

SESSION 22: UNITED

TOPIC: Justice

GOAL

The goal of this session is for the teens to explore how authentically loving God demands caring for others, especially the most vulnerable among us. The teens will also be inspired to work for true justice for God's people.

KEY CONCEPTS

Christ calls us to live out justice, a virtue that puts us in right relationship with God and one another.

True justice starts by diving into sacramental graces and the power of prayer but does not end there.

As we seek to bring justice to the world, we should follow the guidance of the Church not only in her teachings, but in her actions, too.

KEY TERMS

Justice: The cardinal moral virtue which consists in the constant and firm will to give God and neighbor their due.

Social Teaching: The teaching (social doctrine) of the Church on the truth of revelation about human dignity, human solidarity, and the principles of justice and peace.

Solidarity: Unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group.

Virtue: A habitual and firm disposition to do the good.

SCRIPTURE

1 John 4:19-21

Luke 4:16-21

Matthew 25:31-46

CATECHISM

1396-1397

1803-1805, 1807

1928-1942

ABOUT THIS CONFIRMATION SESSION

The Gather activity randomly assigns the teens numbers and gives them instructions they must follow to achieve higher ranks, giving them some insight into how inequalities impact human society. The Proclaim begins by processing the Gather activity and then explores Christ's

concern for the marginalized and how the Church continues His care for society's most vulnerable. In the Break, the teens reflect on Scripture verses that call us toward social justice. The Send wraps up the session with a version of the Stations of the Cross that incorporates the corporal works of mercy and themes of Catholic social teaching.

ENVIRONMENT

As this session focuses on justice, use the corporal works of mercy to decorate. Place items connected to each of the corporal works of mercy in prominent spaces around the room. For example, a jug of water for "give drink to the thirsty," a cardboard box and newspapers for "shelter the homeless," a pair of handcuffs for "visit the prisoners." As the teens arrive, ask them to figure out what the items have in common. Consider giving a prize to the first person to guess correctly.

MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

"Blessed are the Ones," Audrey Assad (*Heart*, Marshall Altman, 2012)

Catholic Relief Services: "CST 101 | Life and Dignity of the Human Person" (youtube.com)

"Isaiah 61," Matt Maher (*Welcome to Life*, Spirit and Song, 2003)

AS YOU GET STARTED

To dive deeper into this session, consider using it as a precursor to a service project. Have each small group decide on a project to do together or announce plans for a large group project. Connecting this teaching to action can help the teens better recognize that justice and service must go hand in hand.

For an added element to the environment, consider incorporating pictures of the corporal works of mercy. Make sure that the pictures are not so graphic that the teens might find them upsetting, but challenge them by showing images of those who are hungry, homeless, etc. and need our help.

SUMMIT

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Welcome them to the session and begin in prayer.

Summit (20 min)

Divide the teens into their Confirmation small groups. Use the modified *Summit* session to lead the teens through a *lectio divina* based reflection on the Sunday readings.

GATHER

Climbing the Social Ladder (15 min)

Prior to the session, gather enough name tags for each teen and permanent markers for each Core Member. Label the teens' name tags with the numbers one through ten.

Gather the teens in the main meeting space and explain the activity. Each teen will have a name tag placed on their back. Each name tag is labeled with a number, one through ten. The teens need to figure out their number and form a group with the other people who share the same number. The teens cannot ask what number they are and cannot tell others their numbers. (If needed, tell the teens they must be silent while discovering their numbers and forming groups.) Let the teens mingle. Within several minutes, the teens will have discovered their numbers and formed their groups.

Once the groups have formed, announce the following:

We are not finished yet; there is a catch. In this game, one is actually the worst number and ten is the best number. In the time left, you have the chance to raise your number. Approach any Core Member and they will tell you how you can raise your number.

Prior to the session, allow the Core Members to set whatever standards they want — within safe environment regulations — for the teens to move up in rank. They can create assignments for the teens to complete — anything from basic tasks to exercises that require highly specific skills. They can make the teens compete or bid against one another. They can raise or lower teens' numbers arbitrarily (e.g., let teens skip multiple numbers, raise the number for teens who did not ask). They can limit the amount of time or number of people they choose to help. Have them use their permanent markers to write the new numbers on the teens' name tags. Call time when you need to move from the Gather to the Proclaim and note that not all of the teens will be able to raise their number to a ten in the allotted time.

