

CONTEMPLATING THE WAY OF THE CROSS
A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH
OUR CRUCIFIED LORD

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Introduction

Contemplating the Way of the Cross is inspired by the rich spiritual heritage of the founder of my religious order, the Daughters of Saint Paul. Blessed James Alberione established the Pauline Family back in the 1900s. We are truly a "family" of religious congregations, secular institutes, and lay cooperators: ten in all living in the spirit of Saint Paul. Like Saint Ignatius before him, Blessed Alberione recommended that when we pray we place ourselves in the scene of the Gospel we are contemplating.

Praying with the imagination is a wonderful way to contemplate the Gospel stories, especially the life of Christ. Imaginative prayer involves using the gift of our imagination to experience the Lord's presence in the Scriptures by entering into the story; it's very relational. When we place ourselves in the scene, we imagine that we are there, living the word with all our senses: seeing, hearing, and pondering all that is happening. Since learning this time-tested method, I have used it while praying the Way of the Cross, and it has reaped great fruits in my spiritual life.

As you pray this Way of the Cross, I invite you to pray it imaginatively. When you pray in this way you need only visualize the Gospel event as if you were there; let it unfold before you and be part of the scene. Use all your senses. Who is there? What is happening? What is the mood? Be aware of the smells, the sounds, the energy, the reactions, and your own feelings. Get involved in the story and let your imagination take you where it will.

Praying imaginatively is not just about remembering how it might have been, or constructing a mental picture, nor is it about historical accuracy. It's about being there now and letting God speak to you, stir you, strengthen you, enlighten you, and comfort you. Imaginative prayer is an invitation to the Holy Spirit to bring the Word to life in us at a deeper level, so that it may become always more personal and transforming.

Before you begin to pray the following Stations, spend a few quiet minutes asking the Holy Spirit to sanctify your imagination and to guide you through the Way of the Cross together with Jesus and Mary. When you begin, bullet points are given to help you set the scene in your imagination. As you read,

imagine yourself with Jesus, Mary, and the others who were present. Watch their interactions and be aware of your own reactions. If you are praying the Stations alone, you might feel inspired to replace or add to the reflections or prayers with your own. Follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in you.

The Way of the Cross is a testimonial of Christ's unquantifiable love! May your contemplation of the Passion of Christ open to you the Heart of Christ and intensify your love for him. Many graces await the one who prays with Scripture. Each time I contemplate the Way of the Cross, new treasures of understanding and grace are laid open before me, a deeper awareness of Jesus' immeasurable love, greater love for God and for my brothers and sisters, new intimacies with Jesus, and a more intense resolve to live for him, "who has loved me and given himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). I pray that your own prayer is blessed by the One who calls you friend- the Friend who laid down his own life for you.

Scripture

*"Come, all you who pass by the way, look and see
Whether there is any suffering like my suffering."*

-LAMENTATIONS 1:12

Prayer

Lord Jesus, let me follow you in life, embracing the crosses that come my way, uniting them with your own sorrowful passion and death. I want to keep my eyes fixed on you, who suffered for love of me, atoning for my sins and healing all my wounds. Strengthen me with your grace in every difficulty, and at the end of this earthly sojourn, to your mercy, welcome me into eternal bliss. Amen.

FIRST STATION

JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

*Though he was harshly treated,
he submitted and opened not his mouth;*

*Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers
he was silent and opened not his mouth.*

Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away.

-ISAIAH 53:7-8

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Jesus stands silently, in my place, before Pilate.
- He is surrounded by those who wish to condemn him unjustly out of jealousy.
- Pilate recognizes Jesus' innocence. Nevertheless, he sentences Jesus to be crucified.

Meditation

My dearest Jesus, you stand in front of Pilate drained of blood. Your body and face are marked by the agony you have just endured- first, in the garden of Gethsemane, then at the mock trials, the gruesome scourging, the cruel crowning with thorns. Only your will keeps you alive right now, your will to drink the chalice completely (see Mt 20:22). Jesus, you remain alive because of your great love for the Father, for us, for me. O, the magnitude of your love! From my place in the crowd I watch what is taking place. Most of the people around me jeer and clamor for your death-the same people who witnessed your miracles and holiness of life. The crowd is fickle. I see the blood dripping from your face and limbs, and my heart feels like it's being torn from my breast! I fall to my knees upon seeing you so reduced and yet still surpassing all of us in dignity, humility, and courage. Pilate declares, "Behold, the man!" (Jn 19:5). A weak man, Pilate tries to please everyone at the cost of righteousness. He judges wrongly and condemns. Though treated unjustly, you, dear Jesus, are silent. Pilate's unjust condemnation brings to awareness the times I have condemned others without evidence or sufficient reason.

