

Stations of the Cross

Why do the Stations?

The most important reason for reviving the practice of making the Stations of the Cross is that it is a powerful way to contemplate, and enter into, the mystery of Jesus' gift of himself to us. It takes the reflection on the passion out of my head, and makes it an imaginative exercise. It involves my senses, my experience and my emotions. To the extent I come to experience the love of Jesus for me, to that extent the gratitude I feel will be deep. Deep gratitude leads to real generosity and a desire to love as I have been loved. First, just a note about the history of the stations:

The History:

From the earliest of days, followers of Jesus told the story of his passion, death and resurrection. When pilgrims came to see Jerusalem, they were anxious to see the sites where Jesus was. These sites become important holy connections with Jesus. Eventually, following in the footsteps of the Lord, along the way of the cross, became a part of the pilgrimage visit. The stations, as we know them today, came about when it was no longer easy or even possible to visit the holy sites. In the 1500's, villages all over Europe started creating "replicas" of the way of the cross, with small shrines commemorating the places along the route in Jerusalem. Eventually, these shrines became the set of 14 stations we now know and were placed in almost every Catholic Church in the world.

Why Put Them On the Web?

We do this for the same reason we have done the Daily Reflections and the Online Retreat on the web - accessibility. It would be wonderful if each of us would find the time to explore our church, or a classic church in town, and make the stations there, going from station to station. However, it is much easier to imagine almost anyone with a computer going through these stations, any time, day or night.

What if I have never made the Stations before?

Go to the page on "[How to do the Stations](#)" and see how simple it is. On

the web, it's easy. I can do one a day, for two weeks. I can do several at a time, and just do them, when I get a chance. I can do all 14 at a time, and return to them in my prayer and imagination as I do them.

The most important thing to remember is that this can be as personal as I'd like it to be. One of our common religious struggles is to realize that we are not alone. The Good News is that Jesus entered into our life's experience completely - even suffering and death - and that he fell into the hands of a Loving God, who raised him from death to life. We can have complete hope that suffering and death have no complete hold on us. We will all share eternal life with him, if we can fall into the hands of the same Loving God. And, along the way, we are not alone. Jesus is with us as one who knows our suffering, and the death we face. That can be deeply consoling.

So try the stations, and experience the consolation they offer. And return often, to be renewed in this intimate experience of Jesus' solidarity with all humanity in our way of the cross each day.

How to do the Stations?

Making the stations is easy. And, we tried to make this online experience of them an easy adaptation of what one would do, if doing them in a church before real stations.

The Context:

The first point to note is that this is *prayer*. It isn't an intellectual exercise. It is in the context of my relationship with God. I could read through the text of each of the stations, and look at the pictures, but that wouldn't necessarily be prayer. This is an invitation to enter into a gifted faith experience of who Jesus is for me. It becomes prayer when I open my heart to be touched, and it leads me to express my response in prayer.

The second thing to remember is that this is an *imaginative* exercise. Its purpose is not a historical examination of "what really happened" on that day in history. It's about something far more profound. This is an opportunity to use this long standing Christian prayer to let Jesus touch my heart deeply by showing me the depth of his love for me. The

context is the historical fact that he was made to carry the instrument of his death, from the place where he was condemned to die, to Calvary where he died, and that he was taken down and laid in a tomb. The religious context is that today Jesus wants to use any means available to move my heart to know his love for me. These exercises can allow me to imaginatively visualize the "meaning" of his passion and death.

The point of this exercise is to lead us to gratitude. It will also lead us into a sense of solidarity with all our brothers and sisters. In our busy, high tech lives we can easily get out of touch with the terrible suffering of real people in our world. Journeying with Jesus in the Stations, allows us to imagine his entry into the experience of those who are tortured, unjustly accused or victimized, sitting on death row, carrying impossible burdens, facing terminal illnesses, or simply fatigued with life.

How to:

Just go from one station to another. When "arriving" at a station, begin by looking carefully at the image itself. Click on the image there to enlarge the photo. See who is in the scene. Look at how they are arranged and what the artist who created this image is trying to tell us about the drama there.

This online version is divided into four parts:

- The first part is a simple description of the scene. It helps us be conscious of what the "meaning" of this station is for us.
- The second part is the traditional prayer at each station. Its words become more and more meaningful as we repeat them throughout the journey.
- The third part is the contemplation of the scene. This is a guided reflection on the power of the scene for me, to enter it more deeply and to lead to some experience of it personally.
- The fourth part is my response. This is expressed in my own words. It is the place where the sorrow and gratitude flow from my heart.