PROCLAIM

"United" Teaching (15 min)

Good Habit

Begin the Proclaim by processing the Gather activity. Ask the teens what they found to be easy and difficult about the activity. Encourage them to share specific instances when they encountered different experiences throughout the game. Have them describe how they felt throughout the activity and whether those feelings impacted their decision-making and perception of other teens. See if the teens can connect this activity to real-life experiences and guess the Proclaim topic.

While on Earth, Jesus did many important works. He died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead, reconciling humanity with God. He preached and established a Church to continue sharing His Good News.

Read Luke 4:16-21.

Christ cared for those in need. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus begins His ministry with a message of justice. He goes to the synagogue and announces He is God's anointed, who brings freedom and light to those bound and in darkness.

The word "justice" can be thrown around rather carelessly: the justice system, social justice warrior, the Justice League. Justice has become quite a buzzword. But there is a place for justice in our faith; it is a crucial piece of Catholic morality. Sadly, the "justice" our society values usually does not fit the justice our Catholic faith demands.

Catholic morality is not simply following rules. It is about growing in virtues that make us the best, holiest versions of ourselves. Virtues are habitual and firm dispositions to do the good. Not a general "good," but THE good: God's definition of good.
CCC 1803

Justice is a human virtue — a virtue that can be acquired through human effort. As justice is fundamental to moral goodness, it is also a cardinal virtue — one of four virtues from which all other human virtues flow.
CCC 1804-1805

Consider using CCC 1803-1832 to identify the three theological virtues and four cardinal virtues, and explain how theological and human virtues are different.

Justice is the virtue by which we constantly, firmly desire to give God and our neighbor what is due to them. True justice means having right relationship with God and one another — knowing and loving God for who He is and loving all human beings as His children.
CCC 1807

We said virtues are habitual dispositions to do the good — habits! And habits are actions. The virtue of justice is not simply a theological idea. It requires actively serving God and neighbor so naturally that it is second nature. This is radically different than the revenge that society calls "justice." How can we bring God's justice to our broken and hurting world? Our first steps must be prayer and the sacraments.

We Can Change Things

Read the following quote from St. Teresa of Calcutta: "I used to pray that God would feed the hungry, or do this or that, but now I pray that He will guide me to do whatever I am supposed to do, what I can do. I used to pray for answers, but now I am praying for strength. I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things."

We sometimes hear that prayer does not affect the wrongs in the world. As Catholics, we know this is not true. We know that God can and does act toward our good in ways we cannot see. But, as with all things in our faith, God asks for our participation. We are Christ's hands and feet

in the world. He calls us to work toward justice and fight the sins that create injustice wherever and whenever we can.

Project a list of the seven sacraments and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Each sacrament is uniquely connected to justice, but today we will focus on Confirmation and the Eucharist. Confirmation brings a greater outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. While all of the gifts relate to justice, fortitude is particularly important. Fortitude, also a cardinal virtue, enables us to pursue the good amidst difficulties. Living out true justice is a struggle. **There are many people who disagree with Catholicism's view of justice and are quick to condemn and attack. We need the virtue of prudence, strengthened in Confirmation to know what is truly just and to act accordingly.** The Eucharist also gives us much needed strength. Among other benefits, the Eucharist deepens our spiritual connection to Christ and one another as members of one Body, the Church. The Eucharist reminds us that, despite our differences, we are united in Christ.

CCC 1396

Consider exploring how the remaining five sacraments are tied to justice.

Read 1 John 4:19-21.

This is especially true of the poor, those who are most in need of justice. **Saint John** says we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, without caring for those with us. The Eucharist reminds us that the poor are our brothers and sisters who help us imitate Christ in giving to those who can give nothing in return.

CCC 1397

Consider using CCC 1391-1401 to discuss the other fruits of Holy Communion and remind the teens they are obligated to continue to attend Mass and receive the Eucharist after Confirmation.

Social Justice Warrior

As we grow in justice, the Church guides us spiritually with the sacraments and prayer. However, the Church also gives practical guidance, explaining how to act justly. She encourages us to pursue social justice — a society where everyone knows what is good, works toward that good, and helps each other along that path.

CCC 1928

Social justice starts with a fundamental respect for the human person. Living justly means respecting others and their rights — not the rights bestowed by a country or institution, but the rights that flow from their dignity as children of God.

