

The Stations of the Cross



Introduction

In the Passion, Jesus laid bare the way that God's children have used the death of the innocent to distance themselves from their own dependence on violence. By removing the scales from our eyes, Jesus has broken forever the power of violence in our lives. We will never again be able to convince ourselves that we can save ourselves by violence without some lingering concern for those who die. Without our blindness to the cost to the victim, violence doesn't offer the salvation it once did. Instead, we have no choice but to rely on the one thing that does save us, God's mercy.

Too many versions of the Stations of the Cross romanticize Jesus' suffering. Others tend to encourage us to identify with Jesus as the victim. In some way he serves as a victim in our stead. This is not only theologically unsupportable in a country as rich and powerful as the United States, but it is dangerous. By entering into the Stations as victims, we blind ourselves to our complicity in violence, and others suffer from our blindness as a result.

This is not to say that there are not victims, even among us, who know with some immediacy what it is that Jesus suffered. These people do not need to pray the Stations. They do not need a version that confronts them with a human violence they know all too well, nor do they need a version that gives suffering a value God never meant it to have.

On the Sunday of the Passion, we all cry out as part of the crowd, "Crucify him, crucify him!" For those of us who need the Stations, it is this cry that gives us our best entrance. To do anything less is to minimize the reality of the Passion so that we might cushion its impact on us. Alongside this impact vanishes the Passion's power to convert.

This version of the Passion pulls no punches because it does its work in absolute confidence in the mercy of God. We have the courage to see ourselves as we are truly depicted in the Passion because we view it from the perspective of God's ultimate victory over our sin, from the perspective of the resurrection.

About the Stations of the Cross

These devotions find their roots in the experiences of the earliest pilgrims to Jerusalem, who would walk the "Via Dolorosa" as it had been reconstructed there. During the Middle Ages, however, it became impossible for pilgrims to make this journey, and a "spiritual" Way of the Cross became increasingly popular.

The Stations were followed in different forms at different times, varying in number from as few as 7 to 12 or more. In the 18th century, the fourteen stations we know today became the standard. The fifteenth station, "Jesus rises from the dead" is a fairly recent addition, and is purely optional. Some

Station I

Jesus is condemned to die

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

Leader: Pilate said, "I find no fault with this man," but when the crowd grew loud, he grew silent. "I wash my hands. You deal with him." Pilate had the knowledge and the power to stand and say no to the world as it sought to crush the Lord of Life. He didn't use either.

How many times do I have the knowledge and the power to say no, and stay silent?
How many times do I participate, by my silence, in the Passion of Jesus? Who will die because I do not say no?

Silence

All: Dearest Jesus, you hear my silence and you still love me. Because you say no to the world, the world says no to you. By the power of your Holy Spirit, give me the courage to stand and say no with you. Help me to take up my cross and follow you.

Like a lamb you stood there silent,
"Crucify!" we shouted, vi' lent,
Pilate washed his hands and sighed.

Station II

Jesus takes up his cross.

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

Leader: This cross has been thousands of years in the making. Its weight grows greater each time I look for someone to blame for the pain in my world. Each time I insist that sin must be punished, I add an ounce to the burden Jesus carries for me. This is the cross he carries, the cross of blame, of vengeance.

When have I said, "Well, he certainly deserved that!" or "It's only fair. Look at what she did!"? When have I failed to forgive as I have been forgiven. When have I laid more weight on your blessed shoulders?

Silence

All: Dearest Jesus, each step you take today is made harder by my hardness of heart. You carry this weight so that no one else ever will, not even me. By the power of your Holy Spirit, please give me the desire and the strength to forgive, to lighten your cross.

Heavy gift of Pilate's soldiers,
Weight of ages on his shoulder,
Jesus carried this for us.

Station III

Jesus falls the first time

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: The laughter at your first fall is transformative, Jesus. The gathered "I's" surrounding you laugh together, becoming a "we" for the first time. We laugh together, we reduce you to a joke, to something less than a man. Your first fall is the fall of Larry, or Moe, or Curly, but it is also the fall of my "I." I am lost now, in the collective "I" of the mob.

How many times, Lord, have I sacrificed my "I" as I took satisfaction or pleasure in the fall of another? How many lynchings have I started with my laughter?

Silence

All: *Dearest Jesus, lying there on the ground, you feel my laughter, our laughter, as a slap to the face, a pulling of the beard. In your innocence, you cause me to question my desire to laugh at anyone else. By the power of your Holy Spirit, Lord, open our ears to our laughter and close our mouths. Help us to see the human beneath the clown.*

Son of Mary, scorned and beaten,
Lying on the earth, defeated,
Jesus bears our laughter now.

Station IV

Jesus meets his mother.

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: We want to make you a clown. We want to isolate you completely, but your mother will not permit it. She withstands the blows of taunt and sorrow to be present for you along the way. She alone remains to give you courage, to remind us that you are someone's child, just like we are.