Prayer

Jesus, you are my example and my strength. Please help me to love you with indomitable love, fidelity, and courage. Replace my pride with humility so that I may never judge or condemn others

SECOND STATION

Jesus Takes Up His Cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

The LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all. ISAIAH 53:6

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Jesus' shoulders are ripped and torn, so brutally scourged.
- The heavy, rough Cross is laid upon Jesus' wounds.
- As Jesus cries out in pain, the crowd yells, "Crucify him!"

Meditation

Jesus, Rabbouni, my Teacher and Master, you embrace the cross and let yourself be led meekly, like a lamb to the slaughter. People are shouting insults, throwing stones, and uttering blasphemies. The frenzied cries of "Crucify him!" pierce my soul with anguish. The crowd has become irrational and wild. Fear rises within me, but my eyes focus on you, and I see how calm you are. I counter the cries of the crowd with, "Lamb of God, have mercy on us!" Jesus, you look at everyone around you, including me, with a gaze filled with forgiveness. Then you begin moving forward, carrying the cross. You are totally surrendered, one with the Father. To the very end you teach me how Love behaves. I run to you, desiring to help you bear the weight. "Let me help you, Jesus!" You shake your head, and I understand that you have come for this reason. You desire to drink this bitter chalice to the very last drop for our redemption. Your eyes encourage me to use my strength to help my brothers and sisters with their crosses. I continue to walk with you toward Golgotha in surrender and adoration, my eyes full of tears and my heart renewed in love.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, in your suffering, as in all of your life, you are my Teacher. Let me never take my eyes off you but learn from you how I should live. Teach me the way of forgiveness and compassion.

THIRD STATION

Jesus Falls the First Time

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

Insult has broken my heart, and I am weak. PSALM 69:21

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Jesus stumbles and falls.
- The soldiers flog him, screaming at him to get up.
- Jesus has lost so much blood; he is weak beyond endurance!

Meditation

O my blessed Jesus, you stumble and fall. Your Holy Face is pressed in the dirt, your mouth filled with dust to the point of choking. Will no one help you? I try to reach toward you, but an angry soldier holds me back. Your face is disfigured and marred beyond recognition, covered with blood and dirt. You are exhausted. Our gazes meet. Your compassion impresses itself upon my heart. You help me to understand that this fall is to sustain those who are tempted. I hear your voice whispering within, "Lift up the fallen; encourage the weak. In your weakness I am near you with my strength." I remember the words of Saint Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor 12:9). Jesus, you are my Teacher, even in apparent powerlessness.

Prayer

Lord, deliver me from every form of self-sufficiency and teach me compassion and trust. Let my every fall draw me closer to you.

FOURTH STATION

Jesus Meets His Mother

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

And you yourself a sword will pierce. LUKE 2:35

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Jesus sees his Mother in the crowd. Mary rushes to her Son.
- As Mary gazes into her suffering Son's face, she remembers the prophecy of Simeon (see Lk 2:25-35). The sword of sorrow plunges deep into her heart.
- Mary's grief immeasurable, she repeats "Fiat! Let it be done unto me" (see Lk 1:38).

Meditation

Loving Jesus, your gaze meets the gaze of your Mother. How agonizing for you to see her in so much pain! You and your Mother are one perfect communion of heart and soul. Mary does not abandon you on the road to Calvary. Instead she walks alongside you, suffering your every pain, offering her pain along with yours to the Father. Your Sacred Heart and her Immaculate Heart beat together for humanity. You look at me; your eyes say, "Learn from her." I nod, too full of sorrow to speak. I draw closer to Mary and silently take her arm. She squeezes my hand and says softly, "Thank you." I can feel Mary's strength flow through me, sustaining me in the way of discipleship. From her I learn the measure of a mother's heart.

