

The Way of the Cross



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Redemptorist

Prayer Before Setting Out

Lord Jesus Christ, here I am, ready to walk in your footsteps on the road to Calvary - and beyond - ready to let my imagination be captured by the astonishing drama of your Passion.

Awaken my soul to be astonished by it all over again - this greatest declaration of love our God has ever made to the world.

Mother Mary, take my hand, walk with me, and lead me deep into the mystery of your Son's suffering, death, and resurrection.

Amen.



First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death

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.

'Behold the Man,' Pontius Pilate says as he presents you to the crowd after your scourging and crowning with thorns.

Lord, you are a sorry sight, close to death from the savage scourging, bleeding from head to ankles, a half-destroyed man, yet the most complete man the world has ever known.

Pilate's words have a deeper truth than he realises: 'Behold the Man' sums up what your Church has been saying to the world ever since -

Look at him, learn from him, this is the One the world has longed for, "the Desire of the Everlasting Hills".

Crucify him! they cry, the blind, the misguided, the self-righteous.

These days, we simply dismiss you as irrelevant, or drift from you into indifference.

It's another world now, we say, we've outgrown all that.

Uncomplaining, you stand before the world, absorbing our perversity. Your silence pierces my soul.

I behold you now, dear Lord, and acknowledge my sins. I cannot wash my hands as Pilate did.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Second Station: Jesus Receives His Cross

SECOND STATION

Jesus Receives His Cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Lord, you sweated blood at the horror of what was coming and begged that you would not have to drink the cup of sorrow set before you.

But here you are now, freely accepting and embracing the dreaded Cross.

The wood is rough and heavy, but heavier still is the weight of human misery and wickedness that you take upon yourself.

"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," Isaiah foretold long ago.

A mystery of Love that spans the ages is unfolding before our eyes.

You are gathering into your arms all the grief and sinfulness of humanity, 'becoming sin' as St Paul says so startlingly, to break the power of all the dark forces in the world.

Through you the world was created. Now you begin your work of creating it anew, nearer to your heart's desire.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

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.

It is less than a week, Lord, since Palm Sunday, when you entered Jerusalem to cheers and shouts: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord!"

Now, to jeers and shouts of a different kind, you leave that beloved city for the last time.

Weakened by scourging, and beatings, and crowned with thorns, you fall beneath the weight of the Cross.

The brutal reality of what is happening begins to dawn on me.

What terrible things we humans can do to each other! Here we are venting some dark fury on the most innocent man ever born.

There are more terrifying forces at work here than mere human perversity. A weight of evil presses you to the ground.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

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.

Your Mother, Lord, can only look on helplessly as you stumble and fall on the stony streets. Her instinct to run and pick you up is denied.

Her heart is breaking, pierced by the sword of suffering that Simeon had foreseen when she presented you in the Temple.

Little did she know then, little does she know now, of the deep destiny that is unfolding in both of you.

But her prayer is still the same: "Here I am! Let it be done to me according to your Word."

Now you are both beyond words. Only your eyes can convey ... what? Heartbreak. Love. Compassion. And a union of souls that has never been greater.

She is one with you in everything.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Fifth Station: Simon Helps Jesus

FIFTH STATION

Simon Helps Jesus

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

They feared it would be too much for you, Lord, so Simon, the bystander from North Africa, is forced to help you carry the Cross.

A reluctant helper, Simon, but his part in your Passion is a blessing: it brings him and his family to believe in you.

May this journey of mine bring me also to a deeper faith and overcome my reluctance to follow you wholeheartedly.

I remember your words: 'If you would be my disciple, take up your cross daily and follow me.'

Like Simon, may I find blessing in helping you carry your Cross.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

*Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound
renew of my Saviour crucified.*



Sixth Station: Jesus Meets Veronica

SIXTH STATION

Jesus Meets Veronica

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

You are losing blood from many wounds, Lord.

Your back and legs bleed from the vicious scourging. Your head bleeds from the piercing thorns.

Your face is bruised and bleeding from the brutal beatings.

A good woman emerges from the crowd, defying the soldiers. She presses a towel tenderly to your face.

When you are hurried onwards, she is left with the imprint of your features on her towel. Veronica, we call her ever since, meaning 'True Image.'

Let me dwell a while, Lord, on this lovely moment of human tenderness.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Seventh Station: Jesus Falls a Second Time

SEVENTH STATION

Jesus Falls a Second Time

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

You fall to the ground a second time, Lord, the Cross heavy upon you, your wounds set throbbing again.

How remarkable that Isaiah foreshadowed all this centuries before: "He was despised, shunned by all, pain-racked and afflicted ... an object from which people turn away their eyes."

But Isaiah saw an astounding truth beneath the brutal appearances:

"It was our afflictions he was bearing, our pain he endured ... He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities."

