



**P R A Y I N G T H E S T A T I O N S O F
T H E C R O S S F O R V I C T I M S O F
H U M A N T R A F F I C K I N G**

USCCB / MIGRATION AND REFUGEE
SERVICES, ANTI-TRAFFICKING

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PRAYING THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

FOR

VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

*But the LORD's portion was his people;
his allotted share was Jacob.*

*He found them in a wilderness,
a wasteland of howling desert.
He shielded them, cared for them,
guarded them as the apple of his eye.*

*As an eagle incites its nestlings,
hovering over its young,
So he spread his wings, took them,
bore them upon his pinions.
The LORD alone guided them,
no foreign god was with them.*

Deuteronomy 32:9-12

How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: 'Where is your brother?' (Gen. 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labor? Let us not look the other way.

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God,
From the depths of your boundless freedom you created man and woman in the wondrous liberty of your friendship, and when through disobedience man lost that freedom you restored it through the sacrifice of your dearly beloved son, our Lord Jesus Christ, our Supreme liberator. As we gather to venerate the precious wounds that freed and healed us (cf. Isaiah 53:5), we commend to your loving protection and care our brothers and sisters who are victims of human trafficking. Send forth to us, from your seat on high, your Spirit of wisdom and courage, that we may know how best to work for their freedom from bondage, to secure them in their liberty once they escape or are rescued, and to do all we can to ensure them a fruitful and dignified membership in society.

As we journey along the painful steps of Jesus on his Way of the Cross, we also beseech you, merciful and just God, for the traffickers who enslave their brothers and sisters. We pray that you illumine their conscience with a stark realization of the evil they are committing, that they recognize their faults, do penance, and offer restitution for their crimes against human dignity.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Amen.

THE FIRST STATION: *For corrupt officials and those who, by betrayal, condemn victims to slavery.*

Pontius Pilate condemns Jesus to death.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Gospel according to St. Matthew

(Matthew 27:20-24)

The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas but to destroy Jesus.

The governor said to them in reply, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They answered, "Barabbas!" Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus called Messiah?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" But he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted the louder, "Let him be crucified!" When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. Look to it yourselves."

Meditation

As Jesus is brought before the tribunal of earthly government, we are reminded of the often weak pillars of the world's justice systems. Jesus, surpassing in innocence even Abel the Just (cf. Hebrews 12:24), finds himself before a judge who is afraid of the crowd and of the shakiness of his job security (cf. John 19:12). Pilate washed his hands of responsibility. He muffled and suppressed the voice and force of his conscience. In this station, let us remember and pray for government officials in many countries who, through greed or fear, allow the scourge of human trafficking to go unpunished, and even facilitate it.

Let us remember that Jesus found himself before Pilate through false love's kiss of betrayal: How many victims of human trafficking are betrayed into the living death of enslavement by those who are supposed to love them? By fathers and mothers, by brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, friends and lovers?

Culpable silence in the face of injustice is also a betrayal, for the voice of conscience is the very voice of God acting within the confines of the human heart.

Let us pray:

O Lord Jesus Christ,

You were betrayed and condemned by those who muffled the voice of their conscience and relinquished their responsibility to you and to humanity. Come to the aid of the victims of human trafficking who were betrayed by those in responsibility and by those who were supposed to love and protect them. Let them cry out like the psalmist "Even if my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me in" (Psalm 27:10). Inspire them with a renewed hope in the love that people of good will have towards them, that with our spiritual and material support they may triumph over their exploitation and their trauma. O Lord of justice, we also ask that you send constant graces of repentance and conversion to corrupt officials who through greed or fear fail to protect those under their care.

We ask this in your most holy name.

THE SECOND STATION: *For the dignity of victims suffering humiliation.*

Jesus takes up his cross.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Gospel according to St. Matthew

(Matthew 27:27-31)

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped off his clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about him. Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat upon him and took the reed and kept striking him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him off to crucify him.

Meditation

In this station let us remember the humiliation endured by victims of human trafficking. Jesus, after being betrayed by a beloved friend and condemned by a cowardly judge, is handed over to be ridiculed and mocked. How well this mirrors the plight of so many trafficking victims! In pursuing what appeared to be the potential betterment of their lives, their illusions of a better life, of love, or adventure are dashed to the ground, they are mocked and ridiculed. Men, women, and children—whose lives were redeemed at the price of the blood of the Son of God—are made to feel like mere commodities.

