



# Journey of Suffering & Strength

*Stories of Jesus' journey to the cross, partnered with scriptural reflections from the gospel of John, and linked as devotions with the suffering steps of immigrants.*

**DAY 1: Monday: JOHN 12:1-11** : “Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair.” (vs. 3)

**Reflection:** During the dinner at Bethany hosted by Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus, “whom Jesus had raised from the dead,” Mary performs this gesture of love for which she is criticized by Judas. Jesus comes to Mary’s defense, saying “Leave her alone.” Jesus continually defends those who are vulnerable, misunderstood, or rejected. Today we have many opportunities to speak in defense of vulnerable children, women and men, saying to those in power, “Leave them alone.” Let us speak and act on behalf of DACA recipients and all immigrants who long for humane immigration reform.



**Story:** My name is Maria Sotomayor. I came to this country from Ecuador when I was nine and have been living for 13 years without legal status because immigration laws today prevent me from adjusting my status. In 2012, I benefited from DACA which changed my life in many wonderful ways. In my final year of college I was able to receive work authorization so I went from waiting tables for less than \$3 an hour to doing what I love most, defending immigrant rights. I obtained a driver’s license so I could drive to school. I was also able to contribute more money to my family and to college tuition. Last year I was even able to visit Ecuador with advance parole, and after 13 years give back to my community and see my family. Unfortunately, without a definite solution to immigration I have only two years of work authorization, and what happens then? We need immigration reform that is just and humane and doesn’t leave our families and communities behind.

**Action/Resources:** Speak with a DACA recipient to learn how this executive action has benefitted him or her. Make a call to your Representative in Congress to urge him or her to OPPOSE H.R. 1148, the Michael Davis Jr., in Honor of State and Local Law Enforcement Act (formerly known as the SAFE Act), that would eliminate the Administration’s protection of DREAMers, expand immigration detention, encourage racial profiling, criminalize overstaying a visa and negatively impact refugees and asylum seekers. Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121.

**Prayer:** God of love, watch over our sister and brother immigrants and protect them from all harm. Bless young DACA recipients and strengthen their hope for humane immigration reform that will open for them and their families a path to citizenship. Give legislators in Congress open minds and hearts that will enable them to address immigration issues with compassion and wisdom. AMEN.



*Written by IIC partners: Sister Marie Lucey, Franciscan Action Network; Elizabeth Nye, Columban Center for Advocacy & Outreach; Bryan Hanger, Church of the Brethren; Jenny Siegel, USCCB; Rev. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*

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**DAY 2: Tuesday: JOHN 12:20-36** : “Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”(vs. 24)

**Reflection:** Before the Passover feast, the scribes and Pharisees were already plotting to kill Jesus. They'd seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. Now in-crowds thronged about Jesus—and even Greeks came in this passage “to see Jesus.” This confirmed the entire world was curious to know him!! But at the height of his earthly power, Jesus used the story of a wheat seed that must die to bring new life to teach the type of power he wanted to claim. It was a power to SERVE, and to LOVE that he came for—and in this story Jesus says he is willing to die to demonstrate it.



Picture from [www.scpr.org](http://www.scpr.org). #SoyAmerica

Many immigrant families who wait years to have the chance to live openly understand well the nature of threats Jesus lived under. We also follow Jesus whenever we die to self concerns, and instead live to serve and to help suffering families.

**Story:** In her heart, Francesca \* (name changed) just celebrated two full decades of working to serve God as church administrator in her bustling congregation of hundreds! Living just an hour from the border, she entered the U.S. with her husband in 1993. Last summer, as her denomination held their national convention in her church, Francesca could not have been busier—and it was clear that church leaders far and wide depend upon her leadership! She also has faithfully paid taxes for decades. Still, her lack of ability to share her status openly continues to hold her back—and she recognizes the difference President Obama’s “Executive Action” could make for her family. “To be able to apply for DAPA (Deferred Action for Parental Accountability) would mean my husband and I could advance and obtain the education that can capacitate us to serve God better, to aspire for better jobs,...and help our children financially in their pursuit of education.”

