

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Forward

The cross was a means of executing criminals, like a noose or an electric chair. It was a symbol of shame. Christians turned it into a symbol of victory and honor. Jesus was put to death unjustly. But through his death, burial and resurrection, he brought God's saving love to all. We know that Jesus lives in glory. His death is our victory. His cross is our salvation.

We can pray about this mystery by using the Stations of the Cross. It might be helpful to think of the stations in the same way that we think of bus stops or train stations: places where travelers get on or off. The stations in church are stopping places on our journey with Jesus to Calvary, the place where he died. On our journey we remember that Jesus was willing to suffer so that we could share in God's grace. Now we must be willing to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We must be willing to lay down our own lives for one another.

THE STATIONS

A Brief History

The Stations of the Cross became a popular form of devotional prayer because of the influence of St. Francis of Assisi and his followers. In medieval times, it was customary for penitents to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to walk the way of the cross as a sign of sorrow. Traveling in those days, however, was often perilous and sometimes deadly. Francis thought of "reconstructing" the way of the cross in parish churches so that this penitential devotion might be accessible to everyone. The stations were quite simple at first: plain wooden crosses hung along walls or laid into the floor. As the devotion grew in popularity, the stations themselves became elaborate works of art.

In 1731, Pope Clement XII established the 14 Stations as we know them today. Over the years, the Church has authorized various versions for different occasions. This particular version is a compilation and adaptation of several different versions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Readings adapted from *Children's Daily Prayer*, by Elizabeth McMahon Jeep, ©1991, Archdiocese of Chicago.

Prayers inspired by *Everyone's Way of the Cross*, by Clarence Enzler, ©1986 by Ave Maria Press.

All stand and sing the first two verses of the hymn.

HYMN

Take Up Your Cross

1. Take up your cross, the Savior said,
If you would my disciple be;
Take up your cross with willing heart, And
humbly follow after me.
2. Take up your cross, let not its weight
Fill your weak spirit with alarm;
My strength will bear your spirit up, And
brace your heart, and nerve your arm.
3. Take up your cross, heed not the shame,
And let your foolish heart be still;
The Lord for you accepted death
Upon a cross on Calv'r'y's hill.
4. Take up your cross, then, in his strength,
And calmly ev'ry danger brave;
It guides you to a better home
And leads to vict'ry o'er the grave.
5. Take up your cross, and follow Christ, Nor
think till death to lay it down;
For only those who bear the cross
may hope to wear U1e glorious crown.

Text by Charles W. Everest, 1814-1877.

OPENING PRAYER

All begin by making the sign of the cross.

LEADER: Each of us has been given a journey, a road to walk from birth to baptism, and from baptism to Easter joy. Jesus, too, had to make a journey. For three years he walked the roads of Israel. He preached God's love and forgiveness. "Come, follow me," he said. And many followed. But when he was arrested, many ran away. They were afraid to follow him through death to life. Through this meditation, we will follow his last road, the road to Calvary. We will walk and pray with him...

PEOPLE: Loving God, give us a share in Jesus' courage and grace. And bless all those who still struggle on their way. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.