Let us pray:

O Jesus, you are the almighty King who also knows the depths of total humiliation. Your first crown was made of thorns, and instead of kisses of devotion, blows rained down upon your cheeks. Look with kindness upon the victims of modern day slavery who have their humanity degraded by the constant humiliation their captors inflict upon them. Instill in these victims the sense of self-worth and dignity that will prompt them to seek for help and recover their lives. As “deep calls to deep” in the depths of their humiliation, let them also, like the psalmist, exclaim: “Why are you downcast, my soul,/ why do you groan within me?/ Wait for God, for I shall again praise him,/ my savior and my God” (Psalm 42:12).

We ask this in your most holy name.

THE THIRD STATION: *For those in danger of being ensnared in slavery.*

Jesus falls the first time.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the book of Genesis

(Genesis 3:1-5)

Now the snake was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He asked the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?’” The woman answered the snake: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.’” But the snake said to the

woman: “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.”

Meditation

In the reading above we see the perfect illustration of how traffickers, with “venom of asps upon their lips” (Psalm 140:4), entice their victims with the lie of a false hope: the serpent, that primal *slave-driver*, made a fraudulent promise, a promise that proved to be the trap that ensnared humanity in slavery to sin, corruption, and death. Mirroring the cunning of the Evil One, traffickers take advantage of victims’ vulnerability, innocence, and desperation. Many times because of their material circumstances, so many vulnerable people find themselves in situations where risking everything seems to be the only alternative to misery and poverty. How enticing the forbidden fruit of an unknown world is to so many people hungry for justice, for adventure, for love! For laborers in developing countries who have started to consider dubious offers of employment by labor traffickers. For young girls and boys who, against their intuition, risk taking that first step into sexual slavery. For the youth who is thinking of running away from home and risks putting him or herself in danger of exploitation. How enticing the offers seem! How glamorous the façade! How bitter the poison!

Let us pray:

O Lord Holy Spirit, our Consoler and our Advocate,
 You breathed into Adam the “breath of life” (Gen. 2:7) and granted men and women the exalted dignity of having been made “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27) with the liberty of a free conscience and “subject to their own free choice” (Sirach 15:14). Make haste to thwart the traps that the Evil One lays against human freedom. Help the vulnerable men, women, and children resist the fraudulent offers made by traffickers. You who on Pentecost enkindled in Christ’s followers the gifts of wisdom and understanding, right judgment, courage and knowledge, enkindle or reignite these gifts into your children who are dangerously close to falling into enslavement, and secure them in their freedom.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

THE FOURTH STATION: *For families torn apart by human trafficking.*

Jesus meets his most holy mother.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Gospel according to St. Luke

(Luke 2:33-35)

The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Meditation

As Jesus encounters his immaculate mother on his way to Calvary, let us here remember and pray for the families torn apart by the scourge of human trafficking. From the fall of our first parents, the divisive wound of sin has caused a rupture of communion not only in the family of humanity, but also in individual families, as we see the Biblical example of Joseph’s brothers selling him into slavery (cf. Genesis 37:27). This division of the

family often causes the physical and spiritual decay that destroys lives. In human trafficking, we see this division in the starkest, most brutal terms imaginable: Mothers and fathers are ensnared in schemes they thought were job opportunities, separating them from their children; youths are lured away from their families into labor and sexual slavery. The division of families because of human trafficking leads to personal tragedies and damages the social fabric. Let us pray for an end to family estrangement, and advocate tirelessly for family reunification.

