

Lenten Prayer Service
Lament for Racial Injustice
Archdiocese of Chicago



Lament is a way of praying during which a person or community cries out to God and expresses deep pain. Lament is the theme for this prayer service during Lent. The lament prayer today is in the format of the Way of the Cross as we focus on racial injustice. There is much to lament about our history as a nation and as a church as regards the sin of racism. We have come a long way, but there is still much to be done. Yet in the spirit of lament, we hold firmly to the belief that God is in our midst, that there is no pain, no hurt, no injustice so deep that God is not deeper.

Members of the Archdiocese of Chicago Dwell in My Love Anti-Racism Implementation Team prepared this prayer so we can together express our anguish and pain about the sin of racism. A reading from the Book of Psalms or the Book of Lamentations is done at each station followed by a time of silence and then a reflection on that station in the light of racism or anti-racism.

Introduction to Lament ‘Way of the Cross’
(to be read by an individual/ not included in worship aid)

Throughout his 33 years of earthly life, our Lord and brother Jesus Christ encountered many different types of people. No matter who the encounter was with, Jesus’ ministry was centered in reconciliation and restoration of individuals, **and** restoration of the whole community. In seeking to achieve this, Jesus encountered a great amount of discrimination against others and against himself, eventually paying the ultimate price through his death on the cross.

Even on his final journey to the cross, Jesus showed us the path that each of us must take if we are to follow him to resurrected life. Jesus makes it clear even on the cross:

“Forgive them!”: Our way as disciples begins with forgiveness

“Here is your son; here is your mother.” Jesus gives us to each other;

“This day you will be with me in paradise.” We accompany Jesus and one another on this journey;

“Into your hands I commend my spirit!”: We do so by giving ourselves, our spirit, to God and to the service of God’s plan.

As we join together on this Way of the Cross, we do so in the rich, prophetic tradition of lamentation.

Join us on this journey of prayer, of reflection, of lamentation, of hope, with Jesus. Allow it to touch your heart, your mind, so as to encourage and sustain us all on our path to bring racial healing to our church and our world.

Lament for Racial Injustice



First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

Psalm 35: 7-9, 11-12

For without cause they set their snare for me,

Without cause they dug a pit against my life.

Let ruin come upon them unawares, and let the snare they have set catch them; into the pit they have dug let them fall.

But I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful because of his salvation.

Unjust witnesses have risen up; things I knew not of, they lay to my charge.

They have repaid me evil for good, bringing bereavement to my soul.

Let us pray... God of history, + for over 500 years we have witnessed the degradation of people of color + for the purposes of social and economic gain. Their false condemnation becomes the real condemnation of those of us who continue to benefit from their oppression. Through your Son Jesus, + forgive us for our complicity in the sins of our ancestors, + for only you can guide us toward reconciliation and restoration of the one race, the human race. Amen.



Second Station: Jesus is given his cross

Psalm 109: 1-5

O God, whom I praise, be not silent, for they have opened wicked and treacherous mouths against me.

They have spoken to me with lying tongues,

and with words of hatred they have encompassed me

and attacked me without cause.

In return for my love they slandered me, but I prayed.

They repaid me evil for good and hatred for my love.

Let us pray... God of freedom, Lord of mercy, + we decry our nation's history of slavery, + yet still struggle under the burden of institutional racism. The sweat and tears of those who bore the inhumane burden of slavery + continue to wash over each generation. Lord Jesus, + continue to allow the tears, the sweat, to flow over us, + to cleanse us of our collective enslavement to the sin of racism. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Third Station: Jesus falls the first time

Psalm 38: 14-15, 18-19

*But I am like a deaf man, hearing not,
like a man who is mute who opens not
his mouth.*

*For I am very near to falling,
and my grief is with me always.
Indeed, I acknowledge my guilt;
I grieve over my sin.*

Let us pray... All knowing God, + God who knows the hearts of all, + we stand in horror at the images of lynchings that have marked so much of the sad history of our nation. The silent assent of so many who stood by haunts us even now. Lord God, + never allow us to be silent in the face of hatred and prejudice against people of color again. Give us continued courage to raise our voices + to lift up all people to claim their God-given dignity. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Fourth Station: Jesus meets his Mother

Psalm 77: 4-6

*When I remember God, I moan;
when I ponder, my spirit grows faint.
You keep my eyes watchful;
I am troubled and cannot speak.
I consider the days of old;
the years long past.*

