

# The Stations of the Cross

## *for the Third Friday in Lent*

*The Way of the Cross begins with a judgment, and ends in one: we judge Jesus at the start, and at the end we find ourselves judged. Let us not stand back from those who witnessed the Passion, but see ourselves among them, and at every station let the One who passes to his death be our Judge.*

### **1 Jesus is condemned to death**

This is Jesus of Nazareth's final, deciding encounter with the hatred and rejection of the world. It is the world's judgment on him. How does he respond to it? Surely with all the pain that rejection inflicts on any of us. But he can also take consolation: not only the prophets, but his Father had been offered this response. God says through Jeremiah<sup>1</sup>:

*From the day your ancestors left Egypt until today, I have sent them all my servants the prophets, persistently, day after day; but they have not listened to me, have not paid attention: they have deliberately resisted, and behaved worse than their fathers. You may carry my word to them, but they will not listen to you; you may call them, but they will not answer. Then you must say to them: This is the nation that will neither listen to God, nor be governed. Sincerity is no more: it has vanished from their mouths.*

### **2 Jesus receives the Cross**

Carrying his own cross is part of the punishment; the walk through the city streets gives the population the chance to humiliate the condemned man. But as we see him separated out to go to his death, we should realise that he dies so as to be one with us who die, he is condemned, to be one with us who stand condemned in God's eyes.

*It was fitting that God, in bringing many children to glory, should make perfect through suffering the leader of their salvation.<sup>2</sup>*

### **3 Jesus falls for the first time**

We may think at this station of all the ways in which human beings fall short of the glory of God, weak and wrong-headed as we are. Jesus knew this truth about us, and loved us, not in spite of it, but because of it. Let us, like Jesus, learn to love even the capacity to fail of those he gives us to love.

*Forgive us our offences, as we forgive those who offend us.*

### **4 Jesus meets his mother**

What has he done with the life she gave him? How has he come to this disastrous pass? Mary knows her Son, and therefore she knows his innocence. Perhaps all her life she has feared for his safety. Now she knows his earthly story is ending in sheer horror. As in the Gospel Mary is silent at the foot of the Cross, so now we think of all who stand speechless before such pain and loss, and pray in their name.

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice.*

**5 Simon of Cyrene shares the burden of the Cross**

In the heart of every grief there is the voice of death, which we are finally powerless to defeat. Here is a passer-by, who finds himself caught up in another man's path to death. If we will see it, he is an example for us: we are all asked to reach out to the condemned, and stand beside them, and lend them our strength, in whatever way we may be allowed.

*I was in prison, and you came to me.<sup>3</sup>*

**6 Veronica wipes the face of Jesus**

We feel in the person of Veronica a deeper sensibility than that of a mere passer-by. She cannot bear to watch without coming forward, reaching out to wipe his face, as a nurse might for a patient; she knows the closeness of his pain to her own weakness. Let us not miss the courage she finds to contradict the harsh sentence, and ignore the mocking crowd.

*If any declare themselves for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for them in the presence of my Father in heaven.*

**7 Jesus falls the second time**

Think at this station of all who fall into sin, leaving behind the call of Jesus and the hope of God's love. Jesus knew the reality of sin, and gathered about him those who were ostracized as sinners. In his falling under the Cross, we recognize his taking the weight of our sin on himself.

*It is not the healthy who need the physician, but the sick. I did not come to call the just, but sinners to repentance<sup>4</sup>.*

**8 Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem**

In these women all women are speaking who watch the horror of hatred, the tragedies of war. Jeremiah<sup>5</sup> says:

*Prepare to call for the mourning women, send for those who excel at it! Let them lose no time in raising their lament over us! Let our eyes rain tears, our eyelids run with weeping! A lament is heard in Zion: 'What utter ruin is ours, what appalling shame! For we must leave our land, our homes are destroyed!' Now listen, women, to the Lord's word: let your ears accept what his mouth speaks: Teach your daughters to wail, teach one another this dirge: 'Death has climbed in at our windows, has entered our palaces, cutting down our children in the street, our young people in the squares;' say it! The Lord declares: corpses are strewn like offal in the open field, like sheaves abandoned by the reaper, with no-one to gather them.*

