

Stations of the Cross

We follow Jesus along the way of the Cross, learning from Him who is meek and humble of heart. After three years of teaching, His final hours were one incarnate lesson – a demonstration, rather than a lecture. Now He makes His way among us every day (cf. Matthew 25:31-46); may we experience the grace of an encounter with Him.

I: 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.

Jesus is brought into the Praetorium. Justice is put on trial; Truth is called a liar; Love is declared hateful. All of this we do to avoid being called out of the shadow of sin. Yet somehow, in the midst of our very refusal to receive Him, He discovers a pathway into our hearts, and He determines to follow that path, knowing that it will cost Him everything.

There is a deeply rooted tendency in human beings to look at others and their failings. In doing this, we miss what is most essential: to accept and assent to God's will in our lives, a will that is largely formed by the opposition of others to God's will. We need only look at Jesus. It was not the Father's will that his Son be killed, nor did he inspire anyone to kill him. He did will, however, that Jesus would freely be the sacrifice for the sins of mankind. He willed that Jesus would let himself be put to death. Jesus did not say, as we often hear today: "But this is not God's will, this cannot be God's will." He said: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this chalice from me; yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mk 14:36). For every one of us there is a chalice that the Father offers us to drink. We have difficulty recognizing it as coming from him, since a great deal of its contents comes from other people. Nevertheless, it is the Father who asks us to drink the bitter cup. It was so for Jesus, and it is the same for us.

Father Wilfrid Stinissen, *Into Your Hands, Father: Abandoning Ourselves to the God Who Loves Us*

All: Our Father...



II: Jesus receives His Cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;
All: Because by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

The beam placed across His shoulders presses down on Him with unnatural weight. He receives the burden without even a moment of self-pity; love is self-forgetful. His eyes show resolve. He is grateful for the chance to express fully what is in His heart.

The more you belong to Christ, the more grace you will obtain to be effective in this world and to be happy in eternity.

But you must make up your mind to follow the way of self-surrender: the Cross on your shoulders, with a smile on your lips, and a light in your soul.
Saint Josemaría Escrivá, *Via Crucis*

All: Our Father...

III: Jesus falls under the weight of the Cross the first time

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;
All: Because by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Jesus stumbles on the uneven ground: the uneven ground of the human heart. Some wave palms before Him, and others lash Him with whips. The human heart can be weak and uncertain, but Jesus loves all people with the heart of His Father, and finds the courage to rise again. Unsteady ground will not put an end to His pilgrimage.

What then is man, if you do not visit him? Remember, Lord, that you have made me as one who is weak, that you formed me from dust. How can I stand, if you do not constantly look upon me, to strengthen this clay, so that my strength may proceed from your face?
Saint Ambrose of Milan, *De Interpellatione David*

All: Our Father...



IV: 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.

From the midst of a sea of angry, fearful faces, the Mother appears, her eyes tender, vulnerable, and heartbroken. "I'm here," she says; nothing more is needed. What else could we ask of a mother's heart? Jesus meets one heart in solidarity with His own, and it is enough. He studies her face: *This face I will carry with Me all the way to Golgotha. Her loving face is the certain sign of My victory, the sure evidence that truly I will make all things new, that I will take stony hearts and make them hearts of flesh. In her face, I see this promise: the redemption of humanity.*

Love means being dependent on something that perhaps can be taken away from me, and it therefore introduces a huge risk of suffering into my life. Hence the express or tacit refusal: Before having constantly to bear this risk, before seeing my self-determination limited, before coming to depend on something I can't control so that I can suddenly plunge into nothingness, I would rather not have love. Whereas the decision that comes from Christ is another: Yes to love, for it alone, precisely with the risk of suffering and the risk of losing oneself, brings man to himself and makes him what he should be.... I think that that is really the true drama of history.
Pope Benedict XVI, *Salt of the Earth*

All: Our Father...