**Action/Resources:** Learn more about who is eligible for DAPA, and how you and your community can help persons begin to gather needed documents to be ready to apply at: <http://nilc.org/dapa&daca.html>, or through [www.adminrelief.org](http://www.adminrelief.org). Remind friends, neighbors, and church members that, while applications are not currently being accepted, still NOW IS THE TIME TO GET READY! View the helpful IIC Webinar about how to best help at: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/pdf.pdf>



**Prayer:** God who strengthened Jesus in his hour of trouble, strengthen also those parents who have awaited relief for decades. Lord who gifted each of your children, empower immigrants

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**DAY 3: Wednesday: JOHN 13:21-32** "After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.'" (vs. 21)



**Reflection:** In Today's reading, we learn of the betrayal that is about to take place by one of Jesus' disciples. Let us reflect on how we, as followers of Christ, betray Jesus in our own lives. We witnessed such a moment last summer when thousands of children and families traveled to the U.S. from the Northern Triangle. Rather than advocate on their behalf, do we stay quiet when our elected officials attempt to roll back protections? People from this region of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador continue to flee from immense violence and hardships in search of refuge. However, many of us turn a blind eye. In doing this, we betray what we are called to do by God, to care for our neighbor and protect the most marginalized among us.

**Story:** Ana,\* 12 and her brother Bryan,\* 15 arrived in El Paso, TX in July of 2014 after traveling for months from their home country, Honduras. Ana, who was pregnant, and Bryan found refuge at a local hospitality center set up to house the thousands of children who traveled unaccompanied. They kept quiet about where they were from and how they got there, mainly from fear of retaliation. It is clear that they both underwent severe trauma at home as well as on their journey. Thanks to the efforts of the community, Ana was able to receive much needed medical care for her pregnancy, and they eventually traveled to live with a family member in the U.S. until their court date. Still, they live in limbo, unsure of what lies ahead. (\*names have been changed)

**Action/Resources:** The IIC has a number of Advocacy Resources regarding Unaccompanied Children on our website authored by our partner organizations. Go to: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/2014/06/16/unaccompanied-children-advocacy-resources/>.

**Prayer:** Loving Creator, Give me the wisdom not to stay silent when I witness injustice toward my migrant brothers and sisters. Bless all children and families fleeing violence and guide our elected officials to implement policies that benefit the most marginalized among us. AMEN.



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**DAY 4: Maundy Thursday: JOHN 13:1-17, 31b-35** : “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (vs. 14)

**Reflection:** Have we obeyed Jesus’ call to wash one another’s feet and love one another? Our immigrant brothers and sisters’ feet have walked many miles looking for safety and are weary from their troubles, and what have we done? Instead of welcoming them we have locked them up. Detention centers have dehumanized and destabilized the lives of so many families. Instead of a holy and welcoming embrace, we have treated them as expendable and shown them no compassion. How might we change this? Can we welcome them as Christ welcomes us all?

Drawing From A Child in Detention



<http://www.mamamia.com.au/news/childrens-drawings-detention-centres/>

**Story:** Alta Gracias and her 3 children fled extreme violence in El Salvador and were locked up in Karnes Immigration Detention Center upon arrival to the US. For over 6 months, they shared 4 bunk beds, 1 shower, and 1 toilet with 2 other families. The asylum process was complicated, burdensome and uncertain, and conditions in Karnes were very poor. Despite the bad conditions, Alta was determined to do whatever she had to do in order to keep her children safe from the threat of violence. In detention, she and her children suffered physically and mentally from these harrowing conditions and were only released in January after a long and difficult process. Since then, they have struggled to survive and overcome the trauma of their experiences. (Story from <https://alasmigratorias.wordpress.com/2014/09/28/prison4families/>)

**Action/Resources:** Read about the Detention Crisis and the other connected issues on the Interfaith Immigration Coalition’s website to learn more about how to take action against ICE, end family detention, and help those applying for asylum. <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/issues/detention/>

**Prayer:** God, forgive us for not loving one another as you have taught us. We have not welcomed those fleeing violence and seeking safety. Instead, we have made life even more difficult for them and have not shown them the compassion you have shown us. We ask for your forgiveness. Help us to reach out and welcome our immigrant neighbors and to passionately and diligently work to change our laws and finally usher in justice.

AMEN.



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**DAY 5: Good Friday: JOHN 18:1-19:42 :** “Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” (18:37)

**Reflection:** Good Friday is often seen as a day to reflect on the cross—it is one day out of the entire year where we focus on the suffering, the violence, and the experience of physical and emotional pain that Jesus endured on the cross. By the cross we know that Jesus fully understands *human* suffering. Through his suffering comes the ability to enter into new life, of a type which Jesus shared about during his time earthly life. In the gospel of John, this life involves bringing “God’s Kingdom of Heaven” to this earth—righting injustices, forgiving our enemies, welcoming immigrants among us, walking with the poor and afflicted, caring for orphans, and loving our neighbors as Christ loved us. What does it look like for immigration policy to be characterized through God’s Kingdom values of love and hospitality? What does it look like for you and me to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to this earth?



**Story:** Last year, around 140,000 children attempting to cross the U.S-Mexico border — around half were unaccompanied and most came from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Children came to the U.S. for various reasons and many have international protection concerns. For example, Juan left Guatemala because he was no longer safe in his own community. Forced to drop out of school because the gangs were recruiting him, he could no longer walk around his neighborhood without the threats calling him to join the gang or be killed. When he was 15 he came to the U.S. to find safety. Also, Martha is 16 and no longer safe in her small town in El Salvador. The gang presence is strong and powerful and when girls reach a certain age in her town they are often forcibly recruited as “gang girlfriends.” Martha also came to the U.S to find protection. Because children like Martha and Juan are not able to find protection from their own governments, they came here. What does it look like to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to them? How can we help the most vulnerable among us — children.

**Action/Resources:** Continue to pray for the soon-to-be 2,400 children and mothers in the South Texas Family Center in Dilley, Texas. And, as a special Holy Week project, consider donating BY APRIL 6th to contribute Spanish language Bibles and story books for the children in Dilley. See information at: <https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Dilley-Spanish-Bibles-and-Books-DriveDISCIPLESFINAL.pdf>. These will be presented before a Prayer Vigil for the families in Dilley, Texas on APRIL 22nd. If you are nearby Texas, contact [ssstanley@dhm.disciples.org](mailto:ssstanley@dhm.disciples.org) to attend the vigil. Or, contact [enye@collumban.org](mailto:enye@collumban.org) to attend a companion vigil for to Stop Family Detention in Washington, DC on the same day.

**Prayer:** God of power, may we be transformed by Christ’s suffering on the cross. Embolden us to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to this earth in all that we do, and to create a welcoming place for our immigrant brothers and sisters. And, may we hold Congress to this standard, and fight for justice for migrants in our country and around the world. AMEN.



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**DAY 6: Holy Saturday to Easter: John 20:1-9:** “On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb.”



Photo by Alonso Parra, Left Lamp Media.

**Reflection:** From entombment to release. From darkness to light. From confusion and hopelessness to joy. From death to life. All these transformations are integral to the Easter story, a story in which we participate through our liturgies of Good Friday's suffering and death, Holy Saturday's emptiness and waiting, and Easter Sunday's Alleluia celebrations. Yet, we cannot fully experience the shifting emotions of the first disciples. Perhaps immigrants who wait in Sanctuary for word of release know better than most of us what it is like to wait in unknowing for days, weeks, even months, and then to walk out of a protected, yet confined, space into welcoming arms.

**Story:** Luis Lopez Acabal spent 100 days in Sanctuary at University Presbyterian Church in Tempe, Arizona. Luis fled Guatemala as a teenager because a local gang threatened his life. His application for asylum was denied, but he made a life here working in school maintenance, eventually marrying Mayra, a legal resident from Mexico and mother of two U.S. citizen children, one with autism. Luis became loving husband, father and family provider. When he was told to leave the country, the Presbyterian congregation provided Sanctuary for him and assisted his family. After 100 days, Luis was able to leave Sanctuary on December 12, 2014 and is eligible for deportation relief through the President's DAPA program. He is grateful to University Presbyterian and is very happy to be home, but remains in legal limbo as he waits to apply for the DAPA program, now delayed by lawsuits filed against the administration by 25 states.

**Action/Resources:** Continue to support the President's executive actions of DACA expansion and Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA), and review the information about DACA and DAPA at: <http://nilc.org/dapa&daca.html>. Respond to IIC alerts when asked to contact your legislators. Pray for those in Sanctuary, and offer assistance when possible.

**Prayer:** Alleluia! Alleluia! Our days of atonement have passed, the great sacrifice has been given. Weeping has turned into rejoicing. Hope bursts forth like flowers from the frozen ground. The potential of abundant life blossoms like visions of peace. Mercy and justice seem possible prayers. Renewed through Resurrection You grace our going forth. We live again in joy and sing in solidarity. Alleluia! AMEN. (Adapted from a prayer by Jane Deren.)



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