Let us pray... God of compassion, + we know that you weep at the injustice done by those with power and privilege, + done at times in your name, to people of color. Yet they continue to come to you, + seek your embrace, + offer their gifts, + long for full stature and recognition within your body, the Church. Guide us, teach us, nurture us all, + that as a holy people we may honor the vision of Your Son + 'that all may be one.' We ask this through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, + through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene carries the cross

Psalm 81: 7-9

An unfamiliar speech I hear: I relieved his shoulder of the burden; his hands were freed from the basket and in distress you called and I rescued you. Unseen, I answered you in thunder; hear, my people, and I will admonish you.

Let us pray: God of the prophets, + over the years there have been many good people + who have accompanied our brothers and sisters of color on their journey to freedom; + there are many more today who stand with them to dismantle racism in our society. They too have borne the burden of hatred and revile from the fearful and ignorant. Lord God, + fortify us in our resolve to free every brother and sister, + white, black, brown, yellow, and red, from the chains of racism, + persevering as you did, + trusting in the immortality of a spirit bonded in relationship to the God of unity and peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Psalm 40: 12-13

Withhold not, O Lord, your compassion from me; may your kindness and your truth ever preserve me. For all about me are evils beyond reckoning; my sins so overcome me that I cannot see; They are more numerous than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails me.

Let us pray: God of freedom, + who seeks to overcome our every fear, + free us from the wounds of racism. Help us to extend forgiveness when sincerely offered, + invite conversion and forgiveness where greatly needed, + that together we might help one another + to proudly reveal the unique expression of the face of God that lies within each one of us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

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Seventh Station: Jesus falls the second time

Psalm 56: 2-5

Have pity on me, O God, for men trample upon me, all the day they press their attack against me. My adversaries trample upon me all the day, yes, many fight against me. O Most High, when I begin to fear, in you I will trust. In God, in whose promise I glory, in God I trust without fear; what can flesh do against me?

Let us pray... God of welcome and inclusion, + for so many years our parishes have struggled to welcome + the African American, the Latino, the Filipino, the Chinese and other people of color. + What harm we have done, and continue to do, by not welcoming and including their gifts + in offering praise and service to you, the Creator of us all. Increase our desire for unity. Help us to welcome the cultural and ethnic gifts of everyone, + to lift them up in gratitude, + and to feed from the bounty of their collective, rich diversity. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Eighth Station: Jesus meets the daughters of Jerusalem

Lamentations 2: 18-19

Cry out to the Lord; moan, O daughter Zion! Let your tears flow like a torrent day and night; Let there be no respite for you, no repose for your eyes. Rise up shrill in the night, at the beginning of every watch; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord; lift up your hands to him for the lives of your little ones who faint from hunger at the corner of every street.

Let us pray... God, we know that you weep at the loss of so many young lives, + predominantly young men of color, + victims of an unjust system that imprisons them behind bars of poor education + and an unjust and racially-biased court system. Lord Jesus, + remove the blindness of stereotypes and apathy, + open our minds, our hearts, + that we may accompany all young men and women of color through the hardships of this life + into new life and new possibilities. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Ninth Station: Jesus falls the third time

Lamentations 3: 16-18

*He has broken my teeth with gravel,
pressed my face in the dust,
my soul is deprived of peace,
I have forgotten what happiness is;
I tell myself my future is lost,
all that I hoped for from the Lord.*

Let us pray... God of 2nd, 3rd, 4th and many chances: + In so many ways our society has failed our families of color. As we continue to shake our heads at the immensity of the problem, + remind us that you are greater than every challenge, + and that with you we can accompany those who are beaten down by the forces of racism and poverty + to rise up together on the journey through death to resurrection + for our families and communities. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

Lamentations 3: 1-4a; 5-7

*I am a man who knows affliction
from the rod of his anger,
one whom he has led and forced to walk
in darkness, not in the light;
against me alone he brings back his
hand again and again all the day.
He has worn away my flesh and my
skin,
he has beset me round about with
poverty and weariness;
He has left me to dwell in the dark
like those long dead.
He has hemmed me in with no escape
and weighed me down with chains.*

