

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

The First Station: Jesus is condemned to die.

Jesus stands in the most human of places. He has already experienced profound solidarity with so many on this earth, by being beaten and tortured. Now he is wrongfully condemned to punishment by death. His commitment to entering our lives completely begins its final steps. He has said "yes" to God and placed his life in God's hands. We follow him in this final surrender, and contemplate with reverence each place along the way, as he is broken and given for us.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

As I view the scene, I become moved by both outrage and gratitude. I look at Jesus. His face. The crown of thorns. The blood. His clothes stuck to the wounds on his back. Pilate washes his hands of the whole affair. Jesus' hands are tied behind his back.

This is for me. That I might be free. That I might have eternal life. As the journey begins I ask to be with Jesus. To follow his journey. I express my love and thanks.

The Second Station: Jesus Carries His Cross.

Jesus is made to carry the cross on which he will die. It represents the weight of all our crosses. What he must have felt as he first took it upon his shoulders! With each step he enters more deeply into our human experience. He walks in the path of human misery and suffering, and experiences its crushing weight.

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I contemplate the wood of that cross. I imagine how heavy it is. I reflect upon all it means that Jesus is carrying it. I look into his eyes. It's all there.

This is for me. So I place myself with him in this journey. In its anguish. In his freedom and surrender. In the love that must fill his heart.

With sorrow and gratitude, I continue the journey. Moved by the power of his love, I am drawn to him and express my love in the words that come to me.

The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time.

The weight is unbearable. Jesus falls under it. How could he enter our lives completely without surrendering to the crushing weight of the life of so many on this earth! He lays on the ground and knows the experience of weakness beneath unfair burdens. He feels the powerlessness of wondering if he will ever be able to continue. He is pulled up and made to continue.

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I stare at the weakness in his eyes. I can look at his whole body and see the exhaustion. As I behold him there on the ground, being roughly pulled up, I know forever how profoundly he understands my fatigue and my defeats.

This is for me. In grief and gratitude I want to let him remain there. As I watch him stand again and gain an inner strength, I accept his love and express my thanks.

*I ask to be with Jesus. To follow his journey.
I express my love and thanks.*

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother.

Jesus' path takes him to a powerful source of his strength to continue. All his life, his mother had taught him the meaning of the words, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord." Now they look into each other's eyes. How pierced-through her heart must be! How pained he must be to see her tears! Now, her grace-filled smile blesses his mission and stirs his heart to its depth. Love and trust in God bind them together.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

As I watch them in this place along the way, I contemplate the mystery of love's power to give strength. She knows the sorrow in every mother's heart, who has lost a child to tragedy or violence. I look at the two of them very carefully, and long for such love and such peace.

This is for me. Such incredible freedom. The availability of a servant. I find the words to express what is in my heart.

The Fifth Station: Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross.

Jesus even experiences our struggle to receive help. He is made to experience the poverty of not being able to carry his burden alone. He enters into the experience of all who must depend upon others to survive. He is deprived of the satisfaction of carrying this burden on his own.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I look into his face and contemplate his struggle. His weariness and fragility. His impotence. I see how he looks at Simon, with utmost humility and gratitude.

This is for me. So I feel anguish and gratitude. I express my thanks that he can continue this journey. That he has help. That he knows my inability to carry my burden alone.

I say what is in my heart, with deep feeling.

The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus.

Jesus' journey is at times brutal. He has entered into the terrible experiences of rejection and injustice. He has been whipped and beaten. His face shows the signs of his solidarity with all who have ever suffered injustice and vile, abusive treatment. He encounters a compassionate, loving disciple who wipes the vulgar spit and mocking blood from his face. On her veil, she discovers the image of his face - his gift to her. And, for us to contemplate forever.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

What does the face of Jesus hold for me? What do I see, as I look deeply into his face? Can I try to comfort the agony and pain? Can I embrace him, with his face so covered with his passion?

The veil I behold is a true icon of his gift of himself. This is for me. In wonder and awe, I behold his face now wiped clean, and see the depth of his suffering in solidarity with all flesh.

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time.