How many times, Lord, have we watched another suffer, but from a safe distance?
How many times have you looked out through the eyes of another for comfort, but were unable to find it?

Silence

All: *Dearest Jesus, your mother stood with you to give you strength, and to hold up your humanity in the face of our indifference. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to see the humanity of those whom the world wants to erase, and give us courage to stand with them, to strengthen them, and to claim them as brother or sister.*

Mary, mother, brave and loving,
Steps into the road, removing
Masks we place on your son's face.

Station V

Simon helps Jesus carry the Cross

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: We need you to die, Jesus, but our rage has gone too far. You are too weak to continue on to the head of the mountain because we have beaten you so severely. When you can't go on by yourself, we look for a solution that won't involve us too closely. We mustn't touch the cross ourselves, but the process must go on. Then we find our answer. A stranger, someone who obviously has no idea who you are will carry the cross. He knows nothing of your innocence.

How many others have we called on to do our violence for us? How many soldiers pulled triggers because we could not? How many executioners pushed buttons for us?

Silence

All: *Dearest Jesus, Simon stood in for us when you couldn't go forward. He helped us carry forward your execution in ignorance. Witnessing your courage and love, he became your friend, and ours. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to see our reluctance for what it is, a sign that something very wrong is happening. Give us courage to step forward when you can't go on and say, "Enough!"*

Simon, stranger, knowing nothing,
You we force to carry for him,
Blessed Cross on which he'll die.

Station VI

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: You have been beaten so badly that you are “marred beyond human semblance.” As you walk along, you are almost unrecognizable. It is so much easier for us to hate you, to jeer you, to wish you dead when we cannot see your face. Veronica will not permit us that luxury. She steps forward and wipes away the blood and sweat, showing all of us your human face.

How many times have we missed your humanity, Jesus? How many times has it been easier to deal with your suffering because we left your face marred beyond recognition? Do we have it in us to see your face?

Silence

All: *Dearest Jesus, your suffering is the suffering of a truly human being, suffering we want to avoid seeing. We want to make your suffering something divine, or something less than human. We don't want to connect too closely to you. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to see what Veronica reveals. Help us to see your humanity in all the suffering around us.*

Dear Veronica, you show us,
Human face of one below us,
Bear away the face of God.

Station VII

Jesus falls the second time

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: The first time you fell, we laughed. This fall elicits our hatred. Even though we have forced Simon to help you, you won't play your part. "Get up! Get up you!" We are desperate to find an outlet for our rage. Life isn't the way we want it to be, and someone has to pay. "Get up! Get up Jesus! Hurry up!"

How many times have we added our voices to the mob's, kicked someone when she was down? It isn't that it's easier for us to attack someone who's weakened, it isn't easier; it is necessary. We need you to fall, so that we can see you as different, as disappointing, as worthy of our hatred.

Silence.

All: *Dearest Jesus, what wondrous love is this? You fall to the earth so that we might rise. You endure our hatred so that we might escape it. By the power of your Holy Spirit, Lord, open our eyes to our need for someone to hate, and to your willingness to be hated for our sake.*

Falling, Jesus, in your weakness,
On the path you walk to free us,
Silent love cast down to earth.

Station VIII

Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: “Weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children.” The women of Jerusalem want to weep for you as though your fate were unrelated to theirs, as though the violence you suffer did not own them as well. You turn their sympathy back on them; remind them that your fate is their fate, too.

How many times have we contemplated your Passion, Lord, and wanted to cry for you? How many times have we wanted to weep because of your pain, and not because we caused it? How often have we blinded ourselves to our complicity in violence by feeling sorry for the victims?

Silence

All: *Dearest Jesus, we want to be converted, not only to feel sorry. We know that you love us too much to leave us wallowing in pity. By the power of your Holy Spirit, open our eyes to the ways that we benefit from the suffering of others so that we might weep for ourselves, and for our children.*

Women, weeping from a distance,
Jesus calls them to repentance,
Opens eyes too blind to see.

Station IX

Jesus falls the third time

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: Jesus, you have done all that you can do. When you fall this last time, you entrust the remainder of what must be done to us. There is no more strength. You are utterly beaten, defeated, but we are not finished. Like the potter's clay, we will now make you into what we need you to be.

How many times have we seen another's weakness as an opportunity to shape them, to change them into what we want them to be? How many times do we take advantage of the fact that you are too weak to resist, Jesus, and fasten you to the Cross?

Silence

All: *Dearest Jesus, there is a good reason that we cannot leave well enough alone, that we must continue on, no matter how thoroughly crushed our victim seems to be. It isn't enough that you are defeated, you must allow us to put you into the shape of the guilty one, the one who deserves what I have done. By the power of your Holy Spirit, teach me the real meaning of mercy. Deliver me from the need for a guilty victim, lest I make one.*

Final fall, his journey ended,
Jesus lies, by us offended,
Weak and broken, loving still.

