



The Refugees' Way of the Cross



Prepared in March, 2019

The Way of the Cross dates back to pilgrims in the fourth century re-tracing the steps of Jesus from Pilate's palace, where he was condemned to death, to Mt. Calvary, the place of crucifixion. Fourteen "stations," or stops, were made along the way, some commemorating biblical events, others traditional.

Here we draw a parallel between Jesus' suffering and the way of suffering walked by people who have had to flee their homes because of violence, poverty, or persecution. In the tradition of liberation theology, Christ continues to be crucified in the suffering of God's people. In connecting these stories with the story of Jesus, we can begin to see the holiness in each and every human life, precious and beloved of God.

You will see a wide variety of stories represented here. Some may fit the international conventions' standards for refugees, some may not. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees estimates that some 60 million people today are seeking a safe place to call home on planet earth—more than at any other time in human history. This is a global crisis we cannot afford to ignore. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

When faced with the magnitude of human suffering, it is easy to be overwhelmed, and our instinct might be to turn away. But it is important to face into the stories of our migrant and refugee sisters and brothers, our children, our ancestors. Our breaking heart reflects the heart of God. Our prayers, our gifts, and our work really do make a difference.

The night before he was arrested Jesus went to the garden with his disciples, and asked them to keep vigil with him, to watch and pray. Tonight as we bear witness to these stories in the Refugees' Way of the Cross, we watch and pray with those who suffer, and with Christ.

Stay with me, remain here with me, watch and pray, watch and pray...



I. Jesus is Condemned to Death

I am from El Salvador. I have walked many miles with the caravan of people seeking hope. Now in a refugee camp in the stadium in Mexico City, alone among thousands, I feel lost. I sit by the information booth—waiting, searching... for direction, for the new life I long for, a life I can live.

Photo shared by Ana Canales.

Meditation:

A meditation from St. Oscar Romero, Archbishop of El Salvador from 1977 until March 24, 1980, when he was assassinated for speaking out against the terrible government repression of the people of his country while celebrating the Eucharist:

“God renounces the category of divinity and leaves the bliss of heaven and comes to be a human being, a man who doesn’t go mentioning his godly prerogatives, a nobody. As we have seen in the scripture today, a nobody who is tied up by the authorities of his time, brought before the tribunals, and judged. It occurs to me to think, when Saint Paul says, “a nobody,” of these figures we are accustomed to see in our papers: the handcuffed and tortured peasant, the worker being denied his rights. A nobody, this is what Christ wanted to be.”

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**



II. Jesus takes up his cross

My name is Alicia. It is 1887. I am 15 years old. I came to New York City from Sweden alone on a ship a year ago. Because of land reapportionment and severe famine my family could not support me. I found a job as a housemaid for a fashionable family. I will marry and begin a new life in America. I will never return to Sweden again.

Photo shared by Vince Zuniga.

Meditation:

Words from St. Oscar Romero:

“We feel in the Christ of Holy Week, carrying his cross, that this is the people that also goes carrying its cross. We feel in the Christ of the open and crucified arms the crucified people. But from Christ, a crucified and humiliated people finds its hope.”

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**



los Angeles y José A.
nico Ascencio.

III. Jesus falls the first time

I am Maria Elena. I am 13 years old in the year 1926. My family has had to flee Guanajuato, Mexico. The government issued a warrant for my father's arrest as a leader in the Knights of Columbus, a Roman Catholic Men's society. After my mother's untimely death, the rest of my family will return to Mexico, but my oldest brother and I will remain in the US, and begin our lives here.

Photo shared by Mina Byrne.

Meditation:

From the Jesuit Refugee Services: “Overwhelmed by the weight of the suffering he must carry and the difficulty of his journey, Jesus falls to the ground. He carries with him the anguish of the thousands of vulnerable migrants who risk their lives each year to escape their homeland in hopes of the basic necessities of safety and work.”

An excerpt from “Home”, by British-Somali poet Warsan Shire:

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark.

you only run for the border
when you see the whole city
running as well.

your neighbours running faster
than you, the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind
the old tin factory is
holding a gun bigger than his body,
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

**Holy God,
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IV. Jesus meets his mother

We are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is 2004 and our country has been at war. Child soldiers are forcibly recruited by warlords. I fled with my four children to Malta, a small island off the coast of Italy. After crossing the Mediterranean Sea, we were detained in prison conditions for five months before being released to live in an “open center” on the island for an indefinite time while our case is being processed.