Prayer

O Mary, teach me to love as you love. Form my heart to be like yours, to reflect your Son. Pray that the sufferings and sorrows of this life may forge my heart into a crucible of love

FIFTH STATION

Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. MARK 8:34

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Simon passes by; he remembers Jesus from his preaching.
- A soldier notices Simon and yells, "Take this cross!"
- Jesus smiles at Simon as he accepts the cross and touches his arm in grateful acknowledgement.

Meditation

O loving Master, how I wish I could help you carry your cross! Simon helps you willingly. This encounter will change his life. This cross will mark Simon's life in such a way as to transform all his future crosses into offerings of joy. I whisper a prayer to you, Jesus, and you show your acceptance. My love can never measure up to yours, but you are pleased, and it comforts you. Accept my offering of love. I especially desire to make reparation for those priests, religious, and lay people who have grown cold in their love for you and are no longer committed to what they have promised. May I love you more ardently and serve you more faithfully. May there be many holy men and women consecrated to you and many faithful Christians committed to you.

Prayer

Lord, allow me, like Simon, to lift some of the weight from your wounded and rejected Heart. Give me the grace to recognize you in those in need and to reach out generously.

SIXTH STATION

Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

I looked for sympathy, but there was none; for comforters, and I found none.

-PSALM 69:21

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Veronica approaches Jesus, unafraid to be associated with him in his suffering.
- She presses a cloth to Jesus' face to wipe away the blood and dirt.
- The image of Christ's face appears on the cloth.

Meditation

Blessed Veronica, how greatly your courage in approaching Jesus would be rewarded! How tenderly you blot Jesus' face, that face so marred by suffering and pain. Veronica, you are a model of those who make atonement and reparation for the injuries caused by others. Jesus and his Mother give you a look of gratitude; I, too, am grateful. Jesus' face is more recognizable now. All it took was a gesture of true love. No words are exchanged between you and Jesus; your glance and gesture are their own prayer. As I stand and watch this scene, I realize that I also am called to reveal Jesus' Face in my suffering sisters and brothers. Through acts of love, I can blot away the splotches of blood and the dust of daily fatigue. I am sorry, Jesus, for my every failure to love. This encounter with Veronica inspires me to love more, as she does. Mary draws me closer, and I know she can see some of what is happening in my soul. How generous God is with his grace!

Prayer

Humble Savior, grant me the grace to see beyond the visible and to recognize your hidden presence in every person before me. Impress your virtue on my heart.

SEVENTH STATION

Jesus Falls the Second Time

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

I lie prostrate in the dust. PSALM 119:25

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Jesus stumbles yet again, and suddenly he is kneeling in the road.
- Soldiers kick and curse him, then roughly jerk Jesus to his feet.
- Jesus cries out in agony as he rises and plods on.

Meditation

The weight of our sins-my sins-is oppressive. Under the burden, Jesus, you fall a second time. I make my way through the crowd to your side, my suffering Redeemer. The anguish in your eyes penetrates my very soul. You have become the opprobrium of humanity, the rejected one of the people. You help me to understand that this second fall repairs repeated sins. How many of my own habitual sins flash before my mind! "Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings he endured" (Is 53:4). As I gaze upon you, I realize that you are bearing not only infrequent sins of weakness and impulse, but sinful lifestyles and sins of habit. I reach out to lift you up, this Son of Man I love so much! The soldiers grow impatient. They shove me away from you and I stumble and fall. Someone from the crowd helps me up. Mary reaches out to support me and gingerly wipes the dirt from my face.

Prayer

My merciful Jesus, grant me the grace to resist sin, to renounce and reject all sinful attachments and to avoid anything that could lead me to sin. Let me be there for others when they need some- one to lift them up.

EIGHTH STATION

Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

The joy of our hearts has ceased, our dance has turned into mourning.

LAMENTATIONS 5:15

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- A group of women approach Jesus, defying the soldiers' prohibition.
- They are loudly weeping and wailing-the ritual for the dead.
- Jesus pauses and speaks to them with concern and gentleness.

Meditation

Jesus, you scarcely have any breath left in you, and yet you stop to console these women. You prepare them for what is to come. In words barely audible, you whisper, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children" (Lk 23:28). I am moved as I watch you completely give your attention to these women. Despite your own suffering, you reach out with concern to others. I am reminded of your words just the day before, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (Jn 13:15). Each day I face so many opportunities to reach out to others, but sometimes it is difficult to go beyond my own self-interest. I turn to Mary and say, "Help · me to be more like your Son and like you."

