

The Stations of the Cross

for the Second Friday in Lent

St Mark

Today we accept the help of St Mark, the first Evangelist, on our Way of the Cross. Mark knew Jesus as the Son of God, and describing his life, he showed how his disciples slowly came to understand him. We pray for the readiness of true disciples, the attentive and open generosity of those who “take up the Cross and follow him”.

1 Jesus is condemned to death

Pilate asked: “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus replied, “It is you who say it.” After this he says no more. This silence of Jesus reminds us of the Servant of the Lord: “Ill-treated and afflicted, he never opened his mouth: like a lamb led to the slaughterhouse, like a sheep dumb before those who shear it, he never opened his mouth.”¹

*When we enter the mystery of the Cross, let us learn to refrain from complaint and resentment, and to wait in silence for the Lord to save.*²

2 Jesus receives the Cross

Mark tells us that the crowd was shouting specifically for the *crucifixion* of Jesus. Pilate releases him “to be crucified”. In this Jesus is vindicated, for three times he has assured his friends, amid their protests, that he will die in this way. So we must not see him as trapped and victimised at this moment, but as a man whose life is unfolding precisely as he foresaw it.

As the Cross comes to us, let us recognise the Way on which we are walking with Jesus, and let his victory be our light in this darkness.

3 Jesus falls for the first time

Mark is always ready to remind us of Jesus’ humanity. He tells us that, as he went forward from his disciples into the Garden of the Agony, Jesus *fell on the ground* to pray. In this happening, there was awe, and fear, a falling which abandons dignity before the power of God. It is this conscious surrender to God’s will which impels every step of the Way of the Cross even though Jesus’ human strength is nearly exhausted.

*As we pass through the Lenten season of testing, let us stay close to Jesus who, for the sake of the joy which lay ahead of him, endured the Cross, and disregarded the shame of it.*³

4 Jesus meets his mother

Mark tells us of the hardship Jesus’ family experienced, as he went off on his mission: how they tried to bring him home for his own good, and take care of him in Nazareth. But Mary will not save him, as his mother; rather, he must be her Saviour: and she must become his disciple as we must: only those who hear the word of God and keep it can be his brother, sister, and mother.

Help us to listen to your teaching, Lord of the Passion, and to follow it.

5 Simon of Cyrene shares the burden of the Cross

Mark tells us that Simon shouldered the Cross from the beginning of Jesus’ last journey. He tells us too of Alexander and Rufus, Simon’s sons: they must have become members of the early Church, and so therefore must Simon.

Let even those, whose burdens we are forced into bearing, teach us our place on this Way of the Cross.

6 Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

This woman's name means "true image". In her impulsive compassion for the convict's suffering, she is allowed to mirror Jesus, who is "the image of the unseen God"⁴. Others "avert their gaze, and have no regard for him, for he has no form or charm to attract them, no beauty to win their hearts"⁵; to Veronica, the clear-sighted, the Man of Sorrows calls for pity.

Let our compassion give us courage to go to the aid of Christ, in his suffering brothers and sisters.

7 Jesus falls the second time

Whilst we thought of him as one bearing punishment, struck by God and brought low, yet ours were the sufferings he carried: he was wounded for our rebellion, crushed because of our guilt: by his wounds we have been healed⁶.

Lord, prevent the self-righteous judgments we pass on others. Give us grace to know our own weakness, and to have compassion for theirs.

8 Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Here are women who do not stand aloof, but let their hearts be moved for Jesus. But he redirects their thoughts: *weep for yourselves and for your children*. We easily forget that Jesus is not a sad case to be pitied, but our Redeemer, walking the only path to life. Our tears for him are false unless we realise they are the tears of spectators, safe on the side of the road. Jesus is showing us *our* true plight; those who really need pity are the ones whose house is left to them,⁷ who refuse to repent, and to come with Christ.

Lord, never hear us if we pray to be saved from the carrying of the Cross.⁸

9 Jesus falls the third time

Some say: *I have exhausted myself for nothing, I have been toiling in vain*. Yet all the while my cause was with the Lord, and my reward with my God⁹.

