

Good Friday Pilgrimage for Peace 2026

Racism Crucifies



For over 45 years, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie have prayed a contemporary Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, walking through the City of Erie to remember the Passion of Christ in the places where God's beloved children suffer today.

The theme of the 2026 Good Friday Pilgrimage for Peace is "Racism Crucifies." Participants contemplated Jesus' death and reflected on the connections between racism and war, xenophobia, and structural poverty and violence.

Our prayer is that God would be glorified, both in the recollection of the Passion and in the conversion of our hearts and our society.

45th Good Friday Pilgrimage for Peace 2026

Saint Peter Cathedral

Leader:

The First Station: Jesus is betrayed.

Racism and Religion

White supremacy in religion betrays the people of God.

We adore you O Christ and we bless you

All: Because by your holy cross, you have embraced the world.

Refrain: When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone to myself.

(once by cantors, twice by assembly. Movement during the singing)

Reader 1: Jesus sat at the table on the night before he died with a group of his friends, people who knew him well, who had walked with him and listened to his teachings. Among them, Jesus knew, was someone who had already betrayed him, someone who, after all their time together, had no regard for Jesus' life. Others who were there, whose feet Jesus had washed, would soon deny that they even knew him.

Jesus: "One of you will betray me,"

Voice: "Surely that is not me, Teacher. I would never betray you!"

Silence (15 seconds)

Contemporary Context

Reader 2: The doctrines and Scriptures of Christianity teach that all people are made in the image and likeness of God, filled with immeasurable dignity and beloved by their creator. And yet, the Christian Churches have long been instrumental in upholding the worst and most violent forms of racism. Religious orders ran abusive Indian Boarding Schools that separated indigenous children from their families in an effort to destroy their culture; Catholic priests and Catholic families were involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, even owning enslaved people; and even after slavery ended, Black men and women were shut out of the priesthood and religious life for many years. Even today, its parishes often remain racially segregated, and many White Catholics remain reluctant to name and speak out against racism. When religion models and teaches superiority based in race as God's will and God's plan, it denies the loving Creator of all. White supremacy in religion betrays the people of God, and until it can be recognized, it cannot be fully repented of, and it cannot be reconciled. Jesus, who shares in the experience of being betrayed by those who claim to love his Gospel message, urges us now to not turn away from the realities of racism in our church, our city and our world.

Refrain: Were You There?

Were you there when they crucified my God?
Were you there when they crucified my God?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my God?

Examination of Conscience:

By my actions, my assumptions, my beliefs have I increased and enabled racism in any of its many forms? How am I called to change?

All: Open my eyes, God, help me to see as you see.
Open my heart, God, help me to love as you do.

Closing:

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

(continue singing while leaving station. The movers lift the cross and shift it to the two who will carry it to the next station.)

Station 2: Erie County Courthouse (149 W 6th)

Leader:

The second station: Jesus is condemned to die

Racism and voter suppression

We adore you O Christ and we bless you

All: Because by your holy cross, you have embraced the world.

Refrain: When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone,
I will draw everyone to myself.

(once by cantors, twice by assembly)

Scripture

Reader 1: After he was betrayed, as he was praying in the garden, soldiers seized Jesus, treated him roughly, and brought him before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, who had the power to set him free or execute him. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he had a custom of releasing prisoners during the feast of Passover, so he asked the crowd if he should pardon Jesus, or a violent murderer named Barabbas.

Pilate: Should I pardon Jesus or Barabbas?

Voice: "Give us Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!"

Pilate: "What should I do with Jesus, then?"

Voice: "Crucify him!"

Pilate: "What should I do with Jesus? He has done nothing wrong."

Voice: "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Reader 1: Pilate washed his hands in front of those gathered there and handed Jesus over to be killed.

Silence (15 seconds)

Contemporary Context

Reader 2: Voting—having a say in the direction the country takes—is important and empowering. It means that your opinion matters. And so it is unsurprising that for generations, those who have held power in the United States have done all they could to make it difficult or impossible for marginalized people to vote. For the first century of US history, Black, Latino, and Native American men gained and lost the right to vote in various states and various legal battles, over and over again. After the fifteenth

amendment guaranteed Black men the right to vote, and after the nineteenth amendment extended suffrage to women, new obstacles were put into place: demeaning and intentionally confusing literacy tests, expensive poll taxes, and intimidation from groups like the KKK patrolling the polling places. Generations of people of color were disenfranchised and discouraged from participating in voting, and learned that going to the polls was dangerous.

