

The Way of the Cross with Survivors

created by
AWAKE

This prayer resource is a gift from our community to yours, an opportunity to pray with and for abuse survivors as they connect their own experiences to those of Jesus Christ in his final days. This prayer follows the traditional Stations of the Cross devotion, with each station featuring a personal reflection written by someone who has experienced sexual abuse by a Catholic leader. Because many abuse survivors struggle to maintain hope in the face of devastating trauma, we have chosen to include the Resurrection as a final station. These reflections are drawn from the Way of the Cross prayer service hosted by Awake in March 2023. We are deeply grateful to each survivor who chose to share their heart by writing one of these reflections. We have included their first names with the authors' consent.

This Way of the Cross is designed to be used for personal or communal prayer. We offer these suggestions for facilitating this service for a parish, small group, or other gathering:

- We recommend you identify one leader and at least two readers, though reading parts may be distributed more broadly if you wish.
- Because of the sensitive nature of this topic, it is important to communicate the specific theme in advance with anyone who may be participating.
- When you begin the service, please offer a gentle caution using these or your own words: "Please note that the reflections in this service are not graphic, but some sections do reference episodes of abuse. We encourage each person to take care of themselves during this prayer, especially those of you who are carrying your own experiences of trauma. Feel free to step away from the prayer at any time if the content becomes too painful or triggering."

About Awake

Awake is a community of abuse survivors, concerned Catholics, and allies committed to awakening, transformation, and healing from the wounds of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. You can learn more about Awake at www.awakecommunity.org.

Leader: The First Station—Jesus Is Condemned to Death

Reader 1: A reflection from Michael - “Jesus, you stood alone before Pilate, like I stood alone before the priest. Nobody was there to speak up for you, or me. Nobody defended you, or me. Even more than fifty years after my abuse began, sometimes I feel alone, abandoned, or afraid. Sometimes I feel like I have been condemned to a journey of recurring images of the suffering I endured. Other victims I knew were so condemned to mental anguish that it led to their deaths, and for them I weep. But because of your passion and death, I also know you walk with me, and all survivors, in our journey toward wholeness and redemption. Thank you for the grounding of this truth in my life.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Second Station—Jesus Takes Up His Cross

Reader 2: A reflection from Jessica - “Acknowledging and facing the abuse I had suffered in childhood felt like an insurmountable task, one that needed to be dealt with so I could “get on” with the life you were calling me to. Looking into your eyes as you accepted the cross, hours after praying for this cup to pass you by, I slowly began to understand that this was a portion of my way of the cross. I continue to learn, when I don’t know how to shoulder this burden, that you show me the way. This path isn’t unknown to you - you know it well, and your courage calls me to walk next to you.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Third Station—Jesus Falls the First Time

Reader 1: A reflection from Cathy - “Lord Jesus, as you walked that road to Calvary, the weight of the cross bore down until it became too much and you stumbled. Under the weight and burden of my sexual abuse, I too have fallen. I fell as you fell. As I looked down at the dirt-covered ground, I felt shame, disappointment, and fear. I felt so very alone on that early part of my journey. I have struggled, but, through you Lord, have been able to get back on my feet. As I move forward with uncertain steps, I can say with confidence that the abuse was not my fault. I know this road will not be easy, but it is possible with you. Be with me, Lord.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Fourth Station—Jesus Meets His Mother

Reader 2: A reflection from Phillip - “I think about the pain you were suffering and the pain you knew was to come, then the experience of meeting your mother in the middle of it all. After the first time I was abused as a young child, I was picked up by my mom to go back home. I was crying and did not say anything. She was not able to comfort me as she did not know about the abuse I had just suffered. Still, just being next to her was finally a safe place for me. It makes me think about how this short time with your Mother must have been a very bittersweet but still encouraging encounter.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Fifth Station—Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