CCC 1929-1930

When speaking about rights, it is easy to think politically, but Christ calls us beyond politics. We must try to wipe away our prejudices and love others as we love ourselves. We must especially care for the disadvantaged and those who think and act differently than us, as we can easily feel they are less deserving.

CCC 1931-1933

Social justice also requires acknowledging our equality and our differences. As children of God, we all have equal dignity and equal, God-given rights. But despite our equal dignity, our lives do not play out equally. Some face natural inequalities — age, physical abilities, intellectual abilities, and more — that are a part of God's plan. Others face inequalities that are the consequences of sin. Whether or not these sinful inequalities impact us personally, we must fight against them for the sake of those affected.

CCC 1934-1938

Solidarity is another vital part of social justice, totally changing whom and why we serve. When we serve those in need, we sometimes see them as projects rather than people. We sometimes help simply for the sake of helping. Solidarity teaches that we are one human family. Remembering this, we realize nothing in this world is truly our own — everything is a gift from God. Solidarity allows us to freely, unselfishly share material and spiritual goods with one another.

CCC 1939-1942

The Church offers so much guidance regarding how to act justly and create a just society. These concepts, the Ten Commandments, and the Beatitudes are just starting points. Catholic social teaching is another great resource. Catholic social teaching provides seven principles that more concretely outline what a just society looks like.

Project a list of the seven themes of [Catholic social teaching](#).

Commented [1]: Add the tenants in parenthesis.

With all this, though, we must remember that the Church not only speaks about justice; she lives out justice, too. The Church is always speaking on behalf of people in need. Pope Francis is a great example of this. If you want to change our world but do not know where to start, look to the Church and stand up for justice with her.

God made us unique and gave us unique callings. We all have different passions when it comes to social justice. Discover yours! Look at your deepest concerns about our world and learn how you can help. We must remember, though, that we are working toward the common good: a just society for all. With that, some justice issues are more urgent or fundamental than others.

Pro-life issues are a good example. The right to life is the basis for all other rights. And, based on the numbers alone, abortion is an issue that requires urgent attention. But people who see the Church as simply anti-abortion are mistaken. While she cares deeply about the unborn, the Church's pro-life stance covers many issues and causes the Church to speak out against all violence and threats to human life and dignity.

Read Matthew 25:34-40.

Christ and the Church show us, both in word and action, that caring for those in greatest need is not optional. Justice is a main mission of Christ and the Church and must become one of our main missions as well.

Confirmation and the Holy Spirit are about faith in action. Preparing for Confirmation is the perfect time to learn more about the Church's teachings on justice and causes you can fight for. Use the graces you receive in Confirmation to change our world.

BREAK

One Moment Video (5 min)

Play the video "One Moment" to transition out of the teaching and into small groups.

Justice Scripture Study (15 min)

Divide the teens into their Confirmation small groups. Begin in prayer and then select teens to read each of the following Scripture passages aloud:

- Genesis 1:26-27, 31 (Man and woman created in God's image and likeness)
- Genesis 1:28-29 (Care for creation)
- Matthew 25:31-46 (Corporal works of mercy)
- Acts 2:42-45 (The Church holding all things in common)
- James 2:14-18 (Faith without works)
- 1 John 4:19-21 (Love of God and neighbor)

After each passage, use the following questions to facilitate a discussion:

- How does this passage connect to justice?
- How can you practice this aspect of justice in your personal life?
- How can you serve this aspect of justice at a larger level (e.g., parish, state, nation).