Today, even after decades of efforts to secure voting rights, there are new tactics in place to keep people from exercising their right to cast their ballot. In 2024, 227 bomb threats were called in, mostly threatening polling places in majority-Black neighborhoods, so that people left to find safety before they could vote. This year, the proposed SAVE Act is supposed to simply require voter ID, but in reality it would turn away voters who could not produce a driver's license or other form of photo ID—and those who do not have ID are disproportionately Black—as well as women who changed their last names after marriage, whose ID will not match their birth certificates. Meanwhile, advisers to the president have encouraged him to send ICE agents to polling places. Even rumors that ICE could be at the polls will be enough to frighten many people of color away. And so, like Jesus, these marginalized communities are silenced and condemned to more suffering, by those in authority who fear that they will challenge the established order.

Refrain: Were You There?

Were you there when they crucified my God?
Were you there when they crucified my God?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my God?

Examination of Conscience

By my actions, my assumptions, my beliefs have I increased and enabled racism in any of its many forms? How am I called to change?

Response: All: Open my eyes, God, help me to see as you see.
 Open my heart, God, help me to love as you do.

Closing:

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

(continue singing while leaving station)

3. Federal Building

**Leader: The third station: Jesus meets his mother
Racism and immigration**

We adore you O Christ and we bless you

All: Because by your holy cross, you have embraced the world.

Refrain: When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone,
I will draw everyone to myself.

(once by cantors, twice by assembly)

Scripture

Reader 1: As he walked through the crowd, bleeding, sweating, and headed for more torment, Jesus caught sight of his mother, Mary, standing and watching him. What must she have been thinking as she watched him suffering? This was her baby, her only child, the miracle that had defined her life, for whom she had risked and lost so much. And now he was in the grip of the Roman empire, condemned.

Silence (15 seconds)

Contemporary Context

Reader 2: The current culture of suspicion, hostility, and cruelty toward newcomers to our country reserves its greatest fury for non-white immigrants. Hateful conspiracy theories insinuate that White Americans are being intentionally “replaced,” their influence diminished, by increasing numbers of Americans of other races and ethnicities. And so, in support of this white supremacist ideology, immigrants and refugees are turned away from our borders, while those who are here are terrorized by state violence. This includes the months-long ICE siege in Minnesota, which targeted Somali immigrants, and the increased presence of ICE across the country. People are being abducted by masked federal agents on city streets and in airports, and shuffled through an extensive web of prisons and warehouses, so quickly that their families often cannot keep track of them or get them legal counsel. The destruction of the family is at the core of these racist policies, which intentionally tear parents away from their children. Right here in Western Pennsylvania in recent weeks, a refugee who had legal status in the US was taken by ICE and wrongfully arrested, leaving his wife at home with two pre-school age children and a newborn baby. Frightened and alone in a country where she is still learning the language, newly post-partum and without employment, this mother, and all immigrants, share in the suffering of Jesus and Mary, who were likewise tortured by an empire that understood well how to cause pain.

Refrain: Were You There?

Were you there when they crucified my God?
Were you there when they crucified my God?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my God?

Examination of Conscience

By my actions, my assumptions, my beliefs have I increased and enabled racism in any of its many forms? How am I called to change?

Response: All: Open my eyes, God, help me to see as you see.
 Open my heart, God, help me to love as you do.

Closing:

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

(continue singing while leaving station)

4. Social Security Office (717 State St)

Leader: The Fourth Station, Jesus falls three times

Racism and poverty

We adore you O Christ and we bless you

All: Because by your holy cross, you have embraced the world.

Refrain: When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone to myself. (*once by cantors, twice by assembly*)

Scripture

Reader 1: Jesus, having already been beaten, scourged, and mocked, having been awake all night, began to carry the cross that he would die on. The beam that he bore on his shoulders weighed about one hundred pounds, and as he set out to walk through throngs of onlookers toward the hill where he would be killed, he stumbled under its weight, falling to the ground over and over.