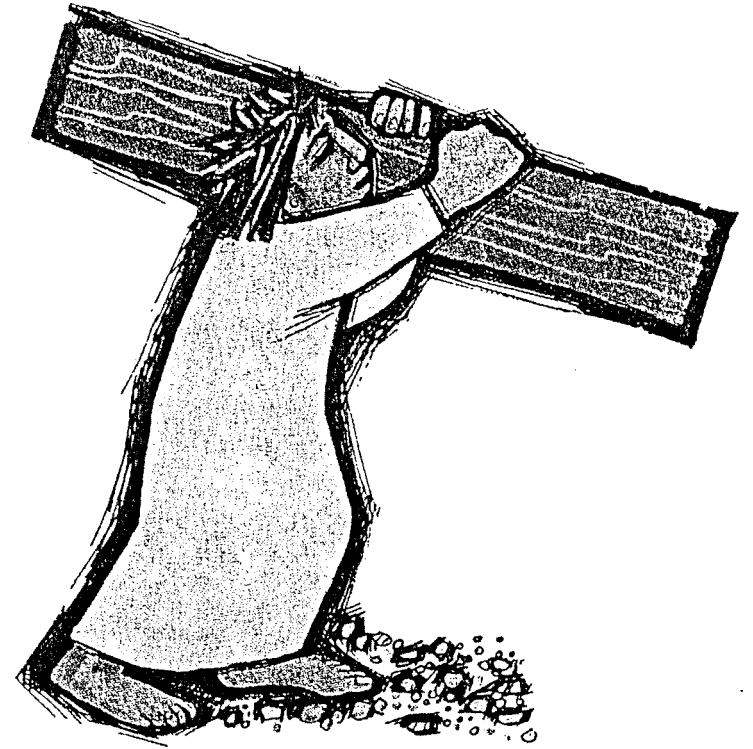
THE FIRST STATION

Jesus Is Sentenced To Death

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!
 PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: The judges said that Jesus must die. They thought they were doing the right thing. But God has said, "You shall not murder." People who judge others are often wrong. "Do not judge," says the Lord. So many people die unjustly! Many die from drugs or hunger. Many are beaten or neglected. Many die in war. Many people, like Jesus, are given to death by others who think they are doing the right thing.

PEOPLE: **God of Mercy, make yourself known to those who are in trouble. Save us when we are alone. Help us when we have no one but you. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE SECOND STATION

Jesus Takes Up The Cross

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!
 PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: Jesus was made to carry his own cross. None of us likes the cross that we must sometimes carry. None of us likes problems and pain. Yet we know that there are times when we must bear burdens that no one can take away from us. Such burdens won't go away. They must be carried. Jesus said, "If you wish to become my follower, take up your cross each day and follow me." With God's help we can carry our cross, just as Jesus did.

PEOPLE: **Strong and faithful God, we believe that you are with us as we carry our crosses with Jesus. Remind us of your presence, and help us to recognize that the strength we need to carry our burdens comes from you. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE THIRD STATION

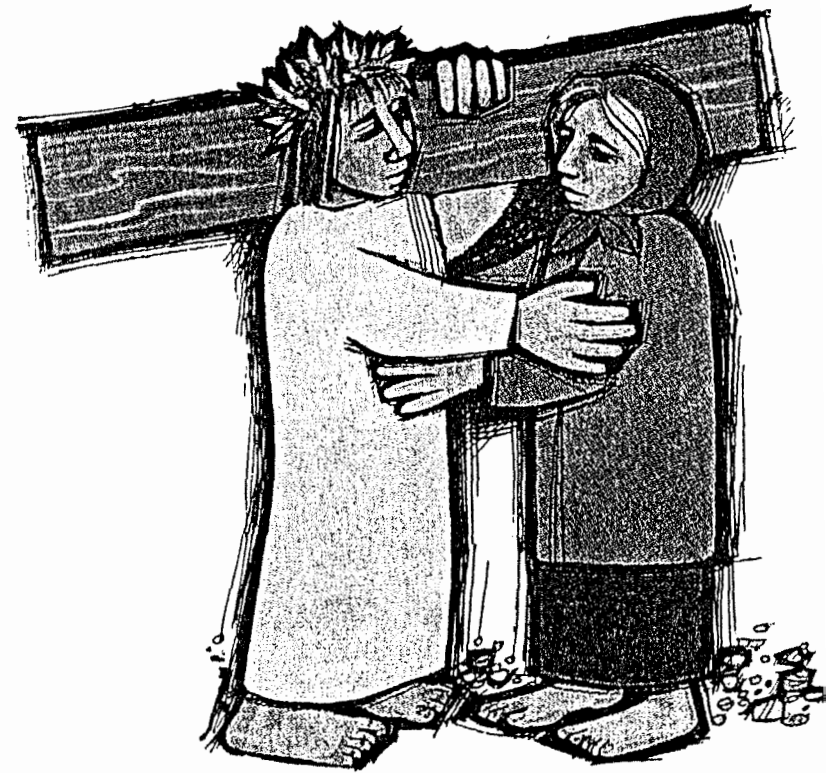
Jesus Falls A First Time

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!

PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: Jesus falls down, but begins again. The soldiers push him to get going. They don't wait. They don't even give him a chance. We know what that's like, for we're often rushed and pushed. There are times when no one waits for us to get ready, to learn, to practice, to be sure which way to turn. Of course we fall. We stumble. We fail. But we, too, get up. We begin again.

PEOPLE: **Kind God, we ask you to help us accept our weaknesses, our "handicaps" of humanity, as the way to your loving kindness. Make us content with all our discontents, and give us the strength to begin again. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE FOURTH STATION

Jesus Meets His Mother

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!

PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: Mary did not run and hide like the disciples did. She was not afraid to be with Jesus, because she was his mother. She could not carry his cross for him, but maybe her presence there gave him strength. Mothers often worry about the troubles of their children. Yet, they do not want their children to be afraid to meet the problems of the world. Like Mary, we sometimes find ourselves with others during bad times, to give each other courage.