Station X

Jesus is stripped before the crowd

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: Physical humiliation isn't enough. Spitting isn't enough. Whipping isn't enough. Crucifixion isn't enough. We need to shame you. We need to strip away from you any shred of human dignity. We are blind to the dignity in which your Father clothes you. Unable to see your deeper dignity, we revel in the shame we pour out on you.

How many times have we branded someone with a scarlet letter? Drunk, convict, weakling? How many times have we labeled our brother or sister, so as to set them apart, reduced them to nothing by using shame?

Silence.

All: *Dearest Jesus, as you stand there, stripped before the crowd, you are more dignified than any of us present. In our blindness, we still believe that shame reduces you. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to see the dignity that you have, that every child of God has, a dignity that neither we nor anyone else can take away.*

By the crowd you're stripped and broken,
Jesus, naked as the token
Of our hatred and our pain.

Station XI

Jesus is nailed to the Cross.

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: Hanging for hours on a cross is not cruel enough, Jesus. Watching you suffocate will not mollify our rage. Life has been so unfair to us, we have such rage that we have to use nails, instead of the traditional ropes. Rage bleeds away as nails, meant for wood, cut easily through human flesh.

How many times have we allowed our rage to drive us to cruelty? Cruel acts? Cruel speech? How many times has another borne the scars of our rage?

Silence.

All: *Dearest Jesus, we cannot free ourselves of this frustration, this fury, by means of our own strength, but we know that you are able. By the power of your Holy Spirit, free us. Take from us this rage, lest someone else suffer to assuage our pain.*

Jesus, source of all that's living,
Hangs above us, still forgiving,
Glory of the God of heav'n.

Station XII

Jesus dies on the Cross

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: We stand in stunned silence as we survey the result of our sin. The Lord of Life hangs dead from the tree. The peace we pursued as we chased you up the hill refuses to come. As we gaze upon you, Jesus, our victim, the realization dawns. Violence will never again bring peace, and we are terrified.

Mute with horror, we stumble to our homes, as though the earth were moving under our feet. The ground itself seems unsteady as we contemplate a world without violence. On what will we stand?

Silence.

All: *Dearest Jesus, keep our eyes fastened on you, hanging lifeless on the Cross. Not only today, but every day, remind us of the cost, the bankruptcy of our old ways, drive us into this silence so that you might speak a new world into being in us.*

Silence now, the world upended,
Her maker now, from Cross suspended,
Cries aloud and breathes his last.

Station XIII

Jesus is taken down from the Cross.

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: We have all departed by the time the guards permit those who love you to bring you down from the Cross. Once the spectacle ended, we are compelled to leave. There is something horrible and fascinating about you as you hang there, and it frightens us. We leave the task of dealing with your body to those who are already unclean.

How often, O Lord, have we fled our own horror, left the care of the dead and the dying to others? How many times have we let our fear of the power of death drive us into hiding?

Silence.

All: *Dearest Jesus, as your mother and your friends cared for your dead body, we are nowhere to be found. We refuse to touch the dead, as though their holiness would make us unclean. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to see beyond this falseness, to see how, by your death, you've stripped all death of its holiness.*

To your mother now you're given,
From the Cross, the Son of heaven,
Empty body, mother's pain.

Station XIV

Jesus is laid in the tomb

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: In a tomb that you could never have afforded, those who did not abandon you, those who refused to join the mob, lay your body to rest with great tenderness. There is nothing divine in the torn flesh, nothing holy in the bloodied brow. There is only sorrow, deeper than the greatest trenches in the ocean. Sorrow.

You will breathe life once again into our deadened spirits, Jesus, but not on this day. Today we walk as those robbed of hope, shuffling from one place to another as though we belonged in the tomb with you. Perhaps, without the breath of your new life, that is precisely where we belong.

Silence.

All: *Dearest Jesus, we have seen ourselves as we truly are, reflected in your loving eyes as we laughed and kicked and rained down blows. We wait now, for your redemption. We are hungry now for a life that doesn't need the blood of victims to sustain itself. Our hunger threatens to consume us. By the power of your Holy Spirit, keep this hunger alive. Help us never again to be satisfied with the bread of this world.*

Son of God, we wait in darkness,
For the dawning of your brightness,
Maranatha, Lord, we cry.

Station XV

Jesus is raised from the dead

All: *We adore you O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Leader: With the guards at the tomb, we stand aghast as the women run behind the stone and find you gone. They run out screaming in delight and terror as the life that you always intended for us dawns.

We sneak into the chamber to find the linens, neatly folded where you lay. At once we are overjoyed and terrified. Overjoyed because we know the truth now, and we can never turn away from it. Terrified because we know how we treated you, the Truth, and the world may do the same to us.

Silence

All: *Dearest Jesus, today, at the tomb, we begin our journey to Galilee, where you said you'd meet us. By the power of your Holy Spirit, give us strength to shout the Truth every step of the Way.*

Death and tomb, they cannot hold you!
Life you give, your life we bring to
Ev'ry child along the Way.