Even with help, Jesus stumbles and falls to the ground. In deep exhaustion he stares at the earth beneath him. "Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return." He has seen death before. Now he can feel the profound weakness of disability and disease and aging itself, there on his knees, under the weight of his cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I contemplate Jesus brought very low. As I behold him there on the ground, with all the agony taking its toll on him, I let my heart go out to him. I store up this image in my heart, knowing that I will never feel alone in my suffering or in any diminishment, with this image of Jesus on the ground before me. This is for me, so I express the feelings in my heart.

The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem.

The women of Jerusalem, and their children, come out to comfort and thank him. They had seen his compassion and welcomed his words of healing and freedom. He had broken all kinds of social and religious conventions to connect with them. Now they are here to support him. He feels their grief. He suffers, knowing he can't remain to help them more in this life. He knows the mystery of facing the separation of death.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I look at their faces. So full of love and gratitude, loss and fear. I contemplate what words might have passed between them.
I remember all his tender, compassionate, merciful love for me. I place myself with these women and children to support him.

This is for me. So, I let this scene stir up deep gratitude.

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time.

This last fall is devastating. Jesus can barely proceed to the end. Summoning all this remaining strength, supported by his inner trust in God, Jesus collapses under the weight of the cross. His executioners look at him as a broken man, pathetic yet paying a price he deserves. They help him up so he can make it up the hill of crucifixion.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I pause to contemplate him there on the ground. The brokenness that makes me whole. The surrender that gives me life. I pause to experience and receive how completely he loves me. He is indeed completely poured out for me.

As I treasure this gifted experience, I express what is in my heart.

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped.

Part of the indignity is to be crucified naked. Jesus is completely stripped of any pride. The wounds on his back are torn open again. He experiences the ultimate vulnerability of the defenseless. No shield or security protects him. As they stare at him, his eyes turn to heaven.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I pause to watch the stripping. I contemplate all that is taken from him. And, how he faces his death with such nakedness. I reflect upon how much of himself he has revealed to me. Holding nothing back.

As I look at him in his humility, I know that this is for me, and I share my feelings of gratitude.

The Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross.

Huge nails are hammered through his hands and feet to fix him on the cross. He is bleeding much more seriously now. As the cross is lifted up, the weight of his life hangs on those nails. Every time he struggles to pull himself up to breathe, his ability to cling to life slips away.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I make myself watch the nails being driven through his flesh. And I watch his face. I contemplate the completeness of his entry into our lives. Can there be any pain or agony he would not understand?

This is for me. Nailed to a cross to forever proclaim liberty to captives. What sorrow and gratitude fill my heart!

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies On The Cross.

Between two criminals, a mocking title above his head, with only Mary and John and Mary Magdalene to support him, Jesus surrenders his last breath: "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.



I stand there, at the foot of the cross, side by side with all of humanity, and behold our salvation. I carefully watch and listen to all that is said. And then, I experience the one who gives life pass from life to death, for me. I console Mary and John and Mary. And let them console me.

This is the hour to express the deepest feelings within me.

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken Down From The Cross.

What tender mourning! Jesus' lifeless body lays in his mother's arms. He has truly died. A profound sacrifice, complete.

This is for me.

*Nailed to a cross to forever
proclaim liberty to captives.*

*What sorrow and gratitude
fill my heart!*

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I behold this scene at the foot of the cross. I contemplate touching, caressing his body. I remember all his hands have touched, all who have been blessed by his warm embrace. I pause to let it soak in. He knows the mystery of death. He has fallen into God's hands.

For me. That I might love as I have been loved. I pour out my heart to the God of all mercies.

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid In The Tomb.

They take the body of Jesus to its resting place. The huge stone over the tomb is the final sign of the permanence of death. In this final act of surrender, who would have imagined this tomb would soon be empty or that Jesus would show himself alive to his disciples, or that they would recognize him in the breaking of bread? Oh, that our hearts might burn within us, as we realize how he had to suffer and die so as to enter into his glory, for us.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I pause to contemplate this act of closure on his life. In solidarity with all humanity, his body is taken to its grave.

I stand for a moment outside this tomb. This final journey of his life has shown me the meaning of his gift of himself for me. This tomb represents every tomb I stand before with fear, in defeat, struggling to believe it could ever be empty.

In the fullness of faith in the Risen One, given by his own Holy Spirit, I express my gratitude for this way of the cross. I ask Jesus, whose hands, feet and side still bear the signs of this journey, to grant me the graces I need to take up my cross to be a servant of his own mission.