**9 Jesus falls the third time**

In this third fall of Jesus, let us remember the short term of our strength, the early withering, perhaps, of our Lenten devotion. Jesus knew that his disciples were fearful, and slow to believe, and ready to fall asleep. He loved them because they needed a Saviour. It is after the gift of the Eucharist that he says<sup>6</sup>:

*The greatest among you must behave as the youngest. I am among you as one who serves.*

**10 Jesus is stripped of his garments**

This is a moment of supreme symbolism. Jesus loses the last of his belongings, and, before they take his life too, he stands revealed in his humanity. They see a naked, vulnerable victim. Let us see the revelation of God's love for us, the epiphany of God made man.

*God wanted all fulness to be found in him, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, everything in heaven, and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the Cross<sup>7</sup>.*

**11 Jesus is nailed to the Cross**

Let us pray at this station for all who have received the knowledge of their death: those diagnosed as fatally ill, those whose hopes for this life have come to their end, or nothing, those who are condemned to death.

*We have carried the sentence of death within our own selves, so that we should be forced to trust, not in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. He has saved us from such a death: and will save us again: we are relying on him to do so<sup>8</sup>.*

**12 Jesus dies on the Cross**

The utter reality of Jesus' death makes the love of God utterly real to us. It is now part of human history. Let us not allow any unreality to enter our thinking about this moment. He died, he was pierced, there came forth blood and water. In this death he lost all for us, and gave himself into his Father's hands. Let us resolve not cling to anything that keeps us from him.

*This is the revelation of God's love for us: that he sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. This is what love means: not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent his Son into the world to take away our sins. My dear friends, if God has loved us so much, we too must love one another.<sup>9</sup>*

**13 Jesus is taken down from the Cross**

Before Jesus goes to the Father, he has a last journey to undertake. He has passed from the world of the living, so as to become the Shepherd of the dead. The loving hands that take him from the Cross have no power to restore his earthly life. This moment is etched into helpless, grief-stricken hearts, a necessary stage in the writing of the Gospel.

*It was written that the Christ should suffer, and so enter into his glory. The reason why he both died and came to life, was so that he should be Lord of the living and of the dead.<sup>10</sup>*

**14 Jesus is laid in the tomb**

The high-priest who declared that Jesus must die was a Sadducee, and therefore did not believe in the Resurrection of the dead. As Jesus is laid in the grave, his mourners were not supposed to think of any such possibility either. A crucified man is a man with a past, but no future, a man never to be mentioned again by name. In human eyes, Jesus has become one with the damned and the forgotten dead.

This is where the Father, who has delivered his Son to us in weakness, will put forth his divine power.

*So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone, and a new being is there to see; it is all God's work. He reconciled us to himself in Christ, and he has given us the ministry of reconciliation: I shall be father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the almighty Lord.<sup>11</sup>*

*Pray for the intentions of the Holy Father:*

Our Father....  
Hail, Mary....  
Glory be to the Father....

### **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus, you have shown us a path to life which never turns away from the burdens of our human nature.

Grant that we may imitate your constant and unswerving love for the Father, shown above all in your undying love for us.

Give us the Holy Spirit, so that we may be turned more and more to your way, and be enlightened by the glory you share with the Father and the Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

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<sup>1</sup> Jer 7: 25-28

<sup>2</sup> Heb 2:10: cf Is 53:4ff

<sup>3</sup> Mt 25: 36; cf 1 Pet 3: 19, where Jesus is said himself to have gone "in the spirit to preach to the souls in prison"; the condemned Jesus *descends into Hell* to free the condemned.

<sup>4</sup> Mk 2: 17

<sup>5</sup> Jer 9: 16-21

<sup>6</sup> Lk 22: 26

<sup>7</sup> Col 1: 19-20

<sup>8</sup> 2 Cor 1: 9-10

<sup>9</sup> 1 Jn 4: 9-11

<sup>10</sup> Lk 24: 26, Rom 14:9

<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor 5: 17-18: 6:18