Prayer

My dearest Jesus, impress the charity of your Heart on my heart. Like you, help me to be more concerned with others' needs than with my own.

NINTH STATION

Jesus Falls the Third Time

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

I am numb and utterly crushed. -PSALM 38:9

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Jesus collapses, falling to the ground.
- His body crumples to the dust. He has no strength left; he is crushed.
- Unlike the last two times, the soldiers help Jesus to his feet.

Meditation

Jesus, you fall yet again. You are having a hard time focusing your energy and can scarcely stand. I draw close and you lean on me for support. "He's not going to make it," I cry to anyone who will listen. "He can't go on!" A soldier yells, "Enough! Get back!" He motions for me to rejoin Mary. I don't want to leave you, Jesus, but you nod, and I know that I must obey. You help me to understand that this third fall repairs sins of obstinacy and pride. Your docility to the Father is for those who are stuck in sin, unable to get up and extricate themselves. The merits of your passion lift them up. I take my place by Mary's side and marvel at her courage and strength; it is the strength of one who believes in the promise of God and fully trusts in him, even amid the most excruciating suffering.

Prayer

O my Jesus, let me practice humility for you! Help me to live in docility, both when it is easy and when it is not. Let me keep your example and that of your humble Mother always before me.

TENTH STATION

Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity. One of those from whom men hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem. ISAIAH 53:3

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Jesus reaches the Place of the Skull. As his garment is ripped from his body, his wounds are torn open again.
- Stripped, Jesus is humiliated before the crowd.
- A sword pierces his Mother's heart as she witnesses this shameful deed.

Meditation

O my suffering Jesus, how your humiliation causes me to weep! I want to scream and push the gaping crowds away. Your glance restrains me. I wish I could at least cover you, but I know there is nothing that I can do. I am help- less. But I know that your humiliation and degradation are for the salvation and healing of many. Even stripped naked and covered with gap- ing, ugly wounds, you are dignified and peaceful. I hear your familiar whisper in my heart, "You are worth all of this." I am overcome by your tender- ness in such a cruel moment. I want to prostrate myself before you and adore you in your marred humanity. I weep for what has been done to you. I suddenly realize that when I insist on life on my own terms and cling to control, I, too, strip you of the power that is yours alone. I do not always allow you to be God. I am filled with sorrow. I would rather die than offend you again! Through my tears I feel Mary's hand upon my shoulder. Love passes from your Mother to me.

Prayer

Dearest Mother, help me to live my life on the Father's terms and to let go of control. Even in life's most difficult and painful moments, help me to remain serene, trusting in the Lord who loves me. Teach me to repeat especially then, "Fiat: Your will be done."

ELEVENTH STATION

Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

*They have pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones.
They look on and gloat over me. PSALM 22:17-18*

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- The soldiers throw Jesus' body down and stretch it across the cross.
- One soldier positions a nail and lets the blow of the hammer hit hard, ripping tendon and flesh.
- Jesus' cry of agony pierces the air three times.

Meditation

How difficult to watch this scene! My heart feels torn in two. Mary's face is filled with anguish. My soul trembles at the incredible cruelty heaped on you, my loving Jesus! I understand now the true depths of the evil of sin. But I also see something far more powerful and important- the immensity of your Divine Love. Your love is without limits or conditions, it does not count the cost, it endures beyond endurance. Speechless, I bow before your Cross in adoration. Like Saint Paul, I want to know only you, Jesus crucified (see 1 Cor 2:2). I desire to be nailed to the cross along with you, my Jesus. Humanly speaking, I am afraid and would rather run from pain, but you have readied my heart, Lord, and I trust in you.

Prayer

My crucified Savior, wounded for love of me, by your sacred wounds keep me bound to you. Remove from me all selfishness. Teach me to love as you love: with generosity, not counting the cost, ready to suffer for love.

TWELFTH STATION

Jesus Suffers Three Hours and Dies

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." LUKE 23:46

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Mary, John, and Mary Magdalene stand under the cross until the end.
- As Jesus suffers, he forgives his executioners, promises paradise to a thief, entrusts his followers to his Mother, and renders his spirit to the Father.
- A soldier pierces Jesus' side with a lance; blood and water flow out (see Jn 19:34).