Silence (15 seconds)

Contemporary Context

Reader 2: Poverty is grinding and demoralizing and widespread. As the rich get richer, those left behind must wait in endless lines for the little they need to get by: identification cards, public assistance, medication, a warm meal. But the waiting is even more endless for those who are trapped in generational poverty, and in the United States, the cycle of poverty is especially entrenched for Black people. For two centuries, Black people were legally prohibited from accumulating any kind of wealth: wages, land, property. This left them with nothing to pass down to their children, while White families could save, invest, and leave an inheritance. After slavery ended, communities that found a way to thrive were often sabotaged or outright destroyed, as in the Tulsa Massacre of 1921.

The federal policies that helped build the white middle class in the 20th century overwhelmingly left Black families behind. The New Deal excluded domestic and farm workers—who were mostly Black and Latino—from qualifying for Social Security. Later, redlining, the practice of denying loans and insurance to people in Black neighborhoods, blocked homeownership and trapped families in areas with lower property values, underfunded schools, and fewer services. Underfunded schools meant worse education, less likelihood of attending college, and fewer, poorer paying job prospects. And so the cycle repeats, worsened by generations of trauma and structural violence like mass incarceration.

And yet people in every generation have continued to have hope, to have dreams for their children, to continue to provide for them to the best of their ability. Like Jesus, falling over and over before a jeering and unsympathetic crowd, they have continued to rise and to move forward, with no guarantee of a better tomorrow.

Refrain: Were You There?

Were you there when they crucified my God?
Were you there when they crucified my God?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my God?

Examination of Conscience

By my actions, my assumptions, my beliefs have I increased and enabled racism in any of its many forms? How am I called to change?

Response: All: Open my eyes, God, help me to see as you see.
 Open my heart, God, help me to love as you do.

Closing:

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

(continue singing while leaving station)

5. Community Health Net (1202 State St)

Leader: The Fifth Station--Jesus comforts the women of Jerusalem Racism and healthcare

We adore you O Christ and we bless you

All: Because by your holy cross, you have embraced the world.

Refrain: When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone to myself. (*once by cantors, twice by assembly*)

Scripture

Reader 1: Jesus noticed that there was a group of women that was watching him—like the women who had followed him and supported him throughout his entire ministry. They were crying as they watched him struggle, seeing and feeling his pain. As he passed them, he paused for a moment.

Jesus: “Weep not for me, but for yourselves and your children.”

Silence (15 seconds)

Contemporary Context

Reader 2: In a country where healthcare is often unbearably expensive and difficult to access, clinics like Community Health Net do important work for underserved people. But these kinds of clinics cannot do enough to end the health disparities between White and non-White Americans: the disparities that shorten and end people’s lives. People of color suffer disproportionately from asthma, hypertension, diabetes, cancer and chronic conditions which can only be managed well with structural support like good insurance, consistent care from one’s medical team, and healthy nutrition. Worse, they are often discriminated against, consciously or unconsciously, in medical settings. Their pain is taken less seriously—a study found that Black and Latino children are significantly less likely to be given medication for long bone fractures than White children are, for example—and they are less likely to be sent for follow-up testing or imaging. In 2016, a study found that forty percent of medical students believed Black people had thicker skin than White people, and so were less sensitive to pain, an idea which easily results in less compassionate care.

Women of color face especially dangerous pregnancies. Black women in the US are five times more likely to die due to complications of pregnancy and childbirth than Black women in other countries, largely due to the standard of care they receive here. Their complaints are dismissed or minimized, their symptoms mismanaged, and their lives cut short at a moment that should be full of joy. But Jesus, who knew the sorrow of the

women of Jerusalem, who wept with them even in his own final moments, challenges the callousness they face.

Refrain: Were You There?

Were you there when they crucified my God?

Were you there when they crucified my God?

Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble

Were you there when they crucified my God?

Examination of Conscience

By my actions, my assumptions, my beliefs have I increased and enabled racism in any of its many forms? How am I called to change?

Response: All: Open my eyes, God, help me to see as you see.
 Open my heart, God, help me to love as you do.

Closing:

Salvator mundi salvanos.

Salvator mundi salvanos.

Salvanos, salvanos,

Salvator mundi salvanos.

(continue singing while leaving station)

6. Tracks used by Amtrak (Sidewalk near 16th and State)

Leader: The Sixth Station--Jesus is stripped of his garments

Racism and cancelled DEI programs

We adore you O Christ and we bless you

All: Because by your holy cross, you have embraced the world.

