

The Stations of the Cross

A Gospel Meditation

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: In the name of the Father + and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Lord Jesus, you are flesh of our flesh and love poured out. Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Lord Jesus, you are innocent and just. Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: Lord Jesus, you are the human face of God. Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Let us pray.

(pause for silent prayer)

Leader & All: Ever-faithful God, we come before you as we always do: with our hopes and joys and strengths, and with our failings, our discouragements, our needs. May our contemplation of the passion of your Son Jesus soften and penetrate our hearts. May it fill us with the sweet consolation and the burning fire of your Spirit. May it send us forth renewed in faith and in hope, and more deeply rooted in your inexhaustible love for us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

FIRST STATION

Jesus is condemned to death

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: On the occasion of the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the crowd one prisoner whom they wished. So when they had assembled, Pilate said to them, "Which one do you want me to release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus called Messiah?" The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas but to destroy Jesus. Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus called Messiah?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" When Pilate saw

that a riot was breaking out, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. Look to it yourselves." Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified. (Mt 27:15, 17, 20, 22, 24, 26)

All: How many times have we let some injustice happen to others because we didn't want to get involved? How many times have we looked away when someone was being hurt or needed help? But you, Jesus, refused to abandon the way of love. You chose obedience even unto death. Can you see how that choice frightens us? How daunted we are by it? Give us the courage to listen when you say, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." (Lk 6:27-28)

*At the cross her station keeping
Mary stood in sorrow, weeping,
When her Son was crucified.*

SECOND STATION

Jesus is given his cross to carry

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: The soldiers led Jesus away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort. They clothed him in purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him. They began to salute him with "Hail, King of the Jews!" and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him in homage. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to crucify him. (Mk 15:16-20)

All: Lord, each of us has something sad and heavy to carry. Each of us has something in our lives that we need courage to face. Yet how often we add to each other's burdens the weight of our fear, our lack of understanding, our criticism. The burden becomes crushing as long as we imagine we must bear it alone. But you assure us, "Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid." (Lk 12:7)

*While she waited in her anguish,
Seeing Christ in torment languish,
Bitter sorrow pierced her heart.*

THIRD STATION

Jesus falls the first time

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: Simon Peter said to Jesus, “Master, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, though you will follow later.” Peter said to him, “Master, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Amen, amen, I say to you, the cock will not crow before you deny me three times.” (Jn 13:36-38)

All: Whenever we see someone staggering and falling down from weakness, whether in body or in spirit, let us remember you, Lord, in your weakness, and give whatever help we can. We can never know from the outside how heavy someone else’s burden is for him or her, or how difficult another’s struggle. But we do know that you say to us, “Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned.” (Lk 6:37)

*With what pain and desolation,
With what noble resignation,
Mary watched her dying Son.*

FOURTH STATION

Jesus meets his mother

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: Jesus journeyed to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd accompanied him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, “Do not weep.” He stepped forward and touched the coffin; at this the bearers halted, and he said “Young man, I tell you, arise!” The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. (Lk 7:11-15)

All: Your heart went out, Lord, to the grieving widowed mother you met at Nain. But now you can do nothing to relieve your own mother’s pain. So often we see people we love being hurt or hurting themselves, and we are powerless to prevent what is happening. So often we hear of the neglect, the abuse, the suffering of the vulnerable in the world around us, and we don’t know how to stop it. In our times of powerless pain, comfort us with your words, “You will grieve, but your grief will become joy.” (Jn 16:20)

*Ever patient in her yearning,
Though her tear-filled eyes were burning,
Mary gazed upon her Son.*

FIFTH STATION

Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: As they led Jesus away, they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. (Lk 23:26)

All: It's not always easy or fun to help those in need. We get dirty and sweaty and tired. Those we are helping may be very different from us, and we may find it scary to enter their world. And they may or may not be grateful when we offer them as charity what is really theirs in justice. But we remember, Lord, your words at your last supper with your disciples: "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you." (Jn 15:12)

*Who, that sorrow contemplating,
On that passion meditating,
Would not share the Virgin's grief?*