V: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry the Cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;
All: Because by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Curiosity leads Simon of Cyrene to peer through the crowd, hoping for a glance at the spectacle. What he does see fills him with revulsion: *I have nothing to do with this*. And yet suddenly a Roman soldier pulls him right into the center of this moment, no longer a spectator, but an intimate participant in the way of the Cross. And as he bears the Cross with Jesus, he comes to realize that this is not disgraceful, but an undeserved privilege.

Our surrender to Christ implies a readiness to let Him fully transform us, without setting any limit to the modification of our nature under His influence.
Dietrich von Hildebrand, "The Readiness to Change,"
Transformation in Christ

All: Our Father...



VI: 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.

Veronica boldly steps forward to offer some relief. No one stops her: the guards are too consumed with the chaos of the crowds. Jesus accepts this gesture gratefully, and wipes His Face on her cloth. The cloth receives the imprint of the New Adam. We, too, received that imprint when the waters of baptism poured down on us. In the veil of Veronica, we see, as in a mirror, our true selves and our high calling.

...Let us visit Christ whenever we may; let us care for him, feed him, clothe him, welcome him, honor him, not only at a meal, as some have done, or by anointing him, as Mary did, or only by lending him a tomb, like Joseph of Arimathea, or by arranging for his burial, like Nicodemus, who loved Christ half-heartedly, or by giving him gold, frankincense and myrrh, like the Magi before all these others. The Lord of all asks for mercy, not sacrifice, and mercy is greater than myriads of fattened lambs. Let us then show him mercy in the persons of the poor and those who today are lying on the ground, so that when we come to leave this world they may receive us into everlasting dwelling places, in Christ our Lord himself, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
Saint Gregory of Nazianzen, bishop, from a sermon entitled *De pauperum*

All: Our Father...

VII: 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.

Jesus falls again, this time from weariness. His heart is not weary, but His body can only bear so much. There is no reluctance, only fatigue. For us, however, the two go hand in hand: when we tire of our pilgrimage, we seek escape. Discouragement urges us to turn away. But the only real failure, we must remember, would be to give up completely. No matter how many times we may stumble, and no matter how long it may take to rise up again, this is the only path to freedom.

Does one not break one's entire life with every gesture? But what of it? The thing is not to go away, and wander for days, months, even years – the thing is to return and in the old place to find oneself.
Adam, in *The Jeweler's Shop* by Saint Pope John Paul II

All: Our Father...



VIII: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;
All: Because by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Jesus calls out to the women: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, weep rather for yourselves and for your children." Sometimes our sorrow is misdirected. We grieve because of the failings of others. Pointing out the faults of others may leave us in the pleasant shade of our own complacency, but this is a false redemption. We must call to mind the task given not to others, but to ourselves. If we wish our sorrow to be productive, we will direct it toward the one place in which we can truly effect a change: our own hearts.

Contrition... imparts to the soul of man a unique character of beauty. For it is in contrition that the new fundamental attitude of a humble and reverent charity becomes dominant and manifest, that man abandons the fortress of pride and self-sovereignty, and leaves the dreamland of levity and complacency, repairing to the place where he faces God in reality.
Dietrich von Hildebrand, "Contrition," *Transformation in Christ*

All: Our Father...



IX: Jesus falls the third time

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;
All: Because by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Jesus suffers another fall. In His eyes, it is not cause for despair, but only another invitation to heroic love, to a rising above the situation. Love does not stop to measure or complain, but presses on to fulfillment.

That voice you hear within you: ‘What a heavy yoke you have freely taken upon yourself!’ ... is the voice of the devil; the heavy burden... of your pride.

Ask our Lord for humility, and you too will understand those words of Jesus, which I like to translate freely, as follows: ‘my yoke is freedom, my yoke is love, my yoke is unity, my yoke is life, my yoke is fruitfulness.’

Saint Josemaría Escrivá, *Via Crucis*

All: Our Father...



