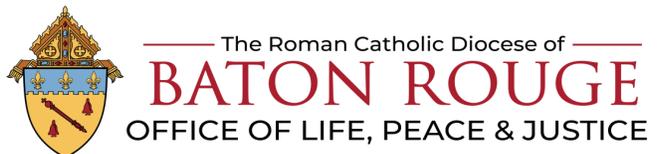
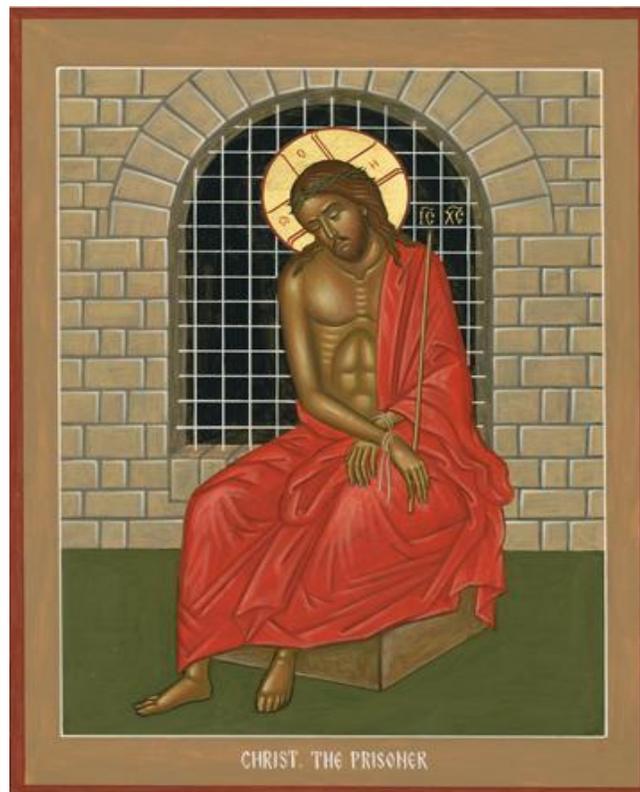


# Novena for Life and Mercy

Fall 2023



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**Background Information on Clemency Applications to Commute Death Sentences to Life in Prison for People on Louisiana’s Death Row**

On March 22, 2023, at Loyola University New Orleans, Governor John Bell Edwards came out strongly against the death penalty, basing his opposition on his pro-life values and Catholic faith.

This past summer 55 people currently on Death Row in Louisiana filed clemency applications with the Louisiana Pardon Board, asking that Pardon Board members recommend to Governor Edwards that he commute their death sentences to life imprisonment. (In Louisiana, the governor can only commute a sentence from death to life in prison after receiving a positive recommendation from the Pardon Board.) As of October 5, none of the clemency petitions have been scheduled to be heard in front of the Pardon Board. The Louisiana District Attorneys Association and Attorney General strongly oppose this clemency process.<sup>1</sup> Governor John Bel Edwards leaves office January 8, 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> From [Departing governor races to move prisoners off death row in Louisiana | PBS NewsHour](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/2023/03/22/governor-john-bell-edwards-death-penalty-louisiana/) and [https://www.nola.com/news/courts/louisiana-judge-rejects-lawsuit-against-death-row-clemency/article\\_4db1066e-6221-11ee-889b-e3525d6fa70a.html#tncms-source=featured-2](https://www.nola.com/news/courts/louisiana-judge-rejects-lawsuit-against-death-row-clemency/article_4db1066e-6221-11ee-889b-e3525d6fa70a.html#tncms-source=featured-2)

## Introductory Readings and Prayer for Every Day of the Novena

### Leader:

At this critical time in our state's history, we gather together to pray for life and mercy for the 55 Death Row petitioners and for peace and solace for victims' family members. Let us be guided by the Louisiana bishops' call for God's mercy, compassion and justice in their 2002 Pastoral Statement: *Let Justice and Mercy Meet: Crime, Punishment and the Common Good in Light of Sacred Scripture and Catholic Teaching*:

### Reader 1:

*Death does not restore, heal, or make whole what was lost. Death only causes more death. When the state imposes death as a sentence, a further insensitivity to the loss of life is the result. The death penalty makes it easy to give up on others and neglect the underlying causes, which yield violence and death. As a people of the Gospel of Life, we are called to build a civilization of life and love.*

### Reader 2:

The crucifix reminds us that Jesus knew the agony of state-sanctioned execution—the fear, the humiliation, the despair, the pain. Yet he refused to be overcome by hatred and vengeance. Instead, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) We will pray this *Novena for Life and Mercy* on nine consecutive Fridays, the day of the week the Church commemorates the execution of Jesus, in the hope that our faith in the sacredness of every human life is strengthened and a Louisiana civilization of life and love flourishes.