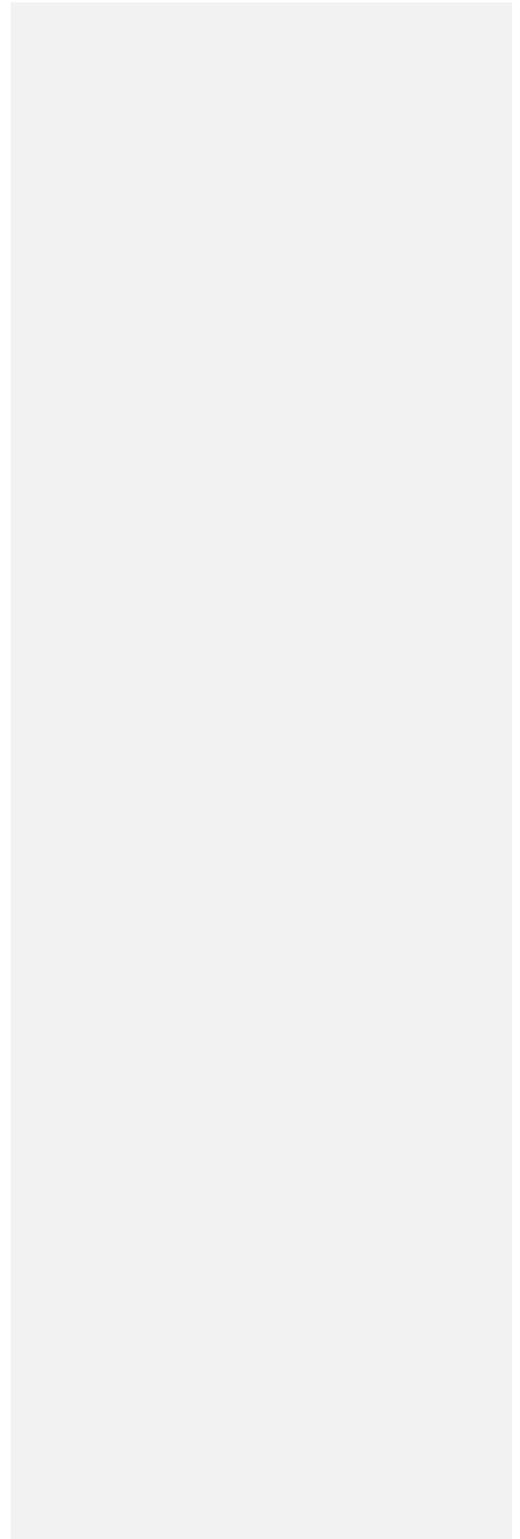
If the teens have difficulty answering the questions or are simply repeating one another's ideas, help them brainstorm more ways to be instruments of true justice.

SEND

Stations of the Cross (20 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Remind them that in working for justice, our actions must always stem from our connection to the Lord through prayer. Briefly introduce the Stations of the Cross for any teens who are unfamiliar with this devotion. Explain that the version of the Stations of the Cross they are going to pray connects Christ's path to Calvary with the seven corporal works of mercy and the seven themes of Catholic social teaching. Use the *Stations of the Cross* handout to lead the teens through the prayer. To take it a step further,

consider providing the teens with visuals as they pray the stations by projecting images of each station and/or the justice issues mentioned for each station.



Handout: Stations of the Cross

Pray the following before each station:

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

FIRST STATION: JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

Corporal Works of Mercy — Visit the Prisoners

Reflection: Pilate condemns Christ of a crime for which He is not guilty. And with this condemnation, many of Jesus' followers flee — afraid to be seen or connected with Christ. Some in our prison system today have, like Christ, been sentenced unfairly — completely innocent of their alleged crimes or serving a longer sentence than necessary. But all prisoners are Christ's children, regardless of innocence or guilt. Christ knows their pain and is in the prisons alongside them. Will we do the same or will we run like the apostles, scared to face the condemned?

Prayer: Jesus, make us instruments of your justice. You faced Pilate with courage, though you knew it would lead to death. Give us the courage to reach out to those in prison.

SECOND STATION: JESUS IS GIVEN HIS CROSS

Catholic Social Teaching — The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

Reflection: In taking up the cross, Jesus begins the most difficult work ever accomplished in the world — the work of our salvation, the work of reconciling God and humanity. The work of our daily lives — schoolwork, chores, clubs, teams — can seem meaningless and boring. But all work, no matter how mundane, is an opportunity to draw closer to God. Many in our world are unable to work or have no option but to work in poor conditions for unfair pay. Let us not take our work for granted, but instead, unite our daily tasks to Christ's saving work and offer them up for workers in need.

Prayer: Christ, make us instruments of your justice. We thank you for taking up your cross for us. Help us do our work well and care for those in need of just, ethical work.