Let us pray:

O Most Holy Virgin Mary,

You are the Morning Star of hope and the Comforter of the Afflicted, we implore that you turn your most gracious gaze towards the families of the victims of human trafficking; towards the mothers who grieve lost sons, towards the fathers who mourn lost daughters. Though you were born without the slightest taint of original sin, you felt the fear and uncertainties of the refugee when fleeing Herod's persecution; because of the rejections in Bethlehem you gave birth in the poverty of a manger; and when the child Jesus escaped into the Temple, you and St. Joseph felt the stings of separation and anxiety. And finally, you suffered the White Martyrdom of pain as you accompanied the fruit of your womb on his way to an agonizing death. Now, from your throne above the mightiest choirs of angels in the highest Heaven, supplicate before your son for families torn apart by the scourge of human trafficking. Secure for them hope for the future, a balsam for their pain, and graces upon graces for their spiritual sustenance.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

THE FIFTH STATION: *For the perseverance of those who work on behalf of victims of trafficking.*

Simon the Cyrenian helps Jesus carry the Cross.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Gospel according to St. Luke

(Luke 23:26)

As they led him away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus.

Meditation

As Simon of Cyrene is pressed into helping Jesus carry the burden of a cross that gets heavier and heavier, we prayerfully turn our attention to the service providers, advocates, and volunteers who strive unceasingly to alleviate the dreadful burden oppressing victims and survivors of human trafficking. We pray that these selfless "Simons" realize that in serving victims of trafficking they are serving the Lord Jesus, as he himself said: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40). Simon helped the Lord carry the cross, but as Simon of Cyrene became Saint Simon of Cyrene, we are reminded of the graces received through helping God's most vulnerable children carry the burden of trauma and material need. We must remember that when we do anything on behalf of victims of trafficking, whether it is social work, outreach, the donating of our time and resources, or even our daily activities, if we offer them to God for the freedom of our captive brothers and sisters, then those actions *become* living prayers.

Let us pray:

O Lord our God,

Look with favor upon the tireless service providers, advocates, and volunteers who dedicate their time, effort, and resources to materially aiding victims and survivors of human trafficking. You instill the impetus of charity so that their desire to help our brothers and sisters is itself your gift, provide them with unfailing steadfastness, right judgment, prudence, daring, and a renewed sense of the spiritual and material dignity victims require and deserve.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

THE SIXTH STATION: *For those who raise awareness of human trafficking and advocates.*

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the book of the Prophet Isaiah**(Isaiah 53:2-5)**

He had no majestic bearing to catch our eye,
no beauty to draw us to him.

He was spurned and avoided by men,
a man of suffering, knowing pain,

Like one from whom you turn your face,
spurned, and we held him in no esteem.

Yet it was our pain that he bore,
our sufferings he endured.

We thought of him as stricken,
struck down by God and afflicted,

But he was pierced for our sins,
crushed for our iniquity.

He bore the punishment that makes us whole,
by his wounds we were healed.

Meditation

This reading from Isaiah contrasts so sharply from the psalmist's image of the surpassing beauty of the Son of Man: "You are the most handsome of men;/ fair speech has graced your lips,/ for God has blessed you forever./ Gird your sword upon your hip, mighty warrior!/ In splendor and majesty ride on triumphant!" (Psalm 45:3-4). Veronica courageously braves the soldiers and beholds the face of God, bleeding and bruised, more "a worm, not a man,/ scorned by men, despised by the people" (Psalm 22:7). Upon the face one sees the joy or despair of the human soul, through the eyes the dark glow of abandonment. In this station, we pray for those who strive to raise awareness of human trafficking through the powerful means of showing the suffering of victims. The word "Veronica" literally means "true icon": taking this as our inspiration, let us unceasingly strive for more, and accurate, representations of the plight of the enslaved, so that the general public grows in awareness and activism.

Let us pray:

O Lord Jesus Christ,

You are the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and yet, your fair face was disfigured by the scandal of sadness, rejection, pain, and drops of your most precious blood. In your mercy you deigned to imprint your suffering face upon Veronica’s veil, as a constant reminder for us to see you in the faces of our suffering brothers and sisters. Look with favor and bless those who work to raise awareness of human trafficking, grace them with the ability to imprint upon their mediums, whether the printed word, television, or movies, true and forceful representations of the suffering of victims, that greater concern might arise in the general public.

We ask this in your most holy name.

THE SEVENTH STATION: *That victims in captivity may never lose hope, even after repeated failure.*

Jesus falls for the second time.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Book of Job**(Job 6:8-14)**

Oh, that I might have my request,

and that God would grant what I long for:

Even that God would decide to crush me,

that he would put forth his hand and cut me off!

Then I should still have consolation

and could exult through unremitting pain,

because I have not transgressed the commands of the Holy One.