It is not just a wooden Cross that pins you to the ground, Lord, but the weight of human wickedness. Mine included.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



*Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of
Jerusalem*

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.

The good women who weep for you, Lord, are being 'compassionate as our Heavenly Father is compassionate.'

In stopping and turning towards them, you affirm their goodness and sympathize with them in turn, for they too will become victims of Roman violence only a few years later when their city is destroyed.

Throughout your life, Lord, you were always stopping and giving people your full attention - the blind Bartimaeus, the bent-over woman in the synagogue, Zacchaeus in his tree, the women on the road to Calvary.

Here am I now, at last, stopping for you. Teach me to stop more often, to pay attention, and, perhaps, to weep.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Ninth Station: Jesus Falls a Third Time

NINTH STATION
Jesus Falls a Third Time

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Another fall, Lord, jarring your whole body, intensifying all the pain.

What mystery is this! A broken, helpless man who is still the visible image of the invisible God!

A while ago you were going about doing good - healing the sick, giving relief to the tormented and distraught, restoring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, assuring us that the loving-kindness of our God had come into the world.

The world, Heaven knows, is in need of redemption. Yet here it is, destroying its Redeemer. What mystery indeed.

'The mystery of iniquity,' St Paul called it. A mystery that still troubles us and sometimes overwhelms us, as it seems to overwhelm you.

But you are absorbing it all and drawing its poison.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped

TENTH STATION
Jesus is Stripped

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

The stripping of your garments, Lord, is a deliberate humiliation, part of the process of destroying your humanity utterly.

Your seamless cloak is tossed aside, to be diced for later by the soldiers.

Exposed to the public gaze, you are helpless and vulnerable.

Did some among the onlookers recoil uneasily from your shaming, as I do now?

Behold the Man, Pilate had said to the crowd after your scourging, not realising the deep truth of what he was saying. For this Man he invites us to behold is humanity at its noblest and best.

Learning to behold you, Lord, and see you in all the fullness of your being, is to find the deepest joy of life.

I gaze on your helplessness and do not know what to say.

To think you endured all this for us! For me! That we might know joy!

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

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.

Rough nails are hammered through your hands, Lord, or more likely through your wrists, lacerating the nerves there, and sending burning pain through your arms to explode in your brain.

You cannot but cry out! Such intense pain blots out everything else. So complete is your emptying of yourself on our behalf.

'He emptied himself,' St Paul says of you, 'becoming obedient unto death - even death on a cross.'

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

TWELFTH STATION
Jesus Dies on the Cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Nailed hand and foot to the splintered wood, you are raised above the world, Lord, and left hanging between heaven and earth.

But you cannot just hang there and die: you have to raise yourself on pierced feet to take in every breath, then fall down again to breathe out.

Is this what finally kills you? - suffocation after three hours of struggling to breathe, no strength left to push up one more time? Or does that great heart break within you from all the strain and agony? - the strain of loving the world so much!

'It is finished,' you say. 'Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit' - the prayer your Mother taught you to say as a child before going to sleep. Now she hears you saying it one last time before your final sleep. You give a great cry and breathe your last.

