

The Stations of the Cross

for the Fifth Friday in Lent

St Luke

St Luke concentrates the themes of pain and struggle into the story of Gethsemane, when Jesus is sent an angel from heaven to comfort him. From that moment of consummate agony the Passion begins to be the record of reconciliation, the ultimate making of peace.

1 Jesus is condemned to death

Jesus appears before Pilate, charged by the priests with trying to incite revolution, opposing the paying of tax to Caesar, and claiming to be Christ, a King. Although Jesus he does not deny his royalty as he enters Jerusalem, he always refused the lordship of earthly kings. Thus the case against him has deliberately distorted his true mission. Pilate says, *Are you the King of the Jews?* Jesus replies: *So you say.* That is their dialogue, identical in all four Gospels. Pilate is convinced of his innocence, three times he declares it to the crowd; but they are unremitting in their cries, and at last Pilate gives them what they ask.

Lord, do not allow our hands to be soiled with the condemnation of the innocent, repeated every day in the world we live in.

2 Jesus receives the Cross

What do they see, who load the Cross onto his shoulders? His weakness, surely; who could carry this last grim load with any vigour? Those who have demanded his death are perhaps satisfied, as they see the instrument of execution brought forth. His death is taking practical form: he is crossing that threshold where no-one will accompany him: condemned, he is separated from us who survive him.

Lord, help us to cancel the safe distance we have put between ourselves and the hungry, the homeless, the sick, and all the people the world will not accept.

3 Jesus falls for the first time

A man on the floor in the city street: maybe a disgusting drunk, a sick man who would cost us hours to help, a beggar asking for our change. We alter our path to cut round him, hurrying in order to evade him. We have somewhere else to go, we have urgent business. Unseen, unrecognised, it is Jesus who lies before us.

Jesus says to his disciples: Whoever listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you rejects me; and those who reject me reject the One who sent me.¹

4 Jesus meets his mother

It is Luke who gives us the image of Mary addressed by the angel, Mary warned by Simeon, Mary prepared for the welcoming of this Son of God. Like all of us, she needs total faith as she encounters him now, bearing the Cross. Perhaps she remembers the many times she cared for his wounds as a child, how often she had to change his clothes and wash from him the dust and grime of the day. Now she is helpless, he is too far beyond her power. Now a disciple, not a mother, the most powerful rôle she knew is taken from her, and *a sword pierces her own soul too².*

Lord, may we leave everything to follow you.³

5 Simon of Cyrene shares the burden of the Cross

Jesus is going out of Jerusalem, to be crucified outside its walls. Simon was coming into Jerusalem from the country: nevertheless *they made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus*. In this way he is compelled to the place of a disciple. We are not told what errand he sacrificed to do this. But perhaps he may have been taught, much later on, the words of Jesus: *Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and his own life too, cannot be my disciple. No-one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple.*⁴

6 Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Luke told us of the moment when *as soon as the time came for him to be taken up, Jesus turned his face towards Jerusalem.*⁵ Isaiah speaks of the Lord's servant who *set his face like flint, knowing he would not be shamed.*⁶ Is this the face Veronica now sees, as for the last time he is cared-for by a woman? Jesus always accepted the care of women, and this little tradition makes it present in the story of Good Friday.
*It is your face, O Lord, that I seek: hide not your face.*⁷

7 Jesus falls the second time

At his second temptation of Jesus in the desert, the devil says: *all the power and splendour of the kingdoms is given to me: fall down in worship before me, and it shall all be yours*. Jesus falls a second time, but in course of his worship of the Father; he is the Servant of God who *will neither waver nor be crushed*⁸ until he has given his service to God alone.
*You must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone you must serve.*⁹

8 Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Jesus told the widow of Nain not to cry, and also those who were mourning for Jairus' daughter. Now he diverts the minds of the weeping women from himself, and bids them to weep as he himself once wept, for their city, their people.¹⁰ These are prophetic words of warning. Jerusalem is refusing her only Saviour: she is courting instead the disaster that lies ahead.
Lord, make us partners in your redemptive work, that we may bring real help to a world that is dying in its sins.