What strength have I that I should endure,

and what is my limit that I should be patient?

Have I the strength of stones,

or is my flesh of bronze?

Have I no helper,

and has my good sense deserted me?

A friend owes kindness to one in despair,

though he has forsaken the fear of the Almighty.

Meditation

A common characteristic of so many victims of human trafficking is their strength, resourcefulness, and dynamism, often coupled with a strong ambition that propels them to better their lot. In this station, we entrust to God’s provident care the victims who are trying so desperately to escape their situation. How disheartened they must feel when their own attempts at securing their freedom have repeatedly failed, or when their possibility of escape is hampered by fears for their family, children, or their own sense of honor!

Let us pray:

O Lord our God,

“Do not be deaf or remain unmoved” (Psalm 83:2) to the silent, living agony of your children ensnared in modern slavery. Send them, through the ministry of your holy angels, constant inspirations that keep their hope alive.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

THE EIGHTH STATION: *For the spiritual growth of service providers and advocates.*

Jesus meets the weeping women of Jerusalem.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Gospel according to St. Luke

(Luke 23:27-30)

A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’ At that time people will say to the mountains, ‘Fall upon us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’”

Meditation

In this station, as we hear the stern words of Christ addressed to the weeping women of Jerusalem, we are reminded of the uselessness of compassion and pity for others if our own conscience is neglected. The women of Jerusalem lamented the physical agony Jesus was in; they failed to see the spiritual agony they themselves were unknowingly suffering. It is sin, after all, which is at the “root of personal and social divisions...a wound which is present in man’s inmost self.”¹ Three years earlier, in responding to the Tempter’s easy solution of simply turning stones into bread to solve the problem of hunger, Jesus said: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). In our service to victims of human trafficking, let us constantly nourish our souls with the “bread of angels” (Psalm 78:25), so that fortified and enlivened by grace, our action on behalf of victims and survivors becomes, itself, a powerful prayer.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus,

Grant us always a clear understanding of our own need for liberation from the bondage of sin. Grant us the ability to be self-critical and heed the promptings of the Holy Spirit towards ever new states of conversion and growth in the spiritual life, knowing that it is only through your almighty power that we can do all things (cf. Philippians 4:13).

We ask this in your most holy name.

THE NINTH STATION: *For the perseverance of survivors after rescue or escape.*

Jesus falls a third time.

¹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, paragraph 116.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the book of Lamentations

(Lamentations 3:17-24)

My life is deprived of peace,
I have forgotten what happiness is;
My enduring hope, I said,
has perished before the LORD.

The thought of my wretched homelessness
is wormwood and poison;
Remembering it over and over,
my soul is downcast.
But this I will call to mind;
therefore I will hope:

The LORD's acts of mercy are not exhausted,
his compassion is not spent;
They are renewed each morning—
great is your faithfulness!
The LORD is my portion, I tell myself,
therefore I will hope in him.

Meditation

As Jesus' cross gets heavier and heavier, laden with all the burdens and sins of an exiled humanity, his mortal flesh feels the stings of pain and a fatigue made more poignant by the hatred of his torturers. In this station, let us commend to Christ the survivors of human trafficking who have been free from slavery for some time, but whose ordeal is far from over. Survivors are beset on all sides with so many difficulties, from financial troubles to health problems, to navigating through an oftentimes complex and seemingly hostile legal system. It is understandable that so many of them feel a deep despair of ever reconstructing their lives. Survivors struggle so heroically to attain dignified work and life stability. In working to end human trafficking, let us never forget these survivors who are continuing their struggle beyond the chains, but who still need our material and spiritual support.

Let us pray:

O Lord Jesus,

Before your glorification, you experienced the poignancy of not only sharp and penetrating pain, but the psychological torment of fatigue and the sense of difficulty in persevering with the arduous burden of the cross. Be with the survivors of human trafficking who have attained their freedom but who still struggle arduously with the difficult task of reconstructing their lives. Inspire them to continue on their path, that with the help of those who love and care for them, they may attain to the material dignity they deserve as children of God. We ask this in your most holy name.

