

Stations of the Cross

Introduction

Be with us Lord as we prepare to follow the Way of the Cross with you. Our lives have been turned upside down. We are anxious and afraid.

Your passion and death were full of power. The events of your path to Calvary give meaning to our suffering. By them we are strengthened to persevere, to pick up our crosses again and again and to carry on. In them we find examples of simple human kindness and words of consolation. Through them we are able to see the world in its true perspective, to recognise that the things of the world have no lasting power to console us. Stripped of everything your Sacred Passion teaches us that what really counts is love: love of God and his holy will and love of our neighbour.

When you taught your disciples you said: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine he must renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me."

You suffered as an innocent victim for our sins. We are the guilty ones. Yet still you give us the privilege of uniting our sufferings with yours and carrying our crosses, great and small, alongside yours for the salvation of the world.

1. Jesus is condemned to death

Lord Jesus, you appear powerless before the powers of the world. Your own people handed you over. Pilate washed his hands of you. The crowds who once praised you now mock you. "Is there anyone to plead your cause?"

We seem to have lost so much freedom. We cannot even get to Mass. Yet no power in the world can deprive us of the freedom to do what really matters, to love God and to love our brothers and sisters. However weak and cut off we are we can always pray, pleading with God and holding the world and those we love before his face.

Lord Jesus Christ, your kingdom is not of this world. Your power is made perfect in weakness. You know this is your Father's will. You embrace your destiny with freedom and trust. What you know by your divine nature we are given to know by faith.

Strengthen our faith, O Lord, so we can accept our trials with confidence and hope.

2. Jesus takes up His cross

We are taking up new and unfamiliar crosses. Many of us are isolated and alone, fearful for our loved ones, anxious for our own health.

Lord, when you take up your cross you carry it for us. You bear the burden of our sins, taking our guilt on your shoulders, pleading on our behalf for the mercy and the grace of God our Father.

Now we feel powerless. There is so much to regret: the things we did that we ought not to have done; and the things we ought to have done that we left undone. There is so much now that we cannot do.

Yet we know that your Passion brings forgiveness and consolation, for us, for those we love and for the whole world. We thank you, Lord. You carry your cross for us all.

3. Jesus falls for the first time

Lord Jesus, the heavy burden of our sins caused you to stumble under the weight of the cross. Our lack of faith makes us stumble, often at the first obstacle, in our feeble efforts to live the Christian life.

You fall, but for our sake you stand up again and carry on. You give us an example of perseverance in trials. But more than that your falling and rising gives us real strength. You give us grace not to despair and to keep going

Our falls take many forms. Failure to trust in God. Failure to love one another. Failure to do your will in our lives.

St Thérèse wrote in a letter that “the Lord is vibrant with joy when we get up after a fall. He has long forgotten our infidelities. Only our desires for perfection are present and give joy to his heart.” When we fall give us the humility to be sorry and the power to persevere, knowing our weakness but trusting in your strength.

4. Jesus meets His mother, Mary

Lord Jesus, your way of the cross is a journey of suffering. There is physical pain and spiritual torment.

Lord Jesus, you carry the cross on your shoulders. Your Blessed Mother bears the cross in her heart. In your sufferings you see each other but you cannot touch. Lord Jesus, Holy Mary, the love you have for each other is deeper than any love that has ever been.

In the turmoil of your Passion how can you express your love for each other? No more than a fleeting look is possible, a brief meeting of pitying eyes through an angry crowd.

When our normal means of showing love are gone the gestures that remain have so much more power. They are like music to the blind and like colour to those who have lost the power to hear.

Lord help us in this trial to see that the smallest gesture can still convey the deepest love.

5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross

So many people need our help. There are too many. We cannot help them all. We need help, too, though perhaps we are afraid to appear weak if we show it.

You have no fear of looking weak. In all humility you accept the help of Simon of Cyrene. He cannot know that the real burden of the cross is not its weight or its roughness. It is the weight of our sins – our ingratitude, our hardness of heart – when you yourself show us nothing but love. Your deepest pain is invisible. It is spiritual suffering.

Simon's example and your humility give us confidence to believe that we really can help you carry your cross; that our sacrifices make a difference; that we can unite them with yours.

Lord give us the grace to see you in our neighbour, to help where we can, and to find comfort in the knowledge that the least we do for these your brothers and sisters, we do for you.

6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

A woman rushes through the crowd, careless of herself and of her own safety, heedless of the anger of the crowd. "Do not touch him! You cannot help him! You will endanger us!"

Veronica wipes the sweat and the blood from your suffering face, dear Lord. And you show your gratitude by leaving the image of your Holy Face upon the very cloth.

So many of us can not longer touch those we love. We cannot even shake a hand, still less cool a burning face or embrace a loved one who is anxious and afraid. All our instincts are frustrated.

Of course we must be prudent. We must have a care for the lives of others. But for ourselves we should not fear death or shame more than we fear the failure to love. "Love is strong as death."

Dear Lord, let us not lose sight of the deepest truths. Love is often reckless and impulsive. Love always involves taking a risk. This Way of the Cross teaches us that you yourself love us more than you love your own life.

7. Jesus falls for the second time

Again and again we fall into sin and for our frequent falls, dear Lord, you fall a second time under the weight of the cross.

We can hardly help ourselves. We are weak. We are often tempted. The narrow way seems very hard and we want to turn back. This is all too much for us.