9 Jesus falls the third time

Contemplating the coming of Jesus to share our fallen nature, we find his sharing in the weakness of the body most eloquent. He shows us in this that bodily frailty need not mean that we co-operate with sin. The spirit is still willing, amid the weakness of the flesh.
Lord, save us from making our undoubted weakness an excuse for sin.

10 Jesus is stripped of his garments

Jesus said, *if anyone takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic.*¹¹ In this station we see how literally Luke takes our Lord's word. As the soldiers gamble for his clothes, Jesus is revealed as selfless, as one who gives himself completely, reserving nothing for himself.
*Lord, we shall see you come, robed in the powers of heaven. Prepare us to stand up, and hold our heads high on that day of liberation.*¹²

11 Jesus is nailed to the Cross

It is as they are fixing him to the Cross that Jesus prays: *Father, forgive them: they do not know what they are doing*. We easily forget that Jesus was praying, not only for those then driving in the nails, but for all who had any part in bringing about this death, which must include *every one of us*. We have all increased the sum of suffering and hopelessness of the world. Let our prayer for forgiveness be one with the prayer that Jesus makes for us.
Forgive us our debts, as we forgive those who are in debt to us.

12 Jesus dies on the Cross

In Luke's Gospel Jesus dies with the words of a psalm; it is not a psalm of dereliction, but of trust: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*.¹³ Our spirit, far from this trustful surrender, is wayward and wilful, often given to selfishness, self-pity, and petulance. Let us ask God to pour out upon us a spirit of prayer, that we may *mourn for the one whom we have pierced as for an only child: that a fountain may be opened for us, to wash sin and impurity away*.¹⁴

13 Jesus is taken down from the Cross

Luke does not recount the scattering of the apostles in the garden of Gethsemane, but only describes Peter as *following at a distance*. When Jesus dies he is *watched from afar by all his friends*. Certainly we may believe that Peter and the others came to look on the face of their dead Master. We can only guess at what they felt. But what they suffer in this scene is an essential element for the joy of Easter, a condition for the joy of Emmaus. Let us join them in spirit, as the truth of his death comes home to us.

When they saw what had happened, they went home, beating their breasts.¹⁵

14 Jesus is laid in the tomb

Luke tells us that the burial of Jesus occupied his friends for a long time: perhaps far into the night, for he tells us that when they had finished the Sabbath was already dawning. The Sabbath is a day on which no-one can work or travel. As Jesus is laid in the tomb, they enter upon a Sabbath rest that is bereft of joy, a Passover feast for which no-one has heart. They cannot know that they are about to enter upon a feast which outshines the Passover in all things, and a promised land which is to be their home in eternity.

Lord, in our weakness we hesitate and falter in our faith. Lead us out of darkness, and into eternal light.

Pray for the intentions of the Holy Father:

Our Father....

Hail, Mary....

Glory be to the Father....

Final Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, who, out of your tender love towards us, have sent our Saviour Jesus Christ to take our flesh upon him, and to suffer death upon the Cross, so that we should all follow the example of his great humility:

mercifully grant us both to follow the example of his patience, and be made sharers in his resurrection:

Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

¹ Lk 10: 16. Cf. Mt 25: 35-36

² Lk 2: 35

³ Mk 10: 28

⁴ Lk 14: 25-27

⁵ Lk 9: 51

⁶ Is 50: 7

⁷ Ps 27: 8-9

⁸ Is 42: 4

⁹ Dt 6: 13: cf Lk 4: 8

¹⁰ Lk 19: 41-44

¹¹ Lk 6: 29; 23: 34

¹² Lk 21: 27-28

¹³ Ps 31: 5

¹⁴ Zech 12: 10, 13: 1

¹⁵ Lk 23: 48