When to do them:

The beauty of the online version is that I can do the stations whenever I like. The only guide we'd offer is to not rush through them. Just reading through them is not making them, any more than walking around a church to look at them is making them. It could be a wonderful prayer

experience to do them as only one or two stations a day for one or two weeks. It can also be powerful to do all 14, very prayerfully, over the course of 40 minutes to an hour, in a single evening, or to do seven one night and seven the following night. Finally, it can be wonderful to return to the experience several weeks or months later, and discover that because of some struggle or difficulty I am experiencing, the stations become a different experience and a fresh experience of consolation.

The First Station: Jesus is condemned to die.

Jesus stands in the most human of places. He has already experienced profound solidarity with so many on this earth, by being beaten and tortured. Now he is wrongfully condemned to punishment by death. His commitment to entering our lives completely begins its final steps. He has said "yes" to God and placed his life in God's hands. We follow him in this final surrender, and contemplate with reverence each place along the way, as he is broken and given for us.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

As I view the scene, I become moved by both outrage and gratitude. I look at Jesus. His face. The crown of thorns. The blood. His clothes stuck to the wounds on his back. Pilate washes his hands of the whole affair. Jesus' hands are tied behind his back.

This is for me. That I might be free. That I might have eternal life. As the journey begins I ask to be with Jesus. To follow his journey. I express my love and thanks.

The Second Station: Jesus Carries His Cross.

Jesus is made to carry the cross on which he will die. It represents the weight of all our crosses. What he must have felt as he first took it upon his shoulders! With each step he enters more deeply into our human experience. He walks in the path of human misery and suffering, and experiences its crushing weight.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I contemplate the wood of that cross. I imagine how heavy it is. I reflect upon all it means that Jesus is carrying it. I look into his eyes. It's all there.

This is for me. So I place myself with him in this journey. In its anguish. In his freedom and surrender. In the love that must fill his heart.

With sorrow and gratitude, I continue the journey. Moved by the power of his love, I am drawn to him and express my love in the words that come to me.

The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time.

The weight is unbearable. Jesus falls under it. How could he enter our lives completely without surrendering to the crushing weight of the life of so many on this earth! He lays on the ground and knows the experience of weakness beneath unfair burdens. He feels the powerlessness of wondering if he will ever be able to continue. He is pulled up and made to continue.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I stare at the weakness in his eyes. I can look at his whole body and see the exhaustion.

As I behold him there on the ground, being roughly pulled up, I know forever how profoundly he understands my fatigue and my defeats.

This is for me. In grief and gratitude I want to let him remain there. As I watch him stand again and gain an inner strength, I accept his love and express my thanks.

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother.

Jesus' path takes him to a powerful source of his strength to continue. All his life, his mother had taught him the meaning of the words,

"Behold, the handmaid of the Lord." Now they look into each other's eyes. How pierced-through her heart must be! How pained he must be to see her tears! Now, her grace-filled smile blesses his mission and stirs his heart to its depth. Love and trust in God bind them together.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

As I watch them in this place along the way, I contemplate the mystery of love's power to give strength.

She knows the sorrow in every mother's heart, who has lost a child to tragedy or violence.

I look at the two of them very carefully, and long for such love and such peace.

This is for me. Such incredible freedom. The availability of a servant. I find the words to express what is in my heart.

The Fifth Station: Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross.

Jesus even experiences our struggle to receive help. He is made to experience the poverty of not being able to carry his burden alone. He enters into the experience of all who must depend upon others to survive. He is deprived of the satisfaction of carrying this burden on his own.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I look into his face and contemplate his struggle. His weariness and fragility. His impotence.

I see how he looks at Simon, with utmost humility and gratitude.

This is for me. So I feel anguish and gratitude. I express my thanks that he can continue this journey. That he has help. That he knows my inability to carry my burden alone.

I say what is in my heart, with deep feeling.

The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus.

Jesus' journey is at times brutal. He has entered into the terrible experiences of rejection and injustice. He has been whipped and beaten. His face shows the signs of his solidarity with all who have ever suffered injustice and vile, abusive treatment. He encounters a compassionate, loving disciple who wipes the vulgar spit and mocking blood from his face. On her veil, she discovers the image of his face - his gift to her. And, for us to contemplate forever.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

What does the face of Jesus hold for me? What do I see, as I look deeply into his face?
Can I try to comfort the agony and pain? Can I embrace him, with his face so covered with his passion?