PEOPLE: **God of all Consolation, we know that to carry our cross we must often stand and watch the suffering of those who are dear to us. We must let them watch our suffering, too. Help us to believe that, for those who love you, all things work together for good. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE FIFTH STATION

Simon Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

LEADER: *We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!*

PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: Jesus tried, but he could not go on alone. Someone had to help. We know what that's like, for none of us can travel our road without some help. Simon didn't know Jesus. He was just part of the crowd. Maybe he had other things he wanted to do that day. But he helped. No matter where we are we see people who need help. Jesus said, "Whatever you do for the least of my people, you do for me." Do we make people beg us? Do we need to have people force us to help? Do we miss all the chances to help Jesus carry his cross?

PEOPLE: **Compassionate God, help us to realize that every time we lift a burden from another's back, we are lifting the cross for Christ. Open our eyes to see that the kindness we extend to others is really given to you. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE SIXTH STATION

Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!

PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: There was blood and spit on his face, and sweat, and maybe tears. Jesus looked terrible, and many refused to look at him. But Veronica stepped up and wiped his face. It didn't make his injuries any less painful. It didn't save him from death. But her courage must have brought him comfort. He knew that someone was trying to help. Someone was on his side. They say that Jesus left a picture of his face on her towel. He surely left an image in her heart, for that's what Veronica's name means -- true image. She had learned his message, "Love one another as I have loved you." Now she was following his example.

PEOPLE: **Loving God, make us brave enough to wipe your Son's bloody face wherever suffering exists. Keep us close to you, so that we won't run away in fear. Thus, may we reveal no more Christ's blood but his glorious face on earth. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE SEVENTH STATION

Jesus Falls A Second Time

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!
 PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: Jesus was still a young man when he was condemned to death. But now he was at the end of his strength. He fell again. There are so many things that pull us down, that make us give up, that make us tired or frustrated or hopeless. Most people don't want a leader who falls down. Who will follow Jesus now? Who will *believe* that his weakness is strength, and the strength of his enemies is weakness? Once before, when many followers left him, he asked the apostles, "Do you also wish to go away?"

PEOPLE: **Give us courage, Lord, when failure presses heavy upon us, when we are desolate. Stretch out your hand and lift us up. Give us the assurance that alone we can do nothing. But with you we can do anything. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

All sing the third and fourth verses of the hymn.



THE EIGHTH STATION

Jesus Meets the Daughters of Jerusalem

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!
 PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: As Jesus struggles through the streets of Jerusalem, he meets the "Daughters of Jerusalem," a term which means *the people of the land*, the poor. This crowd of poor outcasts begins to cry. Jesus knows that all who follow him will have a share in his suffering. They will have sickness and failures and disappointments like everyone. But they will also suffer because they refuse to take part in sin. People who don't want to give up sin, and many who just don't understand, will turn against the followers of Jesus. His followers will suffer as he suffered.

PEOPLE: **Patient God, teach us the way of compassion. Help us to comfort those who seek solace, to put on gentleness like a garment. Make us kind like you. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE NINTH STATION

Jesus Falls Third Time

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

LEADER: Jesus is almost at the end of the road. Why does he stumble now? Perhaps his feet do not want to take him closer to death. Of course he doesn't want to die, but his strength is failing. It's only with God's help that he can go on. It doesn't matter how often he has fallen, or how many people have failed him. It doesn't matter how fearful or lonely he is. He gets up and moves on. God will not fail him.

PEOPLE: **God of Power and Might, when all our strength is gone, protect us from despair. Help us to know that we can begin again, no matter what our past has been. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE TENTH STATION

Jesus Is Stripped Of His Garments

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!
 PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: Jesus owns nothing now, not even his clothes. But he hasn't lost his dignity. He isn't ashamed to stand naked before God. Jesus holds nothing back. He's willing to let them take everything away, rather than give up the work God has called him to do. No wonder his followers have deserted him. It's hard to see a great Messiah here. It's hard to think that this man, naked and penniless, will sit at God's right hand. Yet, that's how we all must be ready to meet God -- not hiding behind cover-ups, but as we truly are. God is all we really need. God is the only gift. Is our faith enough for us?