THIRD STATION: JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

Corporal Works of Mercy — Feed the Hungry

Reflection: Falling to the ground, Jesus' body, already broken from being scourged and carrying the heavy cross, breaks a little more — the same body that is broken and shared with us in the Eucharist. We often take the sacraments for granted. We forget that many people throughout history and some today lack easy access to the sacraments. Many also lack easy access to the food they so desperately need to survive — not just people in distant lands, but within our own country, too. We have easy access to stores, money, gifts cards, and the internet. Have we

used those resources to help bring physical and spiritual nourishment to others? Or have we taken them for granted, too?

Prayer: Lord, make us instruments of your justice. In your death and in the Eucharist, you have given your body for us. Open our eyes to what we can give to help those hungering for food and your presence.

FOURTH STATION: JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER
Corporal Works of Mercy — Shelter the Homeless

Reflection: In Mary's arms, Jesus finds a home along the walk to Calvary. Mary has always cared for Jesus' every need. Caring for Jesus in this dark moment reminds us of other difficult times for the Holy Family — like leaving their home to travel to Bethlehem and fleeing Herod's persecution to escape to Egypt. Just like the Holy Family did, many in our world face homelessness. Some lack a physical house and family and friends who will take them in. Some have been displaced by war, poverty, and natural disasters and now make their way in an unfamiliar town or country. We are a human family; let us find ways to welcome our brothers and sisters into our country, towns, and homes.

Prayer: Savior, make us instruments of your justice. You told us that the Son of Man had no place to rest His head. May we treat sheltering others who are experiencing homelessness the way we would treat you.

FIFTH STATION: SIMON HELPS JESUS CARRY HIS CROSS
Catholic Social Teaching — Call to Family, Community, and Participation

Reflection: We all know how it feels for a teacher to call on us when we did not raise our hand. How much worse must Simon have felt when he was called to participate in carrying the cross. But Jesus could not carry the cross alone and we cannot carry our crosses alone, either. Despite our differences, we are one human family, one community. Christ calls us to be Simon, participating in and caring for society and one another's lives. How beautiful to remember that whether we are able to help or in a position where we need help, we are never alone.

Prayer: Redeemer, make us instruments of your justice. You called Simon to participate, in a small way, in our salvation. Remind us of Simon's example as we participate in our communities.

SIXTH STATION: VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS
Corporal Works of Mercy — Visit the Sick

Reflection: Veronica sees that Jesus is in need of help. She goes to Him and wipes the blood, spit, and dirt from His face. She does not care that He is considered a criminal or that tending to His wounds would probably make her ritually unclean. We have all been sick and around others who are sick. Some of us may have even encountered people who were dying. Being around

illness and death can be uncomfortable. But that does not stop Veronica from caring for Christ and it should not stop us from caring for the sick either.

Prayer: Messiah, make us instruments of your justice. Veronica did not let herself — her fears, her discomfort — prevent her from helping you. May we follow her example and put the sick and dying ahead of ourselves.

SEVENTH STATION: JESUS FALLS A SECOND TIME **Corporal Works of Mercy — Give Drink to the Thirsty**

Reflection: Jesus has encountered so many difficulties along the way to His Crucifixion. His body is exhausted. Walking has become excruciatingly painful. And He falls again. In some parts of the world, people — often women — spend hours every day walking to get water. Often that water is not actually clean, but simply seems safe enough to use. Christ, the living water, takes up His cross again and walks alongside these women as they carry their water. What can we do to walk alongside Christ and these women, too?

Prayer: Jesus, make us instruments of your justice. You have given yourself as living water to all who thirst for you. Open our eyes to the ways we can help those experiencing physical thirst and lacking access to clean water.

EIGHTH STATION: JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM **Catholic Social Teaching — Solidarity**

Reflection: The Gospel of Luke shares that throughout His walk, Jesus is followed by a crowd. In the midst of these angry faces, Jesus sees a group of women crying for Him. And in a twist, Jesus comforts them in their grief, even though He is the one heading toward His death. This interaction speaks to solidarity — truly loving others as we love ourselves. Luke does not say if the women knew Jesus. They may have been complete strangers, but they saw Christ as a brother and wept at the injustices He faced. Christ puts aside His own needs to care for them, reminding us that no pain is too great to stop us from helping others.

Prayer: Christ, make us instruments of your justice. In all things, you have put the needs of humankind above your own. Inspire us to show this same selfless love to others in our human family.