The veil I behold is a true icon of his gift of himself. This is for me. In wonder and awe, I behold his face now wiped clean, and see the depth of his suffering in solidarity with all flesh.

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time.

Even with help, Jesus stumbles and falls to the ground. In deep exhaustion he stares at the earth beneath him. "Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return." He has seen death before. Now he can feel the profound weakness of disability and disease and aging itself, there on his knees, under the weight of his cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I contemplate Jesus brought very low. As I behold him there on the ground, with all the agony taking its toll on him, I let my heart go out to him.

I store up this image in my heart, knowing that I will never feel alone in my suffering or in any diminishment, with this image of Jesus on the ground before me.

This is for me, so I express the feelings in my heart.

The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem.

The women of Jerusalem, and their children, come out to comfort and thank him. They had seen his compassion and welcomed his words of healing and freedom. He had broken all kinds of social and religious conventions to connect with them. Now they are here to support him. He feels their grief. He suffers, knowing he can't remain to help them more in this life. He knows the mystery of facing the separation of death.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I look at their faces. So full of love and gratitude, loss and fear. I contemplate what words might have passed between them. I remember all his tender, compassionate, merciful love for me. I place myself with these women and children to support him.

This is for me. So, I let this scene stir up deep gratitude.

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time.

This last fall is devastating. Jesus can barely proceed to the end. Summoning all this remaining strength, supported by his inner trust in God, Jesus collapses under the weight of the cross. His executioners look at him as a broken man, pathetic yet paying a price he deserves. They help him up so he can make it up the hill of crucifixion.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I pause to contemplate him there on the ground. The brokenness that makes me whole. The surrender that gives me life. I pause to experience and receive how completely he loves me. He is indeed completely poured out for me.

As I treasure this gifted experience, I express what is in my heart.

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped.

Part of the indignity is to be crucified naked. Jesus is completely stripped of any pride. The wounds on his back are torn open again. He experiences the ultimate vulnerability of the defenseless. No shield or security protects him. As they stare at him, his eyes turn to heaven.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I pause to watch the stripping. I contemplate all that is taken from him. And, how he faces his death with such nakedness. I reflect upon how much of himself he has revealed to me. Holding nothing back.

As I look at him in his humility, I know that this is for me, and I share my feelings of gratitude.

The Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross.

Huge nails are hammered through his hands and feet to fix him on the cross. He is bleeding much more seriously now. As the cross is lifted up, the weight of his life hangs on those nails. Every time he struggles to pull himself up to breathe, his ability to cling to life slips away.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I make myself watch the nails being driven through his flesh. And I watch his face. I contemplate the completeness of his entry into our lives. Can there be any pain or agony he would not understand?

This is for me. Nailed to a cross to forever proclaim liberty to captives. What sorrow and gratitude fill my heart!

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies On The Cross.

Between two criminals, a mocking title above his head, with only Mary and John and Mary Magdalene to support him, Jesus surrenders his last

breath: "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I stand there, at the foot of the cross, side by side with all of
humanity, and behold our salvation.

I carefully watch and listen to all that is said.

And then, I experience the one who gives life pass from life to death,
for me. I console Mary and John and Mary. And let them console me.

This is the hour to express the deepest feelings within me.

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken Down From The Cross.

What tender mourning! Jesus' lifeless body lays in his mother's arms.
He has truly died. A profound sacrifice, complete.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I behold this scene at the foot of the cross. I contemplate touching,
caressing his body. I remember all his hands have touched, all who have
been blessed by his warm embrace.

I pause to let it soak in. He knows the mystery of death. He has fallen
into God's hands.

For me. That I might love as I have been loved. I pour out my heart to
the God of all mercies.

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid In The Tomb.

They take the body of Jesus to its resting place. The huge stone over
the tomb is the final sign of the permanence of death. In this final act
of surrender, who would have imagined this tomb would soon be empty
or that Jesus would show himself alive to his disciples, or that they
would recognize him in the breaking of bread? Oh, that our hearts
might burn within us, as we realize how he had to suffer and die so as to

enter into his glory, for us.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I pause to contemplate this act of closure on his life. In solidarity with all humanity, his body is taken to its grave.

I stand for a moment outside this tomb. This final journey of his life has shown me the meaning of his gift of himself for me. This tomb represents every tomb I stand before with fear, in defeat, struggling to believe it could ever be empty.

In the fullness of faith in the Risen One, given by his own Holy Spirit, I express my gratitude for this way of the cross. I ask Jesus, whose hands, feet and side still bear the signs of this journey, to grant me the graces I need to take up my cross to be a servant of his own mission.

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