PEOPLE: **Precious God, help us to be detached from our cravings for prestige or power or wealth. Root out of us all traces of envy. Release us from the vice of pride. Make us poor in spirit, so that we may be rich in you. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE ELEVENTH STATION

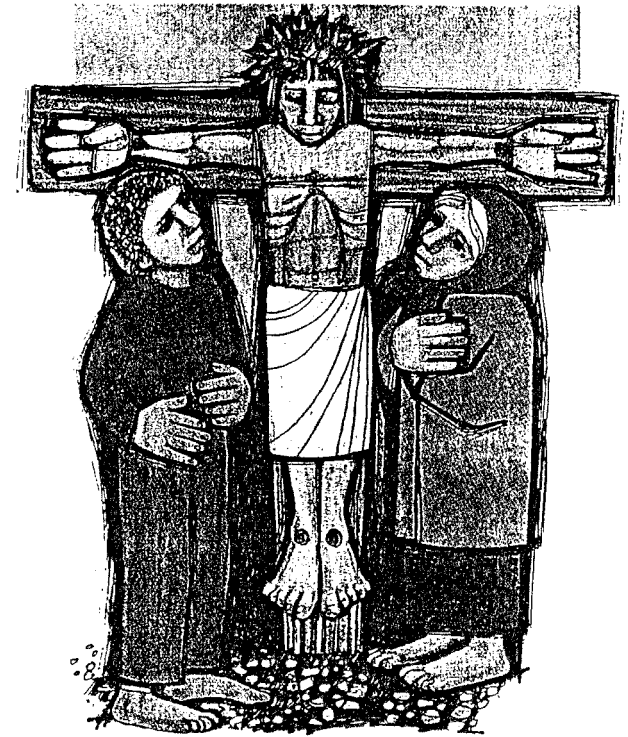
Jesus Is Nailed To The Cross

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!

PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: It's so hard to bear physical pain! Yet Jesus was willingly nailed to a cross! In this upside-down world, many of us cause pain. We laugh at what we should condemn. We turn away when we should help. We scorn the goodness of others. We yawn in the face of excitement. All of these "nails" cause pain to Jesus, because he has taken the pain of the world and made it his own. He takes away its power. In the mystery of suffering is buried the mystery of redemption.

PEOPLE: **Forgiving God, help us to recognize the precious gift of love that is the cross of Christ. May we accept our own crosses with the same love, so that we can work with him for the redemption of the world. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE TWELTH STATION

Jesus Dies On The Cross

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!

PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: Jesus is raised up on the cross so that we all can be drawn to God through him. He says little. He's thirsty. He comforts a man dying beside him. He asks his mother and friends to care for each other. He asks God to forgive those who have brought him to the cross. In the darkness, he calls out to God, who seems to have abandoned him. Everything is gone now, except his life. That, too, he gives freely. He prays, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

All pause and kneel. After a period of silent prayer, the reader continues:

A soldier says words that have echoed in hearts through the ages since that day: "Clearly, this was God's Son!"

PEOPLE: **God, our Father, be near to us as we offer you our daily" dyings." O God, our God, do not forsake us, for we know not what we do. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE THIRTEENTH STATION

Jesus Is Taken Down From The Cross

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!

PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: Mary and a few of Jesus' friends gather and weep. They are heartbroken. What will become of Jesus' dreams, his vision, his works? Everything is finished, ruined. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't seem right. All they can do now is trust in God. Trust and weep. The suffering of Jesus is over, but their own suffering is not. So, too, do we all suffer every time we experience a profound loss. All of us must embrace death --the death of a loved one, the death of a dream, the death of a relationship. But, like Jesus, we are called to live a new life with God.

PEOPLE: **O God, help us accept the deaths that are part of life. Give us the grace and courage to go on. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**



THE FOURTEENTH STATION

The Body of Jesus Is Placed In The Tomb

LEADER: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!

PEOPLE: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

LEADER: The enemies of Jesus think they have won. His followers are disappointed. He was not the kind of messiah they had wanted. Jesus had not ended war or sickness. He had not ended hunger or pain or poverty. They did not know that Jesus would rise on the third day and be with them again. So, they were discouraged. Even today many people are disappointed with Jesus. He seems to have left so much work unfinished. We follow a Messiah who expects us to help with his work. One day the work of Jesus will be finished. For nothing can keep his message from changing the world. At that time, all who shared in his life will also share in his glory.

PEOPLE: **God of Glory, help us to remember Jesus' suffering and death when our road is rugged, and give us hope. Urge us on by the power of your grace. Inspire us to change the world through the power of your love. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

LEADER: We pray with all who look forward to the coming of God's kingdom, the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples:

PEOPLE: **Our Father...**

CONCLUDING PRAYER & DISMISSAL

LEADER: Let us pray: God of all Creation, help us to accept each moment with faith and trust. Show us the way that leads to you, that we may follow your way with our lives, and our lives may be crowned by your glory. We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

PEOPLE: **Amen.**

LEADER: Go now, take up your cross, and follow Christ!

PEOPLE: **Thanks be to God!**

All sing the last verse of the hymn.