Photo shared by Jesuit Refugee Services.

Meditation:

From St. Oscar Romero:

“Christ’s liberation, sisters and brothers, is tenderness, is love, is the presence of a kind mother, Mary. And Mary is the model of those who work with Christ for the liberation of the land and the coming of heaven. In her canticle of thanksgiving Mary proclaims the greatness of God and also that God rejects the pride of the powerful and lifts up the humble.”

Song of Mary: The Magnificat (Luke 1:26-55)

Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

**Holy God,
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Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**



V. The cross is laid on Simon of Cyrene

I am Rosalina. I am 13. I am from Honduras. My father was targeted by the gangs to move guns and drugs in his taxi. We moved from neighborhood to neighborhood, trying to hide. After the third time we moved, they found us again. They came at night and told my father if he didn't work for them, they would take me, I would be theirs. We left that night. We are in Tapachula, Mexico, now, near the Guatemalan border, at a day-time respite center with others from our caravan.

Photo shared by Ana Canales.

Meditation:

From St. Oscar Romero:

“Lamentably, dear brothers and sisters, we are the product of a spiritualistic, individualistic education, in which we were taught: “save your soul and don’t worry about the others.” As if we were to say, to those who suffer: “Patience! Heaven is coming, grin and bear it.” No! This cannot be. This is not to save, it is not the salvation that Christ brings. The salvation that Christ brings is salvation from all the slaveries that oppress humankind... It is necessary that people, who live underneath so many oppressions and slaveries-- the fear that keep hearts enslaved, the sickness that oppresses bodies, sadness, worry, and the terror that oppresses our freedom and our lives-- we must break these chains. This is where to start.”

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**



VI. A woman wipes the face of Jesus

We are from Guatemala. We fled violence. We came, walking with our families over 3,000 miles across Mexico. We wait in Nogales, south of the border with the United States. We do not know if our families' asylum cases will be accepted. But we are joyful in this moment—grateful for shelter, a warm meal, and the kindness of strangers.

Photo shared by Susan Shay.

Meditation:

From St. Oscar Romero:

“If we were to see that Christ is the poor man, the tortured man, the prisoner, the assassinated, and in every human form dumped without dignity by the side of our roads, we would discover this dumped Christ, a treasure, that we would gather with tenderness and kiss and take joy in.”

**Holy God,
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Have mercy on us.**



VII. Jesus falls a second time

We are the Kausch family. During the years of World War II, we saw fighting, separation, and imprisonment. Afterward the Danube Valley, the home our German-speaking ancestors had settled in over 300 years ago, was divided among Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Russia. We were left stateless. We were accepted into a refugee resettlement program in the US. We were among the fortunate ones.

Photo shared by Edie Kausch.

Meditation:

From The Episcopal Church's Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, in 2017 at a demonstration the De Hutto Detention Center where asylum-seeking women who had been separated from their children were being held:

“Allow me to begin by saying that we do not come in hatred. We do not come in bigotry. We do not come to put anybody down. We come to lift everybody up. We come in love. We come in love because we follow Jesus. And Jesus taught us love. Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor. Love your liberal neighbor. Love your conservative neighbor. Love your Democratic neighbor. Love your Republican neighbor. Love your Independent neighbor. Love the neighbor who you don’t like. Love the neighbor you disagree with. Love your Christian neighbor. Love your Jewish neighbor. Love your Muslim neighbor. Love your Palestinian neighbor. Love your Israeli neighbor. Love your refugee neighbor. Love your immigrant neighbor. Love the prison guard neighbor. *Love your neighbor.* We come in love. I would submit that the teaching of Jesus to love God and love our neighbor is at the core and the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And we must be people who reclaim Christianity from its popular modality, from the way it is often perceived and presented, to a way of Christianity that looks something like Jesus... so we come in love.”

**Holy God,
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Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**



VIII. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

My name is Denise; I am from Vietnam. My dad was captured during the war; we stayed and waited for him instead of evacuating. I was three when my dad came home. He was labelled capitalist and was tied to the old regime—they basically took everything; it was really hard to make a living; my parents were constantly harrassed. To get ahead my dad would have to join the Communist Party, which meant giving up his Catholic religion. We tried to leave by boat a few times. One of my dad's cousins left by boat with his son and we never heard from him again. We applied the legal way, it took a lot of time and money, as well as grease money because my dad was labelled. I was 13 when we came in 1986 and we left everything there—my mom and dad had \$500 in their back pocket. Now I live in Oakland with my wife and own a Vietnamese restaurant started by my aunt where my mom is the chef.