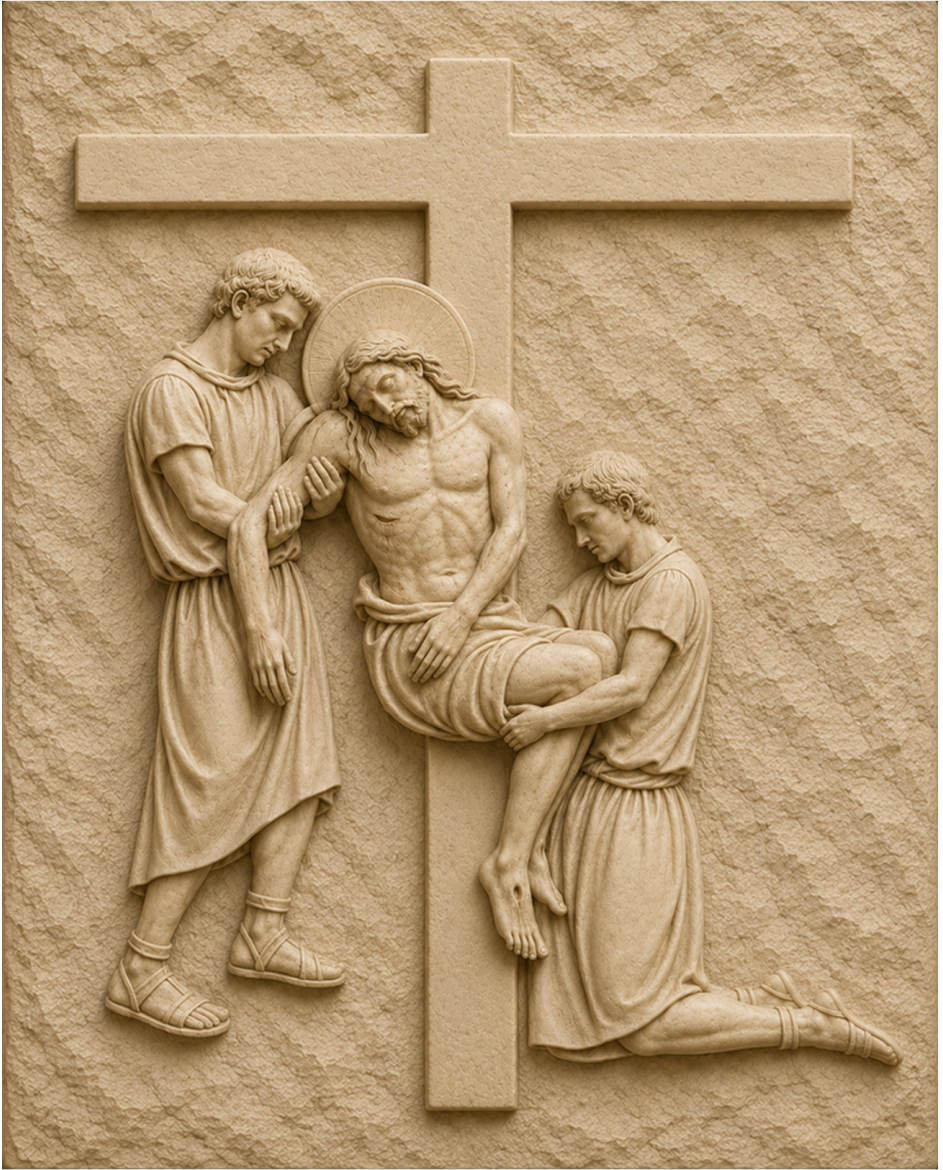
That cry, and the silence that follows, strike fear into all. How empty the world suddenly feels, as if there was nothing under it all.

Moses told his people to remember that 'underneath everything are the Everlasting Arms' of God, not that terrifying nothingness we sometimes glimpse and shudder at.

Those merciful arms are stretched forever on the Cross, embracing humanity in all its pathos, lostness, and sinfulness.

Thank you, Lord, for this deep reassurance.

*Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.
Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew
of my Saviour crucified.*



Thirteenth Station: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

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.

It is strange and lovely, Lord, how the image of your Mother holding your dead body at the foot of the Cross touches hearts in every age.

All the griefs of the world are contained in it, as you and your Holy Mother carried all the griefs of the world during your Passion.

'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,' as Isaiah had foretold.

As a poultice draws poison from a septic wound, so you have absorbed the poisonous wickedness of the world into yourself, restoring the world to health and salvation, even at the cost of your life.

You truly are the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

On Calvary, the sky has darkened, the crowd has slunk away; your friends have fled. Only John, your Apostle, remains with the Three Marys - your Mother, her sister-in-law, and Mary Magdalene.

Let me linger with them in silence and wonder...

You are really dead! The world without you is suddenly terrifying.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart, each wound renew of my Saviour crucified.



Fourteenth Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

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.

Joseph of Arimathea is a good man who longs for the coming of your Kingdom, Lord. With Pilate's permission, he wraps your body in a clean shroud and lays it in a new tomb carved from rock.

A large stone is rolled across to seal the entrance, and a Roman guard is set. You are well and truly 'dead and buried' as we say in our Apostles' Creed.

Night falls. Darkness and silence cover the earth. You are in the realm of the dead. What mystery is here!

Tradition imagines you moving silently among the dead, awakening them from their slumbers, bringing light and joy into the dark underworld.

Tomorrow is the Sabbath, a day of rest after your labours, a day of anticipation before the wonderful event of Easter Morning.

I kneel now before the Tabernacle, Lord, where you are present in our Eucharistic Bread, risen from the dead and given to us totally in love.

'This is my Body given up for you ... This is my Blood poured out for you.'

I bless you, Lord, and thank you with all my heart.

Have mercy on me, Lord, in your great kindness.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

Amen.

Concluding Prayer

(by Fr Ignatius, Passionist)

I kiss the wounds in your sacred hands
With sorrow deep and true:
May every touch of my hands today
Be an act of love for you.

I kiss the wounds in your sacred feet
With sorrow deep and true:
May every step I take today
Be an act of love for you.

I kiss the wounds in your sacred head
With sorrow deep and true:
May every thought in my mind today
Be an act of love for you.

I kiss the wound in your Sacred Heart
With sorrow deep and true:
May every beat of my heart today
Be an act of love for you.

Amen.

The Way of the Cross

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