Reader 1: A reflection from Wendy - “I was terrified to speak of the sexual abuse I endured for three years from my spiritual director. I felt that what I had to share would be a burden too difficult for others to carry. I had carried this burden alone for forty years and thought it in the best interest of my closest family members and friends to keep it to myself and spare them the crushing pain that had plagued me for so many decades. I hadn’t realized how heavy this cross was until parts of it were lifted off my heart. I was overwhelmed with humility and gratitude once I began to speak, as friends and family held me, cried with and for me and have continued to support me with tenderness and careful attention. I wonder if you felt the same way when Simon lifted the burden of the cross off your body. You didn’t stop Simon and inform him that the cross would be too much. You didn’t assume others couldn’t handle it. You allowed Simon to share in the pain, which must have made the weight more bearable.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Sixth Station—Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Reader 2: A reflection from Carol - “Abused as a child, and growing up with parents who were unaware or could not face the reality of my abuse, I learned to hide my shame, to hide my face from the world around me. I rarely made eye contact, and I avoided painful places and memories. On my journey of healing, you have placed Veronicas in my life who haven’t turned away from the ugliness of my story, who have been willing to look at my face, offer a spiritual cloth, and listen with kindness, interest and empathy - the comfort needed to help me continue to carry the cross of surrender.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Seventh Station—Jesus Falls the Second Time

Reader 1: A reflection from Mike - “The clergy abuse I endured as a child caused me to feel isolated, with no one to turn to. I didn’t have anyone to lighten my burden, lift me up, or encourage me to go on. Now as an adult, I have a support system: my family, friends, good priests, and many others who can lift me up when I fall. As I continue to carry my own cross of childhood trauma, I have experienced tender and sweet heartfelt connections from others, who have comforted me and calmed my anxieties. These people help me to be resilient in the face of painful triggers. Any connection, like lifting someone up when they fall a second time, can provide comfort and make a difference.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Eighth Station—Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Reader 2: A reflection from Emily - “Sometimes I can’t weep for you. So often your passion is portrayed as taking away our suffering, or worse, as trumping our suffering so we have no room to complain. Are you hurt that I can’t find consolation in your wounds because mine still run so deep, that your three days of passion sound mercifully short to me in the five years since my abuse? But you see the weeping of the women no one else sees. And you say, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” Your grief for the suffering of women and children is an acknowledgement of my suffering, your invitation for me to weep for me rather than for you. You’ve made my suffering, my sexual assault, part of your passion. You invite my passion to become a part of your passion on the way to your own cross. You stand in your passion and invite me to weep for mine. I suppose I can weep for that, after all.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Ninth Station—Jesus Falls the Third Time

Reader 1: A reflection from Megan - “There is no escaping the weight of this cross, but I start to feel like I can manage in my weakness. I picture the abuse as the first fall, the reporting and the immense pain that it brought as the second. You’ve given me Veronicas, your Mother, and Simons along the way. But then this third fall comes, on any random Sunday morning when I just can’t take one more step into that church. Or I get the courage to go inside and there my abuser is. Or the readings of the day are the same ones he used to groom me. I feel so exposed. Weak. Alone. I wonder if people are shocked any more when You fall this third time. When I continue to fall and I can’t move. Do the people who gave the cross even see anymore? Or have they all turned away? Is there any more scandal at how heavy this is? Thank you Jesus, for not leaving me alone down here in the dust.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Tenth Station—Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