Meditation

The moment of Redemption has arrived, and it happens with your forgiveness and in your surrender. I stand with Mary, John, Mary Magdalene, and the other women under the Cross. I refuse to be separated from you, my Jesus. In this moment I know no fear. Somehow your own love and courage have driven my fear from me. We stand under that Cross and wait. We are exhausted with grief, but we all want to be here, only here. My heart and my ears are aware of your every labored breath, every sacred word, and every sacred silence. As you speak, your seven last words burn themselves deep into my soul:

1. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).
2. "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).
3. "Woman, behold your son; son behold your mother" (Jn 19:26).
4. "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mt 27:46).
5. "I thirst" (Jn 19:28).
6. "It is finished" (Jn 19:30).
7. "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

After you breathe your last, I gaze upon your sacred body, the body that can no longer feel pain. I kiss your pierced and bloodied feet, now so disfigured. O wounded Love, I adore you!

Prayer

O Jesus, let me quench your thirst! Not with vinegar and gall, but with love and devotion: loving devotion to you in my sisters and brothers, in their needs, and in their sufferings. May my love, like yours, be strong and capable of the ultimate sacrifice.

THIRTEENTH STATION

Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil; for you are at my side.

PSALM 23:4

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- A soldier pries the nails from Jesus' hands and feet.
- Jesus is slowly lifted from the cross.
- Mary receives her dead Son into her arms.

Meditation

In this most sacred moment and in the stillness of death, I contemplate your wounds, dear Jesus. I am still overcome by all that has happened on this sorrowful day. I know that you live in your divinity and yet your absence in this instant is so very real. Your body is dead, but still I desire to be near it; it is precious. As I help clean your body for burial, I linger with my heart and my eyes on each wound. Every one of them speak to me of your unconditional love. I am reminded again of the words of Isaiah:

"But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins.

*Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole,
by his stripes we were healed" (Is 53:5).*

While I contemplate you, Nicodemus pries away the crown of thorns from your head. It is a hushed moment, one of inward weeping and pain. Gingerly, I touch your sacred head, your Holy Face. I kiss your brow and the wounds in your hands. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13).

I see the gaping wound in your side. It is large enough to place my entire hand in. I remember how blood and water flowed from that pierced side-the blood and water that washed me clean of every sin and defilement (see Jn 19:34). Timidly I touch the wound that has sheltered me all my life. Filled with gratitude, I reverence it.

Prayer

My dearest Jesus, I love you. I desire to love you above all things until death, to never choose anything or anyone rather than you. Shelter me in your wounded side, and have mercy on me.

FOURTEENTH STATION

Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture

At nightfall, weeping enters in, but with the dawn, rejoicing. PSALM 30:6

Scene

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- Jesus' sacred body is washed and wrapped in a burial cloth.
- He is laid in a new tomb in a nearby garden, and a massive stone is rolled into place to cover the entrance.
- Mary Magdalene keeps vigil.

Meditation

It's all so final. Life as it was before is over. The apostles have gone into hiding, but I remain with Mary Magdalene and the women. I have spent enough of my life hiding, being fearful. Jesus, you promised something new, a risen life, and you keep your word. Expectantly, I position myself in the garden near the tomb. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, leaves with John. Her faith is so secure that she does not need to wait and watch. She will await the hour of God in perfect surrender, as always, and she will not be disappointed. Her grief is filled with hope. We are not alone in the garden. The angels of God are also keeping vigil here. Hope and trust flood my soul. I feel a new confidence: "I know him in whom I have believed and am confident that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day" (2 Tm 1:12). When morning breaks I will see the Lord!

Prayer

My divine Redeemer, as I contemplate you in the tomb, I am reminded of the words of Saint Paul, that if we have died with you we shall also live with you (see 2 Tm 2:11). This fills me with consolation. Let me be so united with you in this life that my death will be a passing into the joy of beholding your face forever in eternal life.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O my Lord Jesus Christ, may your death be my life, make me learn how to -find life in your death.

May your struggles be my rest, your human weakness my strength, your embarrassment my honor, your passion my delight, your sadness my joy, and in your humiliation may I be exalted.

In a word, may I find all my blessings in the trials that you, O Lord, suffered on the road to death. Amen.