Refrain: When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone to myself. *(once by cantors, twice by assembly)*

Scripture

Reader 1: Having reached the hill of Golgotha, the soldiers stripped Jesus of his garments, leaving him humiliated, helpless, and vulnerable. At the moment of his greatest need, already so beleaguered, those in power who were surrounding him deprived him of the most basic human dignity. Their contempt for him, and the total lack of empathy they had for his suffering, could not have been more obvious.

Silence (15 seconds)

Contemporary Context

Reader 2: Amtrak was one of many companies that cancelled Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion initiatives after the 2024 election. They, along with corporations like Target, Verizon, McDonald's, and many more major businesses, sent a message to people across the country that this cause—the belief that society is better off when more people are included and valued—was not worth fighting for. Anti-DEI messages strike at the heart of human dignity, and remind marginalized groups that whatever minor gains had been made in recent decades could quickly and easily be reversed. DEI measures are attempts to bring more voices to the table, recognizing that there is great talent and wisdom to be found in people of all backgrounds and races, including those who have had fewer opportunities given to them. It was not a fad or a result of politically correct ideology, but data driven and beneficial to companies and the country as a whole. These rollbacks are reactionary decisions by business people who want to remain in good standing under a US administration which spouts racist comments, projects racist images and attacks and punishes DEI programs.

But the people who suffer because of it are gifted workers of color, who watch as opportunities pass them by. And most of all, the people who suffer are the children—black, or female, or disabled, or immigrant children—who will not see themselves represented in positions of leadership and authority, who will learn to value themselves, their gifts, their potential, a bit less. Their loss, their belittlement, is a loss and a belittlement for all of us. And Jesus, who knew the pain of having his dignity torn from him, weeps for them too.

Refrain: Were You There?

Were you there when they crucified my God?
Were you there when they crucified my God?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my God?

Examination of Conscience

By my actions, my assumptions, my beliefs have I increased and enabled racism in any of its many forms? How am I called to change?

Response: All: Open my eyes, God, help me to see as you see.
 Open my heart, God, help me to love as you do.

Closing:

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

(continue singing while leaving station)

7. PA State Parole Office (221 E 18th)

Leader: The Seventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

Racism and law enforcement

We adore you O Christ and we bless you

All: Because by your holy cross, you have embraced the world.

Refrain: When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone to myself. (*once by cantors, twice by assembly*)

Scripture

Reader 1: The Roman soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross, wounding him horribly and making it clear that there is now no possibility of escape. He was trapped, knowing the rest of his life would consist of only the agony of a slow, suffocating death.

Once they had nailed Jesus to the cross, they divided his clothes among them by rolling dice; then they sat down and kept watch over him.

People going by insulted Jesus. The chief priests, religious scholars and the elders also joined in the jeering:

Voice: Save yourself, why don't you? Come down off that cross if you are God's own! So he's the King of Israel! Let's see him come down from that cross, and then we will believe in him."

Silence (15 seconds)

Contemporary Context

Reader 2: On July 2nd of 2025, Marchello Woodard, a Black man from Erie, was shot and killed by his parole officer. He was unarmed. His three children, fiancée, parents, and many friends and relatives were left to mourn because of this act of violence, yet another tragedy in a country where Black men are killed by law enforcement officers at disproportionately high rates. The brutality Marchello experienced was not a singular incident; it is part of the weaponry of state violence that stretches back as far as the Roman Empire.

Why are police three times more likely to kill Black people than White people? Does it stem from the racist stories and myths White people hear in their upbringings, which are reinforced in law enforcement training? Is it intentionally racist, a belief that Black lives are less valuable than others? Is it meant to instill fear in the Black community, to keep them from gaining power? As we collectively grapple with these questions, and what it means to seek justice for Marchello, we remember that Christ, too, suffered at the hands of the soldiers sent to kill him, that Christ, too, had his body pierced by agents of the state.

Refrain: Were You There?

Were you there when they crucified my God?
Were you there when they crucified my God?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my God?

Examination of Conscience

By my actions, my assumptions, my beliefs have I increased and enabled racism in any of its many forms? How am I called to change?

Response: All: Open my eyes, God, help me to see as you see.
 Open my heart, God, help me to love as you do.

Closing:

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

(continue singing while leaving station)

8. Mount St. Benedict

**Leader: The Eighth Station--Jesus dies on the cross;
Racism and war**

We adore you O Christ and we bless you

All: Because by your holy cross, you have embraced the world.

