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## HOLY SATURDAY PRAYER SERVICE



**CATHOLIC MOBILIZING NETWORK**

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### Leader's Guide

# Holy Saturday Prayer Service



## Suggested Materials

- Small pieces of paper for each participant
- Pens/Pencils
- A bell or object to gently call participants to attention
- A fire safe bowl
- Lighter/Matches
- Small, individual candles, with paper/plastic shield for wax drippings

## Gathering Ritual

*Begin this prayer service in darkness and quiet. Each participant receives a candle, a small piece of paper, and pen/pencil. Begin the formal service by ringing a bell and turning on dim lights to center and gather participant's focus.*

**The leader invites each person present to write down an experience of harm that weighs heavy on their heart and mind on the provided piece of paper, then to hold that piece of paper in their hand.**

## Holy Saturday Prayer Service



### Opening Prayer

*Loving God,  
On this day of darkness, give me the strength to persist in  
the midst of the unknown.  
Open my heart to your loving grace and allow me the  
courage to lament my sorrows,  
Help me to trust in a future beyond my experience of harm.  
Grant me the wisdom to feel your presence even in the  
darkest of times and  
Allow me to find the light of your mercy guiding me along  
the path of healing  
As I attempt to find life after death, hope after sorrow, and  
joy after pain.  
Amen.*

### First Reading JONAH 2:3-10:

Out of my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me; From the womb of Sheol I cried for help, and you heard my voice. You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the sea, and the flood enveloped me; All your breakers and your billows passed over me. Then I said, "I am banished from your sight! How will I again look upon your holy temple?" The waters surged around me up to my neck; the deep enveloped me; seaweed wrapped around my head. I went down to the roots of the mountains; to the land whose bars closed behind me forever, But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord, my God. When I became faint, I remembered the Lord; My prayer came to you in your holy temple. Those who worship worthless idols abandon their hope for mercy. But I, with thankful voice, will sacrifice to you; What I have vowed I will pay: deliverance is from the Lord.

**The Word of the Lord .....**Thanks be to God

## Holy Saturday Prayer Service



### Reflection (Suggested)

In the midst of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, Holy Saturday often gets lost. Only in the Apostles Creed are we reminded of the beautiful, yet difficult, reality of Holy Saturday: Jesus descended into hell. Holy Saturday can be understood as the site of divine abandonment in which Christ, in the depths of hell, experiences the abandonment that we feel in the aftermath of the gruesome death experienced on Good Friday. A day that reminds us that most of our life is lived in the darkness in hope of the light, Holy Saturday provides the space for hope and healing from instances of harm, and especially for those on both sides of harm.

On Holy Saturday we are confronted with the devastating fact that Christ is dead, that God in love has entered into death. Rather than approach this from the site of the cross, Holy Saturday invites us to reflect on the Spirit, as the unique bond of love between God and Christ – even in the depths of hell. In this moment we see the truest form of God’s Solidarity with humanity, when Jesus, rather than rescue those in hell, identifies with them. “Divine love is revealed at the point in which it is most threatened.”<sup>1</sup> In this experience of hell, a great comfort can be found for those experiencing great suffering. There truly is no place that God does not go. Even in the depths of great suffering, of God-forsakenness – God will still be there. Not only does God’s ever-present love offer hope to those who have committed great wrongs, but it also sheds light on how we are to heal from great harm. On this day of darkness, let us reflect on the continued use of the death penalty and the perpetuation of the cycle of violence.

### Pause for a moment of silent reflection and contemplation

1) Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 68.

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### Closing Song

**The closing song is to be sung by all present, as lights slowly become brighter.**

*“In Our Darkness” – Taizé Chant*

In our darkness  
there is no darkness.  
With you, o Lord,  
the deepest night  
is clear as the day.

*(Repeat chant three times)*

## Holy Saturday Prayer Service



### Closing Ritual

*The leader invites each person to place their piece of paper in the fireproof bowl. Once all have done so, the leader will light the paper on fire (with extreme safety and caution), and invite each participant to come forward, one by one, to light their candle.*

**Share with them that by igniting their candle, they are taking a first step at healing from their experience of harm, that they are beginning to move from the darkness into the light of new life. (After all candles are lit, sit in silence for a few minutes.)**

### Closing Prayer

*Loving God,  
In my moments of doubt and weakness, you sent your  
Spirit to bear witness to my pain.  
In my times of error, you sent your Son to stand in  
solidarity with loving mercy.  
As I embark on the path towards healing and  
restoration,  
Grant me the gift of your grace as I discover life after  
death.  
Renew me in the light of your Kingdom,  
And help me to discover new life.  
Amen.*

## Holy Saturday Prayer Service



### Second Reading JOHN 20:11-18:

"But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

**The Word of the Lord .....** Thanks be to God

### Reflection (Suggested)

In Jesus's experience of hell, it is the Spirit that allows light to shine through the darkness; it is the Spirit which makes way for "life through the wounds of death."<sup>1</sup> In the mystery of Holy Saturday, it is the Spirit that endures and secures love between life and death; it is the Spirit that bears witness to what remains.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

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The experience of Mary Magdalene depicted in the Gospel of John attests to this witness. Her witness, however, is not defined by sight; only through hearing Jesus speak her name does she recognize him – her witness is then defined by unseeing.<sup>2</sup> Mary's witness points to a new kind of witness, not through seeing and touch but one through tears of pain and sorrow, darkness and uncertainty.<sup>3</sup> The Holy Spirit is what allows a witnessing to what remains after death, and to the landscape of survival that remains after trauma.

The Spirit is what gives life to that which persists despite death and narrates a new understanding of redemption.<sup>4</sup> In witnessing to the realities of experiences of harm, redemption becomes the ability to recognize the life remaining after an experience of harm – to begin the process of healing.

In this light, we are called to reflect upon the trauma experienced by murder victims' families, as well as all those negatively impacted by the violence of the death penalty, and the incredible challenge they have to persist, to find life after death. In the space of Holy Saturday, amidst the death and devastation present, there is hope. There is hope in the middle, in the space between life and death where the Spirit persists and breathes life into those who remain.

### Pause for a moment of silent reflection and contemplation

2) Ibid., 89.

3) Ibid., 91.

4) Ibid., 141.

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### Intersessions

**Leader:** *As we prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Our Lord, we join together and acknowledge those moments of harm that keep us in darkness.*

For Pope Francis and those in leadership within the Church, as they work to end the cycle of violence. Give them the wisdom to allow the Spirit to shine a light and bear witness on all those suffering in the world. We pray, **Loving God, Send Your Spirit.**

For all those impacted by violent crime and acts of grave harm. May all the victims of crime and their families know your healing power and be transformed by your mercy. We pray, **Loving God, Send Your Spirit.**

For all those on death row awaiting execution, and those whose lives we have lost. May they know your unending love and forgiveness as children of God. We pray, **Loving God, Send Your Spirit.**

For us all, as we struggle to persist despite the unknown. May we be opened and transformed by your Spirit in times of darkness and doubt. We pray, **Loving God, Send Your Spirit.**

For all those prayers we now voice out loud: ..... We pray, **Loving God, Send Your Spirit.**