SIXTH STATION

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?" And the king will say in reply, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least sisters or brothers of mine, you did for me." (Mt 25:37-40)

All: Lord, the angry crowd saw a criminal, but this woman saw someone in pain, and she acted toward him with kindness and respect. When we see someone no one else likes or notices, do we look deeper and recognize the sister or brother of the king? Can we look past poverty or wealth, race or creed or ethnicity, illness or health, to the God-given dignity of the person? Can we act in kindness and respect, even if others don't? "God said, 'Let us make the human being in our own image, after our likeness.'" (Gen 1:26) Every human face shows us something of who God is.

*Christ she saw, for our salvation,
Scourged with cruel acclamation,
Bruised and beaten by the rod.*

SEVENTH STATION

Jesus falls a second time

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the high priest's maids came along. Seeing Peter warming himself, she looked intently at him and said, "You too were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about." So he went out into the outer court. Then the cock crowed. The maid saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." Once again he denied it. A little later the bystanders said to Peter once more, "Surely you are one of them; for you too are a Galilean." He began to curse and to swear, "I do not know this man about whom you are talking." And immediately a cock crowed a second time. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." He broke down and wept. (Mk 14:66-72)

All: Lord, we fall again and again, often in the very same ways. It's hard to keep getting up and trying again. And it's hard to live with physical weakness and disabilities, too. Either way, we often feel discouraged and ashamed. To continue on requires faith—in ourselves, and in the God who loves us. We need to hear you say to each one of us, as you did to a woman you healed, "Courage! Your faith has saved you." (Mt 9:22)

*Christ she saw with life-blood failing,
All her anguish unavailing,
Saw him breathe his very last.*

EIGHTH STATION

Jesus meets the women weeping for him

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' At that time people will say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?" (Lk 23:27-31)

All: What a strange paradox you direct these women's attention to, Lord: that often the only way to healing and freedom lies through some kind of dying. What needs to die in our lives in order for us to be more freely and fully the persons your Father intends us to be? What needs to die in our Church, if it is to shine forth more clearly as your Body present in and for the world? What needs to die in our culture, in our world, in order for God's reign of justice and peace to be established? Lord, teach us all over again to pray, "Your kingdom come; your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Mt 6:10)

*Mary, fount of love's devotion,
Let me share with true emotion
All the sorrow you endured.*

NINTH STATION

Jesus falls a third time

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mk 10:42-45)

All: A third fall! How did you ever find the strength to get back up? Your body's strength drained by pain and blood loss, your spirit crushed by betrayal, rejection, mockery—what sort of lordship is this? We like our leaders to be strong and capable, impressive and inspiring. But this is downright scary. No human strength or glory here—just love that won't quit, and utter trust in God. Seeing you lying there bloody in the dust, Lord, we tremble as we hear you ask, "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" (Mt 20:22)

*Virgin, ever interceding,
Hear me in my fervent pleading:
Fire me with your love of Christ.*

TENTH STATION

Jesus is stripped of his clothing

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: They brought Jesus to the place of Golgotha (which is translated Place of the Skull). They gave him wine drugged with myrrh, but he did not take it. They divided his garments by casting lots for them to see what each should take. (Mk 15:22-23, 24)

All: You stand before the soldiers and the crowd stripped of respect, stripped of honor, stripped of strength, stripped even of the clothes on your body. But no one can strip away the love and fidelity that are the core of who you are. You refuse the drugged wine to make it clear that you are choosing to remain faithful to your mission to the very end. Your complete trust in God stands forth more sharply than ever. Seeing this, we remember that you said, “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Lk 9:62). And we are filled with a dreadful awe.