Refrain: When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone, I will draw everyone to myself. *(once by cantors, twice by assembly)*

Scripture

Reader 1: A reading from the Gospel of John

At noon, a darkness fell over the whole land until about three in the afternoon. At that hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice,

Jesus: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Reader 1: This made some of the bystanders remark,

Voice: "He is calling for Elijah!"

Reader 1: One of them hurried off and got a sponge. He soaked the sponge in cheap wine and, sticking it on a reed, tried to make Jesus drink. The others said,

Voice: "Leave him alone. Let's see whether Elijah comes to his rescue.

Reader 1: Once again, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, then he gave up his spirit.

Silent pause, 30 seconds

Reader 1: Suddenly, the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies was ripped in half from top to bottom. The earth quaked, boulders were split and tombs were opened. Many bodies of holy ones who had fallen asleep were raised. The centurion and his cohort, who were standing guard over Jesus' body, were terror-stricken at seeing the earthquake and all that was happening, and said,

Voice: "Clearly, this was God's Own."

Reader 1: The Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Silence 15 seconds

Contemporary Context

Reader 2: Wendell Berry's poem, Questionnaire, reads:

1. How much poison are you willing
to eat for the success of the free
market and global trade? Please
name your preferred poisons.
2. For the sake of goodness, how much
evil are you willing to do?
Fill in the following blanks
with the names of your favorite
evils and acts of hatred.
3. What sacrifices are you prepared
to make for culture and civilization?
Please list the monuments, shrines,
and works of art you would
most willingly destroy.
4. In the name of patriotism and
the flag, how much of our beloved
land are you willing to desecrate?
List in the following spaces
the mountains, rivers, towns, farms
you could most readily do without.
5. State briefly the ideas, ideals, or hopes,
the energy sources, the kinds of security,
for which you would kill a child.
Name, please, the children whom
you would be willing to kill.

The United States government, with its White supremacist, Christofascist ideas, ideals, and hopes, has answers to these questions. The children of Vietnam, the children of Iraq, the children of Afghanistan, the children of Gaza, and now the people of Iran, have paid the price as American weapons have destroyed their homes, their schools, their places of worship. We wage these wars against people who we can easily dehumanize, can consider as "Other" because of their race. Some of those leading the country today believe that this is a Holy War, waged against people who are enemies of God. But there are no holy wars.

Mohadessah Falahat, a young mother in Iran, lost her son and her daughter in the missile strike on a girls' school in Minab, in February, an assault that killed 175 people. She spoke to the UN Human Rights Council weeks later, saying:

Ladies and gentlemen, I am a mother, a mother who even now when passing by my kids' room feels the urge to open the door and see them sleeping in their beds, as always, or sitting there drawing. But the room is silent, much more silent than any home should ever be.

That morning was like any other. It was routine for me to straighten their shoes by the door, comb their hair, and put their backpacks on their shoulders. There was no sign that this would be the last time.

As they walked out the door, they simply said 'Mom, come pick us up after school.' That simple sentence now repeats in my mind a thousand times, and each time my heart burns with pain.

These days, whenever I see any child for a moment, I think maybe, maybe it is my kids, Mahdieh and Amin, running just like that. Laughing just like that. Living just like that. The clothes they bought with such joy for the New Year, are still there, their notebooks left unfinished. And their dreams, dreams—they never had the chance to continue writing.

I'm not just a grieving mother. No. I am the voice of all the mothers. No mother is prepared to hear the words 'Your child is not coming back.'

Christ, killed by those who scorned his divinity, by those who could not empathize with his humanity, is crucified today in the soldiers, in the children, in the government officials and civilians who die in this racist war.

Refrain: Were You There?

Were you there when they crucified my God?
Were you there when they crucified my God?
Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my God?

Examination of Conscience

Response: All: Open my eyes, God, help me to see as you see.
 Open my heart, God, help me to love as you do.

Closing:

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

- "When I Am Lifted Up," by Bob Hurd, OCP Publications, © 2002. Reprinted under OneLicense.net #A700980.
- "Were You There," Public Domain.
- "Salvator Mundi," Les Presses de Taizé (France), GIA Publications, © 1982, 1993, 1994. Reprinted under OneLicense.net #A700980.