

The Stations of the Cross

Why Do We Walk the Stations of the Cross?

Walking the Stations is a powerful way to contemplate, and enter into, the mystery of Jesus' gift of himself to us. The word station comes from the Latin word that means "to stand." 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.

The Journey:

1. Walking the stations is a journey of prayer. It isn't an intellectual exercise. It is in the context of your relationship with God. Each station is an invitation to examine who Jesus is for you. We open our hearts to be touched, and we express our response in prayer.
2. This is an imaginative journey. It is an opportunity for Christ's sacrifice to touch our hearts deeply as we see the depth of His love for us. The journey points to 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 our hearts to know His love for us. These stations can allow us to imaginatively visualize the "meaning" of His passion and death.
3. This journey should 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.

I. Jesus is Condemned to Death

(Related in Scripture: Matthew 27:15-26, Mark 16:6-15, Luke 23:17-25, John 18:33-40)

Pilate found himself in a difficult situation. He had to choose between what was politically expedient and what was right, so he did what was politically expedient and had Jesus crucified.

Prayer - Almighty God, your Son our Savior suffered at the hands of sinners and endured the shame of the cross. Grant that we may walk in the way of his cross and find it the way of life and peace. Amen.

II. Jesus Accepts His Cross

(Related in Scripture: Matthew 27:27-31, Mark 15:16-20, John 19:17)

It was Roman practice to scourge, whip, and insult a capital prisoner, then make them carry the cross to the site of the crucifixion. On the way, they made a public spectacle of the prisoner and encouraged the crowds to insult him.

Prayer - Almighty God, whose beloved Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption: Give us courage to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

III. Jesus Falls the First Time

(Related in Christian History)

There is no scriptural reference that says Jesus stumbled, but the fact that the soldiers had another man carry His cross for Him strongly implies it.

Prayer - Lord in this first fall you atoned for the original sin of all humanity, I thank you and praise for your unlimited love for me, please Lord, help me not to sin any more. Amen.

IV. Jesus Meets His Mother

(Related in Christian History)

There is no scriptural reference of Jesus encountering His mother along the way to the site of the crucifixion, but it could well have happened. Mary was present at the crucifixion itself, so she may well have made her way to Him while He was still carrying the cross.

Prayer - Teach your church, O Lord, to mourn the sins of which it is guilty, and to repent and release them; that, by your pardoning grace, the results of our iniquities may not be visited upon our children and our children's children; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

V. Simon Helps Carry the Cross

(Related in Scripture: Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26)

Jesus had been up the whole night, first at a Passover Seder, then praying in the garden, then being arrested and tried. He was tired even before He was scourged and whipped. The Romans wouldn't want Him to die of exhaustion, so they enlisted someone else to carry the cross for Him. If he died too early he would escape the torture of the cross.

Prayer - Lord you want us to share the cross with you by sharing and alleviating the sufferings of those in need, grant me to have a heart full of Charity and Love for my neighbor. Amen.

VI. Veronica Offers Her Veil

(Related in Christian History)

Jesus was bloody and sweaty from the ordeal. According to Christian lore, a woman came forward and wiped His face with a cloth (traditionally called a napkin). When she took the cloth back, it had an image of Jesus' face on it.

Prayer - Lord, you have created us for your Glory, please help us by wiping the stains of our souls with your Precious Blood to restore your image in us. Amen.

VII. Jesus Falls the Second Time

(Related in Christian History)

There is no record in Scripture of Jesus stumbling again, but there is no reason to think that He didn't stumble multiple times.

Prayer - Lord, in this second fall you confirm how weak we are, help us Lord to overcome our weaknesses with the strength of your sufferings. Teach us how to love good and to hate evil. Amen.

VIII. Jesus Speaks to the Women

(Related in Scripture: Luke 23:26-31)

Under Jewish law, a woman cannot be a witness in a trial. This meant that the women had greater freedom of movement than the men, because they could not be required to give an account for what they saw and heard. That is why women figure prominently here and at the crucifixion.

Prayer - Lord, in our human weakness we are so concerned to live our lives without discomfort and pain, and yet you tell us that it is more important to seek the Kingdom of Heaven and to weep for our sins in order to gain eternal life. Amen.

IX. Jesus falls the Third Time

(Related in Christian History)

There is no record in Scripture of Jesus stumbling again, but there is no reason to think that He didn't.

Prayer - Lord you have stretched your generosity to the limits, please forgive us for the many times that we sin and don't remember what pain you had to go through to redeem us. Amen.

X. Jesus is Stripped

(Related in Scripture: Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24b, Luke 23:34)

The Romans not only tortured capital criminals, they also humiliated them publicly. For that reason, people were often stripped naked before crucifixion. We learn here what Jesus had worn to the Last Supper: a himation, a sari-like garment, over a tunic. In other words, He was dressed in what we would call His Sunday best.

Prayer - Lord what they did to you is what we do to our souls, we strip your image which is given to us in baptism and we deface your glory. Clothe our souls once more with glory, through the gift of your grace. Amen.

XI. Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

(Related in Scripture: Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24a, Luke 23:33, John 19:18)

Jesus was crucified at about 9:00 in the morning.

Prayer - Lord, you have called me to be your disciple, to deny myself and to follow you. As I come before you, I crucify my will to yours, I crucify all the temptations of the world, and I pray for surrender to your Holy Will. Amen.

XII. Jesus Dies on the Cross

(Related in Scripture: Matthew 27:45-56, Mark 15:33-41, Luke 23:44-49, John 19:30-33)

Jesus died about 3:00 in the afternoon, at the time of the evening sacrifice in the Temple. The Lamb of God was slain at the same time as the paschal lambs were being slain in the Temple.

Prayer - Lord, it is here on the cross that you asked the Father to forgive me, here you promised me a place in your Kingdom. Grant me to relive your passion daily, and have Mercy on me Lord and on the whole world. Amen.

XIII. Jesus is Taken Down

(Related in Scripture: Matthew 27:57-61, Mark 15:42-47, Luke 23:50-56, John 19:38)

The bodies had to be removed from the crosses before sundown to avoid profaning the Sabbath. The bodies were customarily thrown in a common grave for criminals, but Joseph stepped forward and asked for and received custody of Jesus' body.

Prayer - Lord, as you rested eternally in the arms of your heavenly father, and your earthly loved ones, so I want to rest in you, receive my brokenness and heal me for everlasting life. Amen.

XIV. Jesus Laid in the Tomb

(Related in Scripture: Matthew 27:57-58, John 19:39-42)

Joseph and Nicodemus prepared Jesus for burial and put him in a tomb that Joseph had donated. Perhaps the women witnessed the rushed preparation standing at a distance. This would have told them where the tomb was.

Prayer - Lord let me die in you that you may remain buried within me. Grant the grace to live a holy life. Amen.

XV. Jesus Rises from the Dead

Suddenly, without warning, Jesus stood before them and said, "Peace! Do not be afraid! Go and carry the news to the others that they are to go to Galilee where they will see me." (Matthew 28:9-10)

Prayer - Lord I believe in the Resurrection, I trust in you and I love you. Amen.