NINTH STATION: JESUS FALLS A THIRD TIME **Catholic Social Teaching — Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

Reflection: Christ, incredibly weakened by His long journey to Calvary, falls a third time. It seems that at this point, He is at His most vulnerable — barely holding on, knowing the hardest part is yet to come. Our world is so quick to discard people. We quickly forget celebrities from old musical groups, TV shows, and movies. How much easier is it to forget about the poor and vulnerable in our communities? The Church declares that we, as individuals and as a society,

should have a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, putting their needs first in our considerations. As we look at the fallen Jesus in His vulnerable state, can we really turn our back on the poor and vulnerable in our world today?

Prayer: Lord, make us instruments of your justice. You told us that your power is made perfect in our weaknesses. Let us see the weakest among us — the poor and vulnerable — with your eyes, knowing they are held close to your heart.

TENTH STATION: JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS
Corporal Works of Mercy — Clothe the Naked

Reflection: The guards take away Jesus' clothes, leaving Him completely vulnerable and exposed. Likewise, many today lack clean clothes that could help them land a job, clothes that could help them keep warm, and many other basic material goods that help us live well. But even more important than losing His clothes, Jesus is treated without dignity. So many in our world encounter this same treatment. Sexual sins in particular strip away our ability to see one another as humans, as sisters and brothers. Our world needs serious help in many ways, but it starts within our own hearts.

Prayer: Savior, make us instruments of your justice. You, who should be treated with highest respect, humbled yourself to become man and die for us. Change our hearts so we are not too proud to provide for others nor too proud to address our own spiritual poverties.

ELEVENTH STATION: JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS
Catholic Social Teaching — Rights and Responsibilities

Reflection: The Church teaches that social justice requires a balance. Society must protect everyone's God-given rights and, in turn, everyone has responsibilities to help society. And here we see Jesus, our king, our God, having His basic right to life taken away. Why? Because He freely took on the responsibility of saving us from our sins. Yet, we complain so readily when our perceived rights are violated and often choose to throw off our responsibilities. What a beautiful, selfless example Christ has given to us.

Prayer: Redeemer, make us instruments of your justice. You took on a responsibility that was not yours only to be violated by those you came to help. Teach us to take on our responsibilities selflessly and to stand up for the God-given rights of all.

TWELFTH STATION: JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS
Catholic Social Teaching — Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Reflection: Here, Christ gives us the ultimate sacrifice. He calls us His friends and willingly lays down His life for us. In His death, Christ atones for all of our sins — even the most unthinkable evils. Since the Fall, our world has been filled with sins against human life and dignity — violence, murder, torture, and other unbearable wrongs. Jesus could have looked at our broken,

sinful world and said, "No, thanks. They are not worth saving." But He took on our worst sins without thinking twice. Let us rejoice in the immense, unfathomable love our God has for us.

Prayer: Messiah, make us instruments of your justice. You lay down your life and your dignity to atone for our sins and reconcile us to you. Give us your eyes to clearly see the beauty and dignity of every human life.

THIRTEENTH STATION: JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS
Catholic Social Teaching — Care for Creation

Reflection: As God created the world, He saved man and woman for last. All of creation is beautiful, but we often forget that creation includes humans, too. Jesus' body, the pinnacle of creation, comes down from the cross. The friends who remained with Him treat His body with the utmost respect as they prepare Him for burial. Do we treat creation with the utmost respect? Do we take care of our bodies, knowing God created them in love? Do we look at the Earth as our home that deserves to be cleaned and preserved? Or do we treat it as a home we can trash and hope someone else cares for?

Prayer: Jesus, make us instruments of your justice. You became man and entered into your creation, lived among your creation, and died for us — part of your creation. As we walk through the created world, remind us to treat it with respect and care.

FOURTEENTH STATION: JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB
Corporal Works of Mercy — Bury the Dead

Reflection: We know that this story has a happy ending. We know that Jesus rises on Easter Sunday. But imagine how His friends must have felt; they did not know what we know. Not only have they lost Jesus, but now the amazing things He preached seem too good to be true. We feel these same things when loved ones pass away. We lose that person but are afraid of losing memories of them and fear we may never encounter them again. We must trust in the God who rose from the dead, trust that there is communion with Him and all of the saints in heaven.

Prayer: Christ, make us instruments of your justice. We cannot imagine how dark the world would be without your presence. We look forward to the joy of heaven, basking in the glory of your presence, and pray that all who have gone before us are already there with you.