### ***PRAYER TO END THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops<sup>2</sup>***

**Leader:** Merciful Father, we ask your blessing on all we do to build a culture of life. Hear our prayers for all those impacted by the death penalty.

Please respond to each petition:

**Lord hear our prayer.**

Reader 1: We pray for all people, that their lives and dignity as children of a loving God may be respected and protected in all stages and circumstances.

All: **Lord hear our prayer.**

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<sup>2</sup> Italicized words added to provide Louisiana context.

Reader 2: We pray for victims of violence and their families, that they may experience our love and support and find comfort in your compassion and in the promise of eternal life.

All: **Lord hear our prayer.**

Reader 1: We pray for those on Death Row, that their lives may be spared, that the innocent may be freed and that the guilty may come to acknowledge their faults and seek reconciliation with you.

All: **Lord hear our prayer.**

Reader 2: We pray for the families of those who are facing execution, that they may be comforted by your love and compassion.

All: **Lord hear our prayer.**

Reader 1: We pray for civic leaders, *especially our Governor, Attorney General, members of Louisiana's Pardon Board, State Legislature, and Louisiana District Attorneys* that they may commit themselves to respecting every human life and ending the use of the death penalty *in Louisiana* and across our land.

All: **Lord hear our prayer.**

**Leader:** Compassionate Father, give us wisdom and hearts filled with your love. Guide us as we work to end the use of the death penalty and to build a society that truly chooses life in all situations.

We ask this Father through your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

**Amen**

**[Next go to Readings for today's Novena Prayer. End the Novena with the Closing Prayer on p. 14]**

## **Readings for Each Day of the Novena**

***[Assign Readers for Each Day]***



## DAY 1

### Excerpts from the Testimony of Brett Malone, May 24, 2023<sup>3</sup>

[Assign different readers for each paragraph or Leader reads entire passage.]

*...It took me over 21 years to find my voice and be able to say that I most certainly have a problem with the state killing someone in my name or my mother's name. Executing Jeremiah will not bring me or my family closure. It will not repair the wounds that we sustained. It will instead bring me and others more pain, more suffering, more agony, more harm.*

*If this state kills Jeremiah, it takes away all hope for reconciliation or redemption, or for any opportunities to repair the harm that we've sustained. Killing him will be an act of vengeance. His execution will not only be punishment for me, but also for his mother and brothers and sisters and family members who love Jeremiah. His mother loves him just as much as my mother loved me...*

*.. it is normal for people who have been through what my family has been through to experience intense emotions—rage, anger, depression, fear, and a desire for revenge.*

*Those emotions do subside over time. For me, it took a lot of work to be able to forgive Jeremiah for my mom's death. Over two decades of soul searching had led me to the position I have now about the death penalty: killing someone is morally wrong, even when it is the state that is doing the killing.*

*What I am asking from each of you is a little mercy. While forgiveness involves overcoming anger and resentment, and the desire for vengeance, mercy involves choosing not to exact revenge, even when we believe we have the right to do so...*

*This session for the sake of moral and legal consistency, I ask that you finish the work you have started. I ask that you extend your respect for human life to those on death row—to be merciful, and to choose life.*

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<sup>3</sup> Testimony presented to the Louisiana House Committee on the Administration of Criminal Justice from Brett Malone, whose mother Mary Malone was murdered by 19 year-old Jeremiah Manning in December 2000.

DAY 2

The Our Father



## Day 3

### Catholic Social Teaching and the Death Penalty

***Saint John Paul II, Homily, Papal Mass, St. Louis, Missouri, January 27, 1999***

A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying ... the chance to reform. I renew the appeal... I made most recently... for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary.

***Pope Benedict, XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, November 19, 2011***

I draw attention to society's leaders to the need to make every effort to eliminate the death penalty.

***Catholic Catechism Revised Number 2267, February 8, 2018***

The Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that 'the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,' and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.

***Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, October 4, 2020***

Let us keep in mind that not even a murderer loses his personal dignity, and God himself pledges to guarantee this. The firm rejection of the death penalty shows to what extent it is possible to recognize the inalienable dignity of every human being and to accept that he or she has a place in this universe. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying the chance to reform. I renew the appeal... for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary.



PEACE PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much  
seek to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.



## Day 5

### Statements from the Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Death Penalty

#### *Violence in Our Society: Death is Not the Answer*, 1994

We must believe in the all-powerful redemptive love of God which can change hearts, convert people, and renew all things... We must be a people who see the value of a human life that others might think to be worthless. We must be a people who give praise to the God of all possibilities whose powerful Spirit of Love can renew the earth.