Lord, may our human falling be safe in your hand, be the strength in our exhaustion.¹⁰

10 Jesus is stripped of his garments

Mark says *they brought him* to Golgotha. The word used means they *carried* him – Mark also uses it of the sick, the paralytic, the blind, a deaf-mute, and an epileptic child¹¹ who are all *carried* to Jesus. Now his strength seems practically at an end, they take off his clothes, he is being treated like a child. Let us compare his state with our own attempted self-possession.

Lord, teach us the depth of your spirit of sacrifice.

11 Jesus is nailed to the Cross

Jesus has spoken of this moment many times in his life. No-one has dared to understand him. Now at last his word is being made good. The nailing reflects his own determination to be one with the will of the Father. He is also holding firm with sinful humanity. Now Jesus and the Cross are one thing; ¹² he has finally taken our guilt on himself.¹³

Jesus, teach us to have no other plan but the will of our Father.

12 Jesus dies on the Cross

The man who hears Jesus call on “*my God*” (in Hebrew *eli'yah*) imagines that he has called on Elijah – the prophet who was destined to return to herald the end of the world. His hurrying to give him vinegar, sometimes used by the Romans to bring convicts back to consciousness and prolong their agony, displays a cruel mockery. Jesus calls on no human agency, but only his Father. Only the Father can respond to the gift he is giving, and receive the prayer which he offers. Mark exalts him above all human incomprehension or contempt. He gives his life only to the Father.

Lord Jesus, lead us beyond merely human praying, and into the mystery of the Cross.

13 Jesus is taken down from the Cross

Now everything seems to be at an end. Jesus' suffering has finished, and with it, everyone thinks, his life. It is a convulsive moment of grief, bitter with pain, sweet with defeated love. This is how most human life ends: and Jesus has not asked for a different way. When we are brought to this moment, let us enter into it with the same obedience.

Lord Jesus, be near to all who mourn, and comfort them by your closeness.

14 Jesus is laid in the tomb

Joseph of Arimathea takes his body, and buys him a shroud, a final act of human charity; and Jesus is laid in a tomb hewn from the rock. The women who have been watching from a distance take careful note of the place, for they intend to return. Do as they do: take note of this burial, remembering that Jesus came to be faithful in all things to the laws of our life. There is no distance away from the Father, which he has not travelled. Our furthest distance from God the Father brings us nearer to God the Son, who was *taken for a criminal*, and was *given a grave with the rich*.¹⁴ Wherever we may call on him, he will make it a place of resurrection, and lead us from darkness, into his wonderful light.

Lord Jesus, you have walked the way of our sorrow. Find us, and lead us into life.

Pray for the intentions of the Holy Father:

Our Father....

Hail, Mary....

Glory be to the Father....

Final Prayer

Father, our source of life,
you know our weakness.
May we reach out with joy
to grasp the hand you hold out to us,
and walk more generously in your way
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

¹ Is 53:7

² Lam 3:26

³ Heb 12:2

⁴ Col 1:15

⁵ Is 53:2-3

⁶ Is 53:4-5, 1 Pet 2:24-25

⁷ Lk 13:34-35

⁸ Clare of Assisi was once reproached by Gregory IX for the severity of her penances. "Absolve me from my sins, Holy Father," she replied, "but not from the obligation of following our Lord."

⁹ Is 49:4

¹⁰ Ps 91:11-12

¹¹ Mark 1:32, 2:1, 8:22, 7:32, 9:17,15:22

¹² In Jn 10: 29 Jesus says, *The Father and I are one (thing)*. The Jews fetch stones to throw at him. This claim to oneness with the Father is death to Jesus then; and now it is symbolised in his being united to the Cross. In the deepest sense, his oneness with the Father and with us is fatal to him.

¹³ Is 53: 5

¹⁴ Is 53: 9. Many commentators see this as a sign of his burial amongst *sinners*. A tomb, however rich, is always a tomb, the place of ultimate poverty and of corruption.