*Mother, may this prayer be granted:
That Christ’s love may be implanted
In the depths of my poor soul.*

ELEVENTH STATION

Jesus is nailed to the cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” With him they crucified two revolutionaries, one on his right and one on his left. Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads. Likewise the chief priests, with the scribes, mocked him among themselves. Those who were crucified with him also kept abusing him. (Mk 15:25-29, 31, 32)

All: Immobilized as you are by the nails and the pain, no outward action is possible for you now, Lord. Yet still you teach us, in your silent agony! For now we see your outstretched, crucified arms becoming an embrace, enfolding the entire world in your heart’s boundless love. Those who abuse and revile you, those few who loyally stand by you, the many who are utterly indifferent to this commonplace event—just another criminal execution—all are enfolded in God’s love through your heart. Not even this can make you hate. In gratitude and trembling, we pray, “Do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Mt 6:13)

*At the cross, your sorrow sharing,
All your grief and torment bearing,
Let me stand and mourn with you.*

TWELFTH STATION

Jesus dies on the cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Some of the bystanders who heard it said, "This one is calling for Elijah." Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge; he soaked it in wine, and putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink. But the rest said, "Wait—let us see if Elijah comes to save him." But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit. (Mt 27:45-50)

All: It is finished. "This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, poured out for you." (Lk 22:19,20)

*Savior, when my life shall leave me,
Through your mother's prayers receive me
With the fruits of victory.*

THIRTEENTH STATION

Jesus is taken down from the cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: When it was already evening, since it was the day of preparation, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the council, who was himself awaiting the kingdom of God, came and courageously went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was amazed that he was already dead. He summoned the centurion and asked him if Jesus had already died. And when he learned of it from the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. (Mk 15:42-45)

All: Lord, as we see Joseph come forward to claim your body, we resonate with the stunned grief of your friends. We too have suffered losses, some greater than we thought we could bear, and we too have drawn strength from ritual and from friends. Teach us to be better friends, not just to our own friends, but to all of your friends too. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (Jn 15:13)

*Virgin, in your love befriend me,
At the Judgment Day defend me.
Help me by your constant prayer.*

FOURTEENTH STATION

Jesus is laid in the tomb

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: Taking the body of Jesus, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb. (Mt 27:59-61)

All: Once, Lord, you took flesh in Mary's womb; now that flesh is laid in a tomb. Your incarnation is complete: you have shared every stretch of the human journey with us. There is no part of the path we must follow that you have not traveled. But there is more: the two Marys, facing the tomb, hint at the new path you open up for us: "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit." (Jn 12:24)

*Let me to your love be taken,
Let my soul in death awaken
To the joys of Paradise.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Let us pray.*

(pause for silent prayer)

Leader & All: *Most holy, most loving God, our words stumble and falter. How can we possibly express all that fills our hearts when we contemplate your gift of Jesus? Send us forth, we pray, filled with renewed strength and tenderness to be his Body for the sake of the world. Amen.*

Should you wish to expand your prayerful reflection, the Gospel narratives of the passion of Jesus are found in Matthew, chapters 26 and 27; Mark, chapters 14 and 15; Luke, chapters 22 and 23; and John, chapters 12 through 19. The psalm Jesus quotes as he hangs on the cross is Psalm 22.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

I originally composed *The Stations of the Cross: A Gospel Meditation* for St. Helen Parish, Riverside OH. In doing so, I relied heavily on *Native Stations of the Cross*, published by the Archdiocese of Anchorage (<http://www.archdioceseofanchorage.org/living/worship/Stations.htm>) for inspiration and some wording in a number of the reflections. To a lesser extent, I also drew inspiration from *Stations of the Cross* by Rev. Glyn Lorraine Ruppe-Melnyk and published by St. Francis in the Fields Episcopal Church, Malvern, PA (http://www.episcopalchurch.org/41685_52041_ENG_HTM.htm), and from *The Way of the Cross* published by Barton-Cotton, Inc., Baltimore, MD. Scripture quotations are drawn from *The New American Bible* (with revised New Testament) published by Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York (very slightly edited). The text of the *Stabat Mater* is Anthony G. Petti's translation from *RitualSong*, GIA Publications Inc., Chicago, where it appears as Hymn #551. The overall structure of this *Gospel Meditation*, the choice of scripture passages, the prayers, and most of the wording are my own.