#### *Let Justice and Mercy Meet: Crime, Punishment and the Common Good in Light of Sacred Scripture and Catholic Teaching*, January 2002

The temptations to fear, despair, and vengeance are always present... If we give in this attitude, we become imprisoned behind walls of isolation that our fear has erected. We, the Catholic Bishops of Louisiana... say, “Be not afraid.”... These words can be our hope because of the One who overcomes our despair at Easter. We can offer these words because the One who is Love drives out all fear (1 Jn 4:18). We can dare to lay aside retribution and seek restoration because the One who restores has shown us the way: “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.” (Rev.21:3-4)

#### *It is Time to Affirm Life Without Exception: The Death Penalty is Not Acceptable*, April, 2017

We remain deeply aware of the pain and grief that victims suffer, especially those who have lost a loved one through the crime of murder or crimes of violence. We pledge to deepen our commitment to persons who have suffered such violence, anguish and pain. Our opposition to the death penalty is not intended in any way to diminish what victims and their families have suffered. On the contrary it is a statement which affirms the lives of those lost and the ultimate value of life in general. The stark reality is that capital punishment fails to bring back life that has been lost. It does not provide healing, reconciliation, or even peace to those impacted. Our merciful Father does provide such things to us when we turn to Him and ask for his love to be poured out onto us.



Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops

Day 6

## **Prayer for Life by Bishop Daniel Flores, MCN, Diocese of Brownsville, Texas**

God of Mercy,

You bestow upon every person a dignity that cannot be extinguished, no matter the harm someone has suffered or caused.

Rooted in this sacred value of all life, we work together to transform the criminal justice system by ending the death penalty. Enliven our commitment to “work with determination for its abolition worldwide.”

Ignite in our imaginations more restorative approaches to harm and violence that embody Your vision of right relationship. For any person who is a victim of, responsible for, or witness to crime, may we be vessels of Your hope, healing, and redemption.

Embolden in us the fire to foster a culture of life. Sustain our pursuit of reconciling justice, that we may model your compassion and mercy with our lives.

In Jesus’ name we pray.

Amen



## Day 7

### Excerpts from *Misericordiae Vultus*: Bull of Indication of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis, April 2015

9. In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. Lk 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.

... Pardoning offenses becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it is to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile lands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully... Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7).



## Day 8

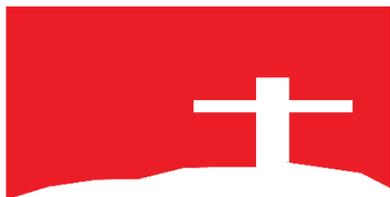
### Prayer for Abolition of the Death Penalty by Catholic Mobilizing Network Staff

Jesus, you were counted among thieves,  
and you were the victim of capital punishment.  
Yet you came to set free those who are imprisoned.

Heal the souls of those who, in their pain, inflict suffering on others.  
Help us to see ourselves in the face of those who have committed crimes.  
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive the sins of those who have trespassed against us.  
Give us the power not to punish but to heal,  
not to seek retribution but to work for restoration and the reign of your peace.

Holy Spirit, of God, you strengthen us in the struggle for justice.  
Help us to work tirelessly for the abolition of state sanctioned death  
and to renew our society in its very heart so that violence will be no more.

Amen.



**CATHOLIC  
MOBILIZING  
NETWORK**

## Day 9

### Hymn, **Amazing Grace** by John Newman, 1779

1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.
3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me,  
His Word my hope secures;  
He will my Shield and Portion be,  
As long as life endures.
5. Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess, within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.
6. The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, who called me here below,  
Will be forever mine.
7. When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.



## **Closing Prayer (Pray every day of the Novena for Life and Mercy):**

### **A Prayer for Justice by Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ**

God of Compassion,  
You let your rain fall on the just and the unjust.  
Expand and deepen our hearts  
so that we may love as You love,  
even those among us  
who have caused the greatest pain by taking life.  
For there is in our land a great cry for vengeance  
as we fill up death row and kill the killers  
in the name of justice, in the name of peace.  
Jesus, our brother,  
you suffered execution at the hands of the state  
but you did not let hatred overcome you  
Help us to reach out to victims of violence  
so that our enduring love may help them heal.  
Holy Spirit of God,  
You strengthen us in the struggle for justice,  
Help us to work tirelessly  
for the abolition of state-sanctioned death  
and to renew our society in its very heart  
so that violence will be no more.  
Amen.

