Opinion
Editorial



Jennifer Vasquez Sura, the wife of Kilmar Abrego Garcia of Maryland, who was mistakenly deported to El Salvador, right, stands with supporters during a news conference April 4 at CASA's Multicultural Center in Hyattsville, Maryland. (AP photo/Jose Luis Magana)

by NCR Editorial Staff

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In the shadow of the cross before us, where our faith calls us to ponder the vulnerable Jesus and the Christ of the marginalized, our government has erected a modern Golgotha for Kilmar Abrego Garcia.

A husband and father of three children — who have disabilities, according to the Associated Press — Abrego Garcia now languishes in El Salvador's notorious Terrorism Confinement Center, or CECOT, a hellscape of restrictive despair. His deportation, engineered through unproven police work and political malice, is not merely an acknowledged administrative error. It represents a moral catastrophe that exposes the decay of a system willing to sacrifice human dignity for the cheap theatrics of law and order.

Remember this: Abrego Garcia has not been criminally charged in the United States or El Salvador, according to NBC News, who cited court filings. No, the 29-year-old is not a saint. Not even close. But it is worth repeating: Abrego Garcia has no known criminal record in the U.S. or anywhere else. For Catholics, this moment demands more than prayer — it demands prophetic outrage.

This Holy Week, multiple news organizations reported on Abrego Garcia's case and related court documents. Abrego Garcia's deportation seems to rely on the word of a single, now-fired police officer, Ivan Mendez, who filed a gang field interview sheet in 2019. Mendez alleged that Abrego Garcia had ties to the gang MS-13, after detaining Abrego Garcia for loitering outside a Home Depot in Maryland. (Never mind that the location is where migrants often look for an honest day's work.)

The evidence? A Chicago Bulls hat, a hoodie and an unnamed informant's claim that he was a member of the gang's clique in New York, where Abrego Garcia has never lived. Days later, Mendez was suspended for accusations of leaking confidential police information to a sex worker; he subsequently pleaded guilty to misconduct.

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No charges were ever filed against Abrego Garcia. No evidence beyond Mendez's report has been presented. Yet this fabricated veneer of probable cause sufficed to tear a father from his three children and deliver him to a prison that human rights groups have accused of multiple violations.

The Trump administration in court papers has admitted the deportation was an "administrative error." Trump and his enabling crooks have defied a Supreme Court order — an order AP reported had no noted dissents — to facilitate Abrego Garcia's return. Instead, Trump's Catholic press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, has doubled down on unsubstantiated claims of gang membership, bearing false witness while willfully disregarding the findings of Immigration Judge David M. Jones.

The administrative judge in 2019 granted Abrego Garcia protection from deportation after deeming his fear of Salvadoran gang violence to be credible and well-founded. In a grotesque Trump-orchestrated irony, Abrego Garcia now is in the same prison with members of Barrio 18 — the gang he fled as a teenager because of extortion and death threats.

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In the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling on presidential immunity, Trump's lawyers brought political theater into the federal district courts, twisting the decision into the pretzel-like tyrannical claim that presidents are above the law. With breathless hypotheticals and unconstitutional defiance, they seek not justice but delay, confusion and denial.

This moment calls for more than concern for Catholics — it demands prophetic clarity. A nation that excuses the abuse of power cannot claim to defend the dignity of the vulnerable or follow the Gospel call to justice.

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What do we know about the brutal CECOT prison? It was designed to erase humanity and violates every principle of Catholic teaching. According to AP, cells are built for 65 to 70 inmates each, but there aren't enough bunks. Inmates are denied visitors and they can't go outside. Human Rights Watch says that within El Savador's lockups and prisons, guards force detainees to kneel naked for hours, take beatings and endure mechanical suffocation — torture that recalls of the passion of Christ. More than 300 deaths have been reported in Salvadoran prisons since 2022, according to Salvadoran human rights groups. Yet the cruelty-driven U.S. administration continues deporting individuals to this charnel house, outsourcing cruelty while evading accountability.

This betrayal of justice is also a betrayal of faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church insists that civil authority derives its legitimacy from defending human dignity and the common good. Pope Francis, who on Holy Thursday met with about 70 inmates at a Rome prison, repeatedly condemns the "globalization of indifference" toward migrants. Francis further reminds us that welcoming the stranger is not optional, it is a divine mandate (Matthew 25:35) apparently foreign to Trump administration officials who say they are practicing Catholics. By weaponizing flimsy accusations to justify family separation and outsourcing torture, the administration subverts the legal regime and perverts the moral order.

The cross demands more than passive reflection. Abrego Garcia's wife, Jennifer Vasquez Sura, a U.S. citizen, now navigates a legal labyrinth alone while caring for three children with disabilities.

> This Good Friday, let our mourning inspire us to action. Demand that the administration comply with the Supreme Court. Support organizations, such as the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, that fight for due process. Urge silent bishops to speak up.
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As we kneel before the cross today, let us remember that Golgotha was not fate but choice. Hapless political leaders chose fear over truth, and bystanders chose complacency over courage. Our choices now will define whether Abrego Garcia's passion becomes resurrection or perpetual crucifixion.

This Good Friday, let our mourning inspire us to action. Demand that the administration comply with the Supreme Court. Support organizations such as the Catholic Legal Immigration Network that fight for due process. Urge silent bishops to speak up and condemn this moral catastrophe from every pulpit. St. Óscar Romero warned, "A church that does not provoke crisis, a gospel that does not disturb, a word of God that does not rankle, a word of God that does not touch the concrete sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed — what kind of gospel is that?" Jesus said, "What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:45).

The cross is heavy, but we do not bear it alone. In Abrego Garcia's cell, in Jennifer's vigil, in the cries of his children, Christ continues to suffer. And in our response,

Easter's hope awaits.