up for Palestine, are now suffering in prison and are at risk of being deported to their countries of origin. Their years of valuable academic work are wasted, their futures uncertain.

Just last week, six Gannon students had their visas suddenly revoked, for no apparent reason at all: no political activism, no threat to the status quo except for being from somewhere else. The university says this life-altering punishment is the consequence of the students having minor traffic violations. A culture of learning and friendly exchange is disappearing before our eyes, giving way to a culture of fear-mongering and senseless cruelty.

Across the nation, international students have long been important members of their campus communities, sharing their cultures with us, then returning home with good educations and positive experiences of their time in the States. Colleges like Gannon, Mercyhurst, and Penn State have welcomed international students for decades. Now these young scholars live in fear of the ruthlessness of a government that is suspicious and hostile to everyone outside their vision of America.

Response:

Prayer/commitment statement

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Open our arms
To protect the vulnerable.

Chant as we leave the station and begin walking:

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Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvanos, salvanos

Salvator mundi salvanos

(Continue singing as we leave the station)

Station 7—County Exec office

Announcement: **Jesus nailed to the cross**
 Immigrants are deported to grave danger

Sung: Open wide my arms, that the suffering of the world may come in.
(once by cantor, repeated by all)

Scripture: Having reached the place of his execution, the soldiers crucified Jesus. Placing him on a cross, they nailed his hands and his feet. Then, they lifted the cross in the air and left him to die a slow death, his breathing becoming more labored and painful over the hours. His body nailed to a cross, he was in immense pain and anguish, with no possibility of survival or escape. Surely now, no one would see Jesus as a prophet, leader and healer. What good was his teaching now?

[pause for dramatization]

Contemporary Context:

Brenton Davis, the County Executive, has boasted about Erie County making money by allowing ICE to detain migrants in our jail—making us one of the countless places in the country that immigrants are detained. They are moved frequently, without warning or explanation, from state to state, so that their families and lawyers cannot visit or even, in many cases, find them. Our jail is full of people who have committed no crime except for coming to this country: they are trapped inside 23 hours a day, without visitors, without guards who speak their languages, with no idea where they are or where they will end up. Is this worth a little extra money for the county?

Yet even this experience of detention is likely gentler than the fate that awaits them if they are deported to their countries of origin, which they left in desperation. Or deported to a Salvadoran prison infamous as a place of torture. Since the Trump administration revoked the Temporary Protected Status of people from countries like Nicaragua, and Venezuela, immigrants who had been given legal status in the US are now deemed to be “illegal” and deportable.

As we speak, there is a Haitian woman here in Erie—a beloved member of our community, with a job and friends—who has been told that she has 30 days to return to Haiti, since her Temporary Protected Status is now eliminated. When she was last in Haiti, she was kept for 19 years as an unpaid servant in a household. She has no friends to return to who would help her, even if the island were not as ravaged by gang warfare as it is, a country so dangerous that the US has banned flights from landing in Port-au-Prince.

Immigrants’ very lives hang in the balance of these policy decisions, made by politicians in our name.

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Response:

Prayer/commitment statement

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Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvanos, salvanos

Salvator mundi salvanos

(Continue singing as we leave the station)

Station 8—Mount Saint Benedict Chapel

Announcement: **Jesus dies on the cross**
 Families are ruptured by US immigration policies

Sung: Open wide my arms, that the suffering of the world may come in.
(once by cantor, repeated by all)

Scripture: (read from the ambo)

A reading from the Gospel of John:

(Praise to you...)

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Here is your son." And then he said to his disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his household.

Later...Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of cheap wine was nearby, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and raised it to Jesus' lips. Jesus took the wine and said, "It is finished."

Then, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

[long pause for dramatization]

Contemporary Context:

There is nothing more natural or more sacred than the love between a child and a parent.

But in an era of mass deportations, thousands of American children are growing up with the constant dread that their parents could be taken away from them at any time, sent back to the dangerous place that they escaped to protect their children's lives and health from threats. The Trump administration knows that the threat of family separation will strike fear into migrants' hearts, encouraging them to "self-deport" and leave their communities in the US, or to never risk coming here to begin with.

And for many migrant families, it's not just a threat, but an excruciating reality.

In February of this year, a woman named Yesenia, who had fled persecution in Venezuela, was selling food at a gas station in Arizona, and her two young children were with her. A customer became angry at her, accused her of being an illegal immigrant, and called ICE. She got the children into her car and tried to drive home, but was pulled over—driving *under* the speed limit. Her husband and her eight- and fourteen-year-old sons were at home. They had no idea that their

mother and younger siblings were being taken into custody, interrogated about their alleged ties to gangs, and then loaded onto a bus bound for Mexico, all within a ten-hour period.

She had no opportunity to say goodbye to her sons or help her husband make arrangements for their care. And although she told the ICE agents that she was working on her immigration case—that it was only a clerical error that had her eligible for deportation—that she was Venezuelan, not Mexican, and had previously been kidnapped by a drug cartel when traveling through migrant towns in Mexico—but they said that was not their problem. Her six-year-old daughter cried and begged to be allowed to return home: the agents told her to be quiet.

Then they were put on a bus and sent to southern Mexico, where they knew no one, far from the rest of their family. For days, the father and older brothers worried about what could have happened to them, as no one would allow them to even call home. Now their church is trying to raise money to at least allow Yesenia's husband to visit them in Mexico so he can see his wife and little children. But no one knows if any reunion will be possible.

What happens to daughters and sons whose mothers are ripped away from them by our government? What happens to women who are torn from their children?

Their hearts must ache to hold their children, as Mary's did at the foot of the cross.

Response:

Prayer/commitment statement

Open our eyes
to the plight of the refugee.

Open our hearts
to the suffering of those fleeing violence.

Open our mouths
to protest cruel policies.

Open our arms
To protect the vulnerable.

Chant as we leave the station and begin walking:

Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvator mundi salvanos

Salvanos, salvanos

Salvator mundi salvanos

(Continue singing as we leave the station)

Credits:

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