THE TENTH STATION: *That under all types of adversity, the Church may continue fighting for and accompanying survivors of trafficking.*

Jesus is stripped of his garments.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Gospel according to St. John

(John 19:23-24)

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. So they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be,” in order that the passage of scripture might be fulfilled [that says]: / “They divided my garments among them,/ and for my vesture they cast lots.”

Meditation

The robe Christ was wearing was seamless, unitary, undividable, and, according to tradition, worth a great price. In like manner, the doctrine which informs and inspires the Church’s service to survivors of human trafficking is unitary and undividable, every teaching a pillar or building block of a universal edifice of natural and supernatural charity. We are taught that salvation “concerns the human person in all his dimensions: personal and social, spiritual and corporeal, historical and transcendent.”² Pope Francis, at the start of his pontificate, taught that the Church is “not a humanitarian agency, the Church is not an NGO...If, as a hypothesis, the Church were not to bring Jesus, she would be a dead Church.” This is an opportunity to realize that service provided within the Wisdom of the Church and *from the heart* of the Church, is indeed one of the ways we bring Christ to victims and survivors.

Let us pray:

O Lord Jesus Christ,

As your holy deacon St. Lawrence declared that the treasures of the Church are the poor she serves, grant us the courage to serve our brothers and sisters who are victims or at risk of human trafficking with a firm commitment to the principles which inflames our service with the fires of your Spirit’s charity. As you were divested of your clothes and left naked, we ask that you strengthen the resolve of your Church to continue her mission of spiritual and temporal help to victims in a way that pleases you.

We ask this in your most holy name.

THE ELEVENTH STATION: *For victims of trafficking who become victimizers.*

Jesus is nailed to the cross.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Gospel according to St. Luke

(Luke 23:39-43)

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same

² *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, paragraph 38.

condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Meditation

Rarely do meditations on the Way of the Cross focus on the impenitent thief, but here we will, as he illustrates one of the most disturbing angles of the mystery of iniquity: how through the suffering of evil, the human will and intelligence can itself, through its own willful consent and its voluntary occlusion from the promptings of conscience, become morally corrupted and vilified. So many times, when human beings suffer grave injustices and tribulations, instead of persevering in a just anger towards the evil they are suffering and a just clamor for retribution against their torturers, they themselves become collaborators and, in turn, victimizers, as the impenitent thief who added to the suffering of Jesus’ passion. In like manner, leading experts in the field have noticed how human trafficking is a crime that recruits from amongst its own victims. Once the victims of false promises and deceitful tricks, now they are the fraudulent predators who understand the psychology of the victims in a much more comprehensive way than other traffickers. Let us commend these victim-traffickers also to the just and merciful hands of God, that their consciences be illumined, and that they use their experience for good rather than evil.

Let us pray:

O Lord our God,

Behold, added to your son’s suffering from the lashes, the wood of the cross and the iron nails, was the distress caused by the impenitent thief who taunted, tempted, and reviled him. Both thieves were guilty, and yet one hearkened to your grace of repentance while the other one closed his heart. We ask you to dispel the darkness of despair in victims that has led them to become victimizers, and that they join in the efforts against modern slavery.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

THE TWELFTH STATION: *That the merits of Christ’s Passions be applied to the liberation of those in bondage.*

Jesus dies on the cross.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Gospel according to St. Matthew

(Matthew 27:45-50)

From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o’clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Some of the bystanders who heard it said, “This one is calling for Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge; he soaked it in wine, and putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink. But the rest said, “Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to save him.” But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit.

Meditation

This station, the most powerful of all, illustrates, in the starkest of possible ways, the value and preciousness of human freedom. God so values human liberty, that he willed the greatest tragedy in universal history to restore

it: the torturous death of the God-Man in the bitter throes of abandonment. The atonement brought about by the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ applies to the whole human person, in his or her spiritual, physical, and psychological dimensions. We must remember to pray ardently for the physical liberation of our brothers and sisters who are ensnared in modern slavery. Let us make it a habit to offer our daily prayers and mortifications for their freedom, and to be confident that every single prayer and sacrifice offered on their behalf will be utilized by God in a time and manner that best pleases his divine Providence. Even if we do not see the effects, there is no prayer that ever goes to waste.