Photo shared by Amy Denney Zuniga

Meditation:

From Luke 23: 27-31

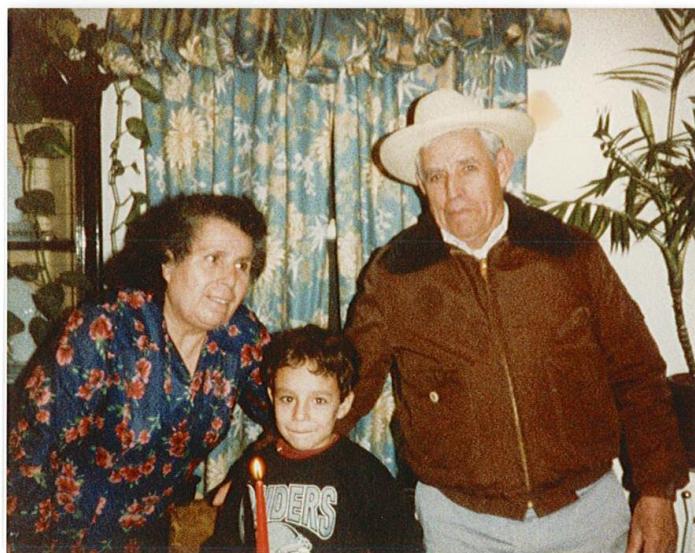
A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

From St. Oscar Romero:

“Here, Christ is the flesh that suffers. Here, Christ is tangible, where Christ is persecution, where Christ is people who sleep in the countryside because they cannot sleep in their houses, where Christ is sickness which is suffered because of so much exposure and so much suffering. Here is Christ carrying his cross, not through a chapel in the way of the cross but living in the people. It is Christ with his cross on the way to Calvary.”

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**

We go by night to encounter the source. Only thirst lights our way.
—St. John of the Cross



IX. Jesus falls a third time

I am María de Jesús, from a small town in Michoacán, México. My husband left to work in the United States in 1932 and we never heard from him again, only that he died and his body was missing. I provided for my six children by sewing clothes. Then my son, Felix, who needed to provide for his family of seven struggling with hunger, also crossed the border to work in the United States many times, walking alone in the desert, and later with human smugglers who made him go through tunnels, in trunks of cars and trucks without ventilation. He was deported many times. In 1986 when there was the immigration amnesty, he obtained his residence. Today most of his children and grandchildren live in the United States and he travels between Michoacán and Napa.

Photo shared by María Gallegos.

Meditation:

An excerpt from “Home”, by British-Somali poet Warsan Shire:

you have to understand,
no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land.

who would choose to spend days
and nights in the stomach of a truck
unless the miles travelled
meant something more than journey.

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**



X. Jesus is stripped of his garments

It is 1993. We have run and walked for many miles, fleeing the violence in South Sudan that killed our families and destroyed our homes. We are 20,000 in a refugee camp in Ethiopia. We are the Lost Boys of Sudan. Eventually, most of us will receive refugee status and resettle in the United States, beginning new families and lives there.

Photo shared by Leslie Moreland.

Meditation:

From St. Oscar Romero:

“This is the commitment of being a Christian: to follow Christ in his incarnation. And if Christ is the God of majesty that becomes a humble human being, even to the death of slaves on a cross and lives with the poor, that is where our Christian faith must be. The Christian that does not want to live this commitment of solidarity with the poor is not worthy of being called a Christian. Christ invites us to not be afraid of persecution because, believe it my brothers and sisters, the one who is committed to the poor must face the same destiny as the poor: to be disappeared, to be tortured, captured, and found dead.”

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**

We go by night to encounter the source. Only thirst lights our way.

—St. John of the Cross



XI. Jesus is nailed to the cross

“Señora, where is your family?”

She lifts up her sleeve to show the machete scars on her arm.

“They killed my husband and sons. I escaped and started to walk.”

“How do you have the strength?”

“I have faith.”

Photo shared by Ana Canales.

Meditation:

From Pope Francis:

“The globalization of indifference makes it difficult for us even to recognize our brothers and sisters. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial. … We have become used to the suffering of others: It doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business!”

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**

Within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, that never dies away, within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, that never dies away...