Let us pray... God of life, + through your Son Jesus you offer us the fullness of life, + yet so often we do not feel valued, not given a chance, + shackled and stripped by the forces of racism and prejudice imbedded in our society. Gracious God, + help us all to lift our voices, crying out and working for justice, + for all who seek to develop and offer their God-given gifts to the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Eleventh Station: Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross

Lamentations 3: 11-15

*He deranged my ways, set me astray,
left me desolate.*

*He bent his bow, and set me up
as the target for his arrow.*

*He pierces my sides
with shafts from his quiver.*

*I have become a laughingstock for all
nations, their taunt all the day long;
he has sated me with bitter food, made
me drink my fill of wormwood.*

Let us pray... "I thirst!" All nourishing God, God who satisfies our every need, + your Son's words from the cross echo across the 500 years of crucifixion that racism imposes on us all. + "We thirst!" + Pour out your grace upon us, + that we may work together to satisfy the thirst of those who hunger for equality, + for a good education and jobs, + for the recognition and respect due all of your sons and daughters. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross *Please kneel.*

Psalm 22: 15-19

*I am like water poured out;
all my bones are racked.*

*My heart has become like wax
melting away within my bosom.*

*My throat is dried up like baked clay,
my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
to the dust of death you have
brought me down.*

*Indeed, many dogs surround me,
a pack of evildoers closes in upon me;
they have pierced my hands and my
feet; I can count all my bones.*

*They look on and gloat over me;
they divide my garments among them,
and for my vesture they cast lots.*

Let us pray... God, source of life and love, + all too often we have participated, sometimes knowingly, often unknowingly, + in the death of the human spirit of so many people of color. Help us center ourselves in the love between you and your Son Jesus. Anchored there we can face the crosses of this life, + trusting that our spirits will never die. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Thirteenth Station: Jesus' body is removed from the cross

Psalm 22: 7-12

But I am a worm, not a man; the scorn of men, despised by the people. All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads; "He relied on the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, if he loves him." You have been my guide since I was first formed, my security at my mother's breast. To you I was committed at birth; from my mother's womb you are my God. Be not far from me, for I am in distress; be near, for I have no one to help me.

Let us pray... God of tender care and compassion, + so often throughout history we have seen the hopes and dreams of the African American, the immigrant, the Native American, + devastated by the sins of those with power and privilege. Remove all of us from the crosses that continue to hinder you + from bringing resurrection into the lives of the oppressed, the disenfranchised, the poor, + the majority of whom are people of color. Hold us in your tender embrace, + drawing strength, new life and new resolve to bring your healing power to bear on the injustice of the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb

Psalm 88: 6-9

My couch is among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no longer and who are cut off from your care. You have plunged me into the bottom of the pit into the dark abyss. Upon me your wrath lies heavy, and with all your billows you overwhelm me. You have taken my friends away from me; you have made me an abomination to them; I am imprisoned, and I cannot escape.

Let us pray... Compassionate and caring God, + God who has inscribed the names of all the faithful in heaven: + On the cross Your Son Jesus took upon himself the sins of our world, + absorbing all of the pain and suffering of eternity, + and responding with forgiveness. May we, like Jesus, commend our hopes, our dreams, our spirits to you. May we work together to eradicate the forces of racism + that continue the economic, social, physical and spiritual crucifixion of our brothers and sisters of color, + forces that ultimately hurt us all. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Lamentations 3: 21-26 (Read after the 14th station showing lamentations giving way to hope)

But I will call this to mind, as my reason to have hope;
The favors of the Lord are not exhausted, God's mercies are not spent;
They are renewed each morning, so great is God's faithfulness.
My portion is the Lord, says my soul; therefore I will hope in God.
Good is the Lord to one who waits for God, to the soul that seeks God;
It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER – ALL

Lord our God, you created the human being, man and woman, in your image and likeness, and you willed the diversity of peoples within the unity of the human family. At times, however, the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of attitudes of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic difference. Forgive us and grant us the grace to heal the wounds still present in your community on account of sin, so that we will all feel ourselves to be your sons and daughters.

Pope John Paul II

PLEASE LEAVE IN SILENCE.

NOTES

Thank you for your participation in this prayer of lament. This Lenten Prayer Service was prepared in 2012 by members of the Anti-Racism Implementation Team of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

The stations featured in this prayer are photos of the stations at St. Agatha Church, 3147 West Douglas Boulevard, Chicago.