X: Jesus is stripped of His Garments

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

All: Because by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

The climb to Calvary is complete; a moment’s rest awaits. But the humiliation continues, as the guards strip Jesus of His garments. He is left naked, exposed, vulnerable. But this is the very form of love, the trustful abandonment of all defenses. Unlike Adam, who, in his nakedness, hid himself in fear, the New Adam does not seek to cover Himself. He has no one to fear: God is His loving Father.

The world seeks freedom in the accumulation of possessions and power. It forgets that the only people who are truly free are those who have nothing left to lose. Despoiled of everything, detached from everything, they are “free from all men” and all things. It can be truly said that their death is already behind them, because all their “treasure” is now in God and in him alone.

Jacques Philippe, *Interior Freedom*

All: Our Father...



XI: 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.

John the Beloved watches as the body of Christ is elevated on the Cross. He remembers the words of the Master as He elevated the unleavened bread: “This is my body... do this in memory of me.” The Supreme Teacher does not want us to forget that love is self-offering, and so the meal He asks us to share, again and again until the end of time, takes the very shape of His sacrifice.

Christ’s blood reveals to man that his greatness, and therefore his vocation, consists in the sincere gift of self. Precisely because it is poured out as the gift of life, the blood of Christ is no longer a sign of death, of definitive separation from the brethren, but the instrument of a communion which is richness of life for all. Whoever in the Sacrament of the Eucharist drinks this blood and abides in Jesus is drawn into the dynamism of his love and gift of life, in order to bring to its fullness the original vocation to love which belongs to everyone.... It is from the blood of Christ that all draw the strength to commit themselves to promoting life. It is precisely this blood that is the most

powerful source of hope, indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God’s plan life will be victorious.
Saint Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*

All: Our Father...



XII: Jesus dies upon the Cross

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

All: Because by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

“There is no one left, Jesus,” mocks Gesmas the thief. A moment of profound aloneness follows, when Jesus does not experience even the Father’s love. Satan now attempts to strip Christ of His relationship with the Father. But when Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Satan is furious. No one bothers to cry out to one who is not listening. The cry of Jesus, desolate as it is, makes clear that He is still communicating with His Father.

You too some day may feel the loneliness of our Lord on the cross. If so, seek the support of Him who died and rose again. Find yourself a shelter in the wounds in His hands, in His feet, in His side. And your willingness to start again will revive, and you will take up the journey again with greater determination and effectiveness.

Saint Josemaría Escrivá, *Via Crucis*

All: Our Father...



XIII: Jesus is laid in the arms of His Blessed Mother

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

All: Because by Your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

At the foot of the Cross, Mary lovingly receives the lifeless body of her Son. She kisses Him, and then gazes out at us as she holds Him. Her eyes are filled with grief but no bitterness. “This is for you,” her eyes say to us. She is the gracious hostess of the divine meal, expressing a hospitality that has cost her everything.

Mary is... the Mother of Mercy because it is to her that Jesus entrusts his Church and all humanity. At the foot of the Cross, when she accepts John as her son, when she asks, together with Christ, forgiveness from the Father for those who do not know what they do, Mary experiences, in perfect docility to the Spirit, the richness and the universality of God’s love, which opens her heart and enables it to embrace the entire human race. Thus Mary becomes, for each and every one of us, the Mother who obtains for us divine mercy.

Saint Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth*

All: Our Father...

XIV: 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.

As the body is placed in the tomb, and the stone is rolled into place, a stillness covers the earth. The stillness is deceptive, for while all seems dormant, God is performing the miracle of which every other miracle is merely a sign. With Mary, we wait in stillness, and in hope.

Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives of Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve... The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory....

I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated.
from an ancient homily on Holy Saturday

All: Our Father...



Conclusion

Leader: O God, who by the precious blood of Your only-begotten Son sanctified the wood of the Cross, we pray: may we who rejoice in that same holy Cross at all times and places rejoice in Your protection, through the same Christ, our Lord.*

All: Amen.

All: Our Father...

All: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

** Closing prayer adapted from text by Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman*