



## **As Holy Week nears, Bishop Estévez Urges Mercy over Execution**

### **Introduction from Bishop Erik T. Pohlmeier**

*As we enter the final weeks of Lent, I am grateful to Bishop Felipe Estévez for once again offering a strong and faithful voice on the dignity of human life. His continued advocacy against the death penalty reminds us of our Christian call to mercy, reconciliation and hope, even in the face of violence and loss. We also lift up in prayer the families who have suffered the pain of losing a loved one to violent crime. May this reflection guide our hearts in prayer and compassion.*

### **A Reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Lent**

By Bishop Emeritus Felipe J. Estévez

April 6, 2025

May Edward James, who was executed March 20, rest in peace. We also pray for consolation for the family of Michael Tanzi, whom the state of Florida will execute this Tuesday, April 8. His spiritual director, Ernie Bono, has asked me to bring him holy Communion and the last rites—the sacraments of the sick and dying—tomorrow (Monday, April 6).

We have learned with consternation that the state intends to execute Jeffrey G. Hutchinson on May 1. We pray for wisdom and spiritual support for Jeffrey. The monthlong wait to be killed is, simply put, a form of cruel torture in a society that considers itself civilized.

As St. John Paul II so often affirmed, the death penalty today is unnecessary. Pope Francis has further declared that it is inadmissible. For those who have committed terrible violent crimes, life in prison is enough punishment. Only God should determine the day we are born and the day we die.

Incarcerated people never lose their inherent, transcendental and infinite human dignity. As Pope Francis reminds us, this is the principal reason the death penalty must be abolished—not only in Florida but in every state in our country.

True justice does not promote the ancient axiom “an eye for an eye” (Exodus 21:23–27; Leviticus 24:19–21). That has been superseded by the new covenant proclaimed by Christ:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Every Christian who prays the Our Father echoes that same mercy when we say, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

In the 21st century, our criminal justice system must move away from punishment inspired by vengeance and toward a model of humane rehabilitation, restorative justice and genuine reconciliation. Yes, to law and order. Yes, to a safe society. Yes, to justice for victims. But no to the extreme and final act of killing human beings which diminish all of us citizens.

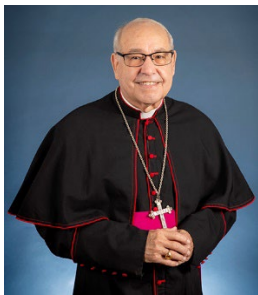
As Holy Week approaches, all of us are invited to kiss the cross on Good Friday. Why? Because our Savior, a prisoner, was killed by the state despite being entirely innocent. The incredible paradox of God’s mercy is that Jesus, the true Lamb, healed all of humanity from sin and death. And the prisoner next to him—Dismas—was the first to be saved.

When I visited the house of Simon Peter, I saw an inscription on the wall: *O crux, spes nostra*—O cross, our hope.

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, as the death penalty continues to be carried out in Florida at an accelerating pace, we are called to pray without ceasing for its permanent abolition. We do so in hope, relying on the one who sits gloriously on the throne of the universe and says: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

I dream and pray that one day soon the state of Florida will end the violent practice of the death penalty once and for all—forever—because it is simply antiquated. Florida must embrace what is truly new.

Hope never fails.



*Bishop Emeritus Felipe J. Estévez, the tenth Bishop of St. Augustine, continues to minister to death row inmates in Florida.*