On the way to the cross you never turn back. Your innocent falls match our guilty ones. They show us that you are with us, alongside us, all the way of our own narrow and rugged pathway.

You stand up again and carry on. We come to know our weakness. We gain confidence from your strength.

8. Jesus comforts the women of Jerusalem

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!'"

This is stark comfort. But it is real help. These are not empty words. Comfort without truth is no comfort at all. Our Lord does not give us only palliative care. He gives us a diagnosis and he has a real cure.

"As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." [Mt 24:37-42]

In this time of trial, and at the Day of Judgement, we may be tempted to agree with those who say it is better never to have loved than to have loved and lost.

This is impossible for those who have truly loved. Genuine love is always a good. Our Lord loves us enough to give us the truth. He does make demands, but "his yoke is easy and his burden light." For those who follow him, and for those who fail and repent, there is no cause to fear. No sickness, not death itself, can separate us from the love of Christ.

9. Jesus falls for the third time

Our Lord falls for the third time. And we fall, not just once, or twice, or even three times, but many times, over and over again. Sometimes it seems we are unable to change. Our habits seem to be set in stone.

Perhaps we will never change. Maybe all we have to offer in the end is repentance and sorrow. But this too is a gift and it is not a small one. To be humble, to be able to say sorry, is the beginning of true holiness. In the end we all come before God as beggars.

Your passion teaches us never to despair of your grace, your love and your power to change us. But even if we cannot change our ways, give us the grace to be humble. God never despairs of his creatures and neither should we. The scriptures tell us that you will take out our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh instead." Dear Lord, make it so in us.

10. Jesus is stripped of His clothes

Lord, when you come to Calvary, after your painful journey, you are stripped of your clothes. Instead of the real crown that is yours as Christ the King you are crowned with twisted thorns. The humiliation of mockery is added to physical pain and the agony of man's ingratitude.

Now we have lost so much of what makes us who we are. We may have no work. We may be unable to see family or friends. We may be deprived of our pastimes. Our lives have been stripped down to essentials. We are isolated and alone. We are left to our own resources. We feel exposed. "Behold the man!"

Lord Jesus, help us by your humiliation and exposure to bear this time of trial. May we learn from it the things that really matter.

11. Jesus is nailed to the cross

Lord Jesus, the hard nails pierce your tender hands and feet. You know the agony of physical pain.

Many now are in pain, perhaps alone in their rooms, perhaps in hospital. Many more live in fear of the prospect of pain.

Lord we pray for doctors and nurses who are caring for the sick and suffering. Often they are exhausted. They too are anxious and afraid, separated from those they love. Give them the strength to care for their patients with kindness and compassion.

Lord Jesus, please help us to find ways of relieving the pain of those who suffer. And when pain can no longer be avoided give us the strength to feel the pain of the nails with you.

12. Jesus dies on the cross

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), "I thirst." A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

The threat of death hovers over us. We may not often speak of it, but it is there. Fear lies just beneath the surface of all our lives.

Your death on the cross shows the depth of God's love. "Jesus, having loved his own, loved them to the end." "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

It is a difficult truth but the love of God is most powerfully shown in pain. The reward of that love is shown in the power of new life in the Resurrection of Easter Day.

Lord, help us to be ready for death whenever it comes. Strengthen our faith in you. Faith brings the virtues of hope and love. You have taught us that "perfect love casts out fear."

13. Jesus is taken down from the cross

Lord, you are taken down from the cross and laid in the arms of your mother. It seems to be the end. You are lifeless in your mother's arms and her grief is intense.

Dear Jesus, Mary, mother most sorrowful. Comfort those who mourn, especially those who have lost those they love in the plague that now afflicts the whole world.

Holy Mary, Mother of Sorrows and Our Lady of Consolation. I praise you because the almighty has done great things in you. I thank you for your never failing compassion and your consolation throughout my life. I am sorry that my sins brought pain and suffering to you and to your Son. In spite of my constant weakness I am filled with confidence in your love and in your power. Please continue to have compassion and to console all those in mourning and in grief. Mother of Sorrows and Our Lady of Consolation: pray for us.

14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

After this Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him leave. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who had at first come to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' weight. They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, as the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Lord Jesus, your sacred body is buried at once, before nightfall, secretly. Nobody is there except Joseph and Nicodemus. They do what they can.

So many of our loved ones, so many with nobody to mourn them, are buried now in this way. Maybe there is not even a priest. Those charged with this sad task do what they can. But they can only do so much. Even in death, even at their burial, so many are sharing in the life and death of Jesus. In the midst of this sadness, help us to find some solace that are sharing your fate to the very end.

*In life no house no home, my Lord on earth might have;
In death no friendly tomb but what a stranger gave.
This is my friend, in whose sweet praise,
I all my days would gladly spend.*

Final Prayer

Lord we have followed you on the Way of the Cross. In this time of suffering and anxiety we have our crosses too. Help us to unite our pains and sufferings with yours.

Give us the grace to trust in you and not in ourselves alone. We pray with King David in the Psalms:

*If the Lord does not build the house
in vain do the builders labour.
If the Lord does not guard the city
in vain does the watchman keep vigil.*

All suffering is a time of trial and a time of judgement. Your cross is our only hope. May we find that hope in your teaching:

*Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out;
but I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*

We adore thee, O Christ and we bless thee.
Because by thy Holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.

Our Father - Hail Mary - Glory Be

BLESSING