XII. Jesus dies on the cross

Alan Kurdi is 3 years old on September 2, 2015 when his family boards an inflatable raft to make the 4 mile journey from a Turkish beach to the Greek island of Kos, fleeing the Syrian civil war. The boat turns over and Alan, along with his mother and brother, drown. His father survives. A Turkish journalist captures images of Alan's small body, discovered washing on to the beach early the next morning. The photos draw intense international focus to the Syrian refugee crisis.

Photos from Wikipedia.

The photograph of Alan Kurdi's body is a powerful image. We have veiled it, as we veil the cross during Lent, out of respect. You may lift the veil and view the image if you feel so moved.

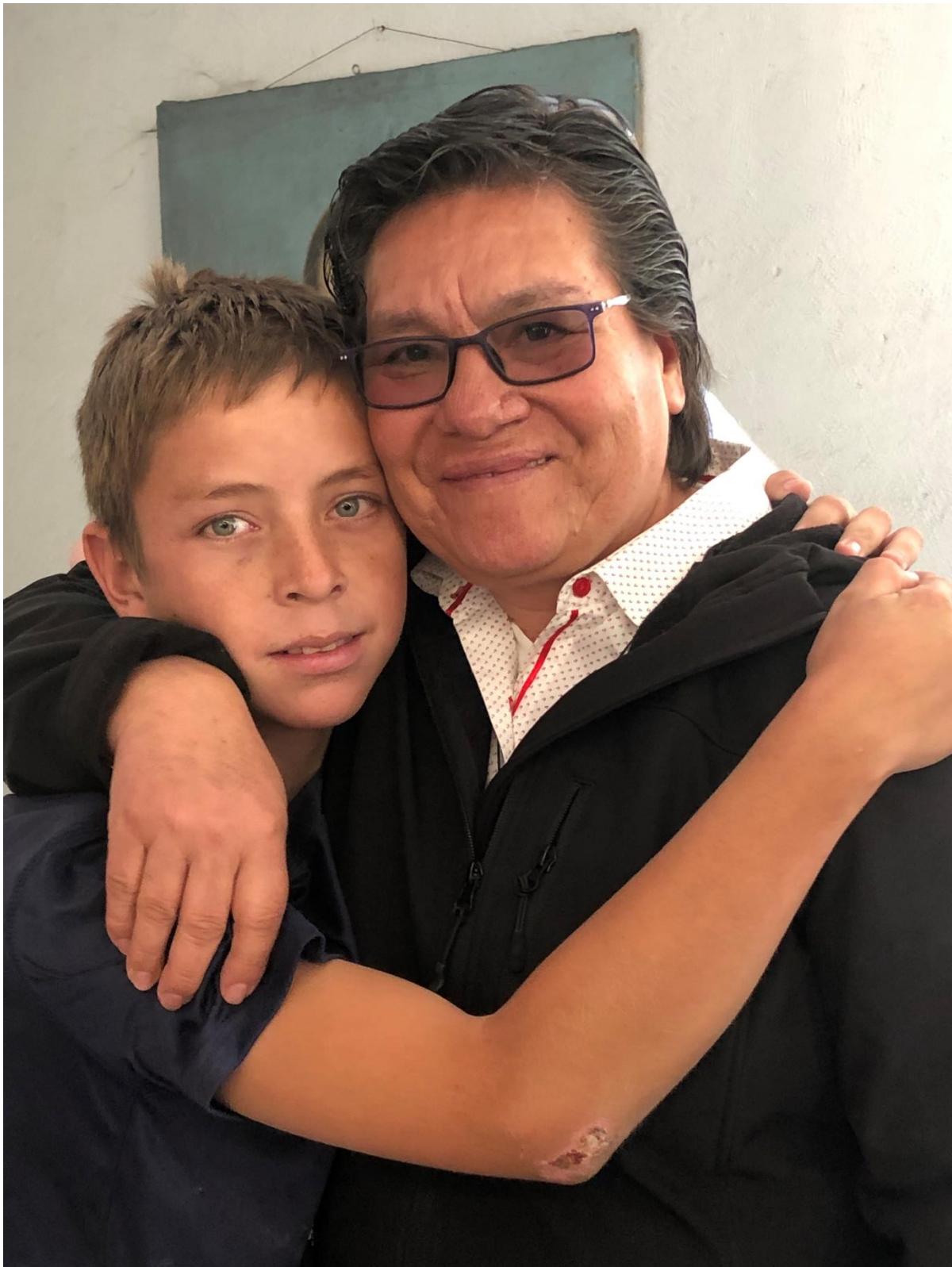
Meditation in Silence

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**

Within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, that never dies away, within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, that never dies away...