Let us pray:

O Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, liberator of the human race, Lion of Judah and Prince of Peace: You who in Joseph were sold into slavery (cf. Genesis 37:28) and in Moses you freed the Chosen People from captivity (cf. Exodus 14:22), you who endured the agony of spiritual pain at Gethsemane, suffered humiliation, the lash, the weight of the cross, the piercing pain of the nails, and the abandonment of God while hanging on the cross, we beseech you now, that from the blood and water which poured forth from your pierced side, liberating the human race from its slavery to sin, may from this fountain also spring forth the freedom of our captive brothers and sisters. May the glorious merits of your passion, death, and resurrection provide them with liberation, hope, comfort, and that they may feel the love that you, O Lord, have for them from all eternity. We ask this in your most holy name.

THE THIRTEENTH STATION: *For victims of trafficking who die in bondage.*

Jesus is laid in the arms of his most holy mother.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the Book of Revelation

(Revelation 12:1-6; 17)

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days.

Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus.

Meditation

In contemplating the Blessed Virgin holding the lifeless body of her divine son, let us call to mind the victims of trafficking who die in slavery. We commend them now to the care of the Most Blessed Virgin, and we trust that the Lord will grant them the justice they were denied on Earth. On the cross, Jesus made all men and women sons and daughters of Mary, the New Eve (cf. John 19:26-27), and so we must have faith in her bountiful care: "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb?" (Isaiah 49:15).

Let us pray:

O Most Blessed Virgin Mary,

You are the Morning Star of Hope who crushed the head of the ancient Enemy, the first slave-driver and apostate tyrant: into your arms we commend the victims of human trafficking who die in bondage, far from the love of their families and friends, and from the consolation and strength of the sacraments. We ask that you be the mother they lack in those final moments of their earthly life, that you be their strength, and may they realize the hope of paradise vouchsafed by your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. That even though on earth they died in captivity, we implore that your most powerful and motherly arms snatch them from the Fowler's snare (cf. Psalm 124:7) and deliver them unto the vision of God, when "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

THE FOURTEENTH STATION: *That survivors of trafficking may be able to bear witness to their own courage, resilience, and dignity.*

Jesus is laid in the tomb.

V. *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R. *Because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.*

From the First Letter of St. Peter**(1Peter 3:18-20)**

For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit. In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water.

Meditation

It may appear contradictory, but Christ being brought down from the cross is just another step in his triumphant conquest of the powers of darkness and of reconstituting humanity's lost friendship with God and communion with each other. As St. Peter in his letter states and the Apostles' Creed testifies, Jesus descended into Hell to announce freedom to the captives. So too, when victims of human trafficking are freed or free themselves from bondage, their resilient survival and reconstitution of their lives is a wondrous testimony to the vitality and power of the human spirit. Their success in life after liberation is a testimony, a living witness that preaches the value of life, that victims of trafficking are survivors, strong and capable of independence. Making the strength and vitality of survivors known is also part of raising awareness of human trafficking. We must be open to hearing them speak, as they endured the trials of enslavement, they have much to teach us on how best to go forward in raising awareness and working effectively on behalf of victims and survivors.

Let us pray:

O Lord our God,

Continue to accompany survivors on the long and often difficult road to financial, emotional, and social stability. As they progress and bear witness to the resilience and dignity of the human person made in your likeness, redeemed by your Son, and inflamed to supernatural beatitude by the Holy Spirit, we ask that their

success be a constant reminder to us of the fruits of our efforts through your will and grace, and to the world's authorities of the efficaciousness of serving them in your name.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

CONCLUDING PRAYER:

Let us pray,

O God, our refuge, our strength, our liberator from every bondage: Look down with favor upon your people who now cry to you; and through the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, through whose exalted humility you laid low the pride of the strong (cf. Luke 1:52), of her spouse St. Joseph, of St. Michael the prince of the angelic hosts, and all the saints, graciously and mercifully hear the prayers which we pour forth to you, for the freedom of captives and the conversion of those who enslave them.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come.
Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O merciful, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.
That we may be worthy of the promises of Christ.

AMEN

Would You Like to Learn More or Teach Others About Human Trafficking?!

If so, visit www.usccb.org/shepherd
and BECOME a SHEPHERD!

*Become a Shepherd is an initiative of the Anti-Trafficking Program of the Migration and Refugee
Services Department of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*