Reader 2: A reflection from Natalie - “When I disclose my abuse to a new person, I feel myself stripped naked, my emotional wounds ripped open with each fresh telling of this terrible story. So many feelings come rushing back, as strongly as they did when I first told someone: the fear that I will be ignored, the pain from previous dismissals by ministers and mentors and colleagues, the lie of shame that I somehow asked for it or deserved it. Though I remain dedicated to sharing my story, I am always ready to be ridiculed, challenged unfairly, or called a liar for the truths that I tell. The exposure is paralyzing in those moments as I wait for their response, praying that I will not be met with mockery again.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Eleventh Station—Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Reader 1: A reflection from Jennifer - “Jesus, as the nails were driven through your flesh to affix you to the cross, my abuser also drove nails through my soul that affixed me to this cross on which he callously left me to hang. The agony of the three hours you hung there, the humiliation of being nailed to the cross, so exposed as onlookers watched and jeered - I’ve felt this too, as a woman abused as an adult, the humiliation as onlookers to my abuse jeered and gossiped. Oh, the agony... Jesus, I’ve never known a pain as intense as the aftermath of what that priest did to me. When you asked your Father, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do,” it makes it easier for me to forgive those who had no idea the gravity of the abuse I endured. As you accepted being nailed to your cross, I look to you to help me accept being nailed to mine and trust that you will use it for your glory.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Twelfth Station—Jesus Dies on the Cross

Reader 2: A reflection from Esther - “Seeing the abuse crisis continue to ravage the Body of Christ brings me a hopelessness that is overwhelming. Seeing the pain of other victim-survivors pierces my heart with pain. Despair then creeps in as I battle my memories, my shame, and the apathetic attitude of many Church leaders. Jesus, after having to endure such cruelty and shame, your last words spoke of the trust you had in the Father. All hope seemed lost as you bowed your head and died. Despair grips my heart, but in that darkness came the greatest victory. By the power of your death and resurrection, may we find renewed hope and trust in God’s loving mercy and justice.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Thirteenth Station—Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

Reader 1: A reflection from Gigi - “At this station, my heart remembers those that treated me with tender loving care as I was taken down from my own cross - both the abuse I endured and the horror of the reporting process. I remember a colleague who held me when I had a nervous breakdown at work. Or a friend who prayed over me after I reported my abuser. Or a loved one who courageously asked me if I was going to hurt myself and said she would be sad if I wasn’t here anymore. Thank you, Lord, for the amazing people in my life who gave me hope when I did not want to live anymore. Thank you for reminding me of your providence in this difficult time and that good people do exist.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Fourteenth Station—Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

Reader 2: A reflection from Lisa - “After the reality of my abuse set in, I often wondered if I would ever be able to find Jesus again. For years, my soul had been invaded and the person of Jesus was confounded with my abuser. Prayer became, and sometimes still is, a time of frustration and fear where I cannot separate them. But here in the tomb, I find hope. Here in the tomb, the stone is rolled shut and you are there, Jesus. Only you. There is no one else except you and me. Here in the tomb I have hope that our relationship will one day be whole again.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Leader: The Fifteenth Station—Jesus Is Raised from the Dead

Reader 1: A reflection from Mark - “There are times when I am overcome by the darkness of the tomb, by the raw wood of the cross I touched profoundly from being abused by clergy. But my shame and wounds are healed by the Risen One, our Redeemer who suffered, died, and rose for all, especially the sexually exploited and violated. Lord, your paschal journey is our paschal journey. We can heal and we can rise in the joy that is Easter. Like the women at the tomb that early morning, let us be open to that same vision of angels announcing that you are alive. Let us hold onto our own lives in your love - in gratitude that we too are alive.”

Leader: For all victims, survivors, thrivers, and copers, let us pray: Jesus, hear us.

All respond: Jesus, be with us.

Concluding Prayer

God of love, you hear the cries of all who have been wounded by abuse in the Catholic Church. Grant them your healing, justice, and peace.

Jesus, gentle companion, you accompany those who suffer. May all who are hurting feel your merciful presence on their journey.

Holy Spirit, mighty advocate, you stir within us and awaken our hearts. Help us to hear your voice in the words of these survivors, and give us the strength to respond with courage and hope.

Amen.

*Thank you for praying with and for abuse survivors.
If you are interested in being part of Awake's work of
awakening, transformation, and healing,
please connect with us at www.awakecommunity.org.*