Please be aware that the photograph on the next page is very painful.





XIII. The body of Jesus is placed in the arms of his mother

My name is Jari. I am 11. I am from Honduras. I have no family now. I came alone with the October caravan, was deported, and came again. Now I live at a shelter run by sisters in Mexico City. I stay close to Sister Magdalena... she anchors me. I have found my mother.

Photo shared by Ana Canales.

Meditation:

From Katrine Camilleri, formerly a Jesuit Refugee Services worker with refugees in Malta:

“My work has brought home the painful realization that often there is little or nothing I can do to ease detainees’ suffering. This is hard to accept, so hard that at times I am tempted to give up, to turn away from the pain and to live more comfortably. Often, the only thing that keeps me going is the image of Mary at the foot of the cross. I am sure she must have been dying to tear Jesus off the cross, to do something for him, but she was helpless. The only thing she could do was to be there, so there she stayed, although it must have been the most difficult thing she ever had to do. Like Mary, being there is often all I can offer, and I have realized this presence is precious. More than that, it is a source of many blessings. Just as streams of living water flowed from the cross of Christ, the detainees have been a never-ending source of enrichment for me.”

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**

Within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, that never dies away, within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, that never dies away...



XIV. Jesus is laid in the tomb

They are the nameless dead. They left their countries out of terror, need, and hope, with little more than a backpack and a prayer. Their lives have ended on this way of the cross. For many, graves remain unidentified, families never know our what has become of them. They are tens of thousands, each one someone's beloved mother, brother, daughter, son.

Photo from Human Rights Brief: Situation of Missing Migrants and Unidentified Remains in Mexico.

Meditation:

From St. Oscar Romero:

“We do not think, sisters and brothers, that our dead have gone from us. Their heaven, their eternal reward makes them perfect in love. They continue loving the same causes for which they died. That is to say that... among this liberation force are counted not only those who remain alive, but also all those who have been killed and who are more present than ever in this procession of the people.”

**Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy Immortal One,
Have mercy on us.**

Within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, that never dies away, within our darkest night, you kindle the fire that never dies away, that never dies away...

Prayers

Let us offer our prayers to God, saying:

Listen to your people, O Lord.

Holy One, to you each and every human life, every story, and every hair on our heads is precious. Hold us as we hold the stories of your suffering people. Help us to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Listen to your people, O Lord.

God of life, you joined the suffering of this world in Jesus. Mary and Joseph fled with the infant Jesus from the atrocities of Herod and sought refuge in a foreign land. We pray especially for all children fleeing war, violence, sickness and famine. Help us never to forget the lives of your children.

Listen to your people, O Lord.

God of love, you walked the way of human suffering in Christ carrying the cross. Be with those who travel many miles, perhaps never to see home again. Bless families who are separated; reuniting them once more. Bring the resurrection of hope, of a new home and a new life. Help us to bear our own and one another's burdens.

Listen to your people, O Lord.

God who makes us one, we pray for our nation and all the nations of the world, that those who govern may count each life precious and may serve the people of their nation and those who seek refuge with equity and fairness. Help us to peacefully mend our divisions, that this world you have created may be whole.

Listen to your people, O Lord.

Gracious God, we pray for our newest neighbors, those families who have sought refuge from the ravages of war and violence. Help us to be good neighbors, so that they find not only shelter and sustenance, but also a loving and supportive community in which to create a new beginning.

Listen to your people, O Lord.

Eternal God, who holds all souls in life, receive those who have died fleeing war and violence into the blessed rest of everlasting peace. Comfort those who mourn and those who live in the fear of unknowing. Help us to end needless deaths and to see in all death the seed of eternal life.

Listen to your people, O Lord.

Almighty and Loving God, you who have crossed the boundaries of Heaven and Earth to be with your people, be with those who must flee their homes because of violence and oppression and lead them home. Help your Church across the world to be a place of refuge and a force of peace.

Listen to your people, O Lord.

We give thanks to you, Source of All Being, that you hear our prayers on behalf of our refugee brothers and sisters. Help us to know that love swallows fear. In your compassion may we learn to walk with those who suffer, know that when we give of ourselves, we receive far more, and experience those who stand knocking at our doors as Christ the Beloved One.

Listen to your people, O Lord.

We offer these prayers in your holy name.

Amen.