

The Development and Practice of the Stations of the Cross

Theresa Sherman

December 15, 2004

Under the Direction of Professor Maxwell Johnson

The Stations of the Cross is an important Christian devotion that helps communities and individuals center themselves on the pivotal event of Christ's Passion. While the Passion has been depicted in artwork, movies, plays, and music, the ritual devotion of the Stations of the Cross is a significant and prayerful way to enter into the mystery. The development of this devotion from its early stages to the twenty-first century demands attention and reflection.

In this essay I will trace the origins of the Stations of the Cross in the early centuries of Christianity and show how the devotion developed over time. Part of that development is the standardization of how the Stations of the Cross were to be practiced. Another important element to focus on is what interpretation was given to the Stations at their onset and what is given now. I will conclude by offering what a current model of the Stations of the Cross might look like, as well as communal reflections on the Stations.

I. Historical Development

A. Origins

Christians have been practicing a devotion to the Stations of the Cross since the early centuries of Christianity, a devotion related to the tradition of "stational liturgy" in the early Church. Early Christians used the word "station" in different ways. The Latin *statio* comes from *stare*, which means to stand, halt, or take up a position. The word was used in this context to refer to a gathering of people at a specific location for an agreed-upon reason, usually liturgical. In Greek "station" referred to fasting. Within Christian literature the word appears in the second-century work *Shepherd of Hermas*. Hermas says that he is "stationa eko," which meant praying and fasting "of the usual kind."¹ Christians fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays. *Statio* also had a

¹ John F. Baldovin, SJ. *The Urban Character of Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*. Pontifical Institutum Studiorum Orientalium. Rome: 1987, 143.

military definition. It referred to a post and the military units assigned to stand guard at it. Ambrose thought that the Church intentionally chose this military term for stational liturgies because Christians were supposed to be the “militia of Christ.”²

The first stational liturgies were thought to have taken place as early as the third century, though it is not known which churches in Rome were the original stational churches.³ Stational churches developed in Rome partly as a result of the high number of churches within the city. As Christianity was legalized, the ability to have churches outside of homes led to greater numbers of churches being built. There were primitive house churches, parish churches, *tituli* (Christian community centers) and later basilicas. Constantine wanted to make Christianity not only legal but also visible: “He employed the most public form of building: the basilica, suitable for public gatherings and characterized by a unified simple space, abundant light and colorful walls.”⁴ Bishops at the time saw it as their duty as shepherd to make visits to the various churches. These stational liturgies were seen as the official diocesan liturgy, with clergy from each respective locale representing their district.⁵

Important locations associated with Jesus’ road to Calvary were thought to be accurately preserved by Christians in Jerusalem during the fourth century. Constantine built churches on those spots, and they were honored for what they memorialized. The belief that they maintained the actual sites is not simply hearsay. Archaeological excavations support the locations for the Holy Sepulcher and Calvary identified at that time.⁶ Pilgrims visited these holy places in Jerusalem and meditated on the Paschal Mystery. Believers from all corners of the world would come to Jerusalem and walk through the churches, placing themselves where Christ actually stood.

² *The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition*. Volume 13: Seq-The. Thomas Gale: New York, 2003, 498.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Baldovin, 108-109.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Thurston, Herbert. *The Stations of the Cross: An Account of Their History and Devotional Purpose*. Burns and Oates. London: 1906, 4.

While the prevailing theme for the Paschal Mystery in the Middle Ages was the suffering of Christ, fourth-century Christians focused more heavily on the resurrection. Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea in 337, commented on practices of the time in his *Life of Constantine*, written in the year of Constantine's death and quoted in Gerard Sloyan's *Worship*. Eusebius writes of the cave of Christ's tomb without including any mention of the actual suffering and crucifixion. He refers to the cave as "the most holy memorial of the Savior's resurrection."⁷ This emphasis on the resurrection shows a very high Christology that minimally mentions the humanity, but only after a greater showcase of the divinity.

The Spanish nun Egeria made a documented pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 386. She wrote about the stational liturgies present there, though she does not use the word *statio*.⁸ Egeria's travel diary gives insight into the current liturgical practices of Jerusalem, Egypt, and Constantinople. She gives a basic outline of the cathedral rite in Jerusalem, stating the roles of different members of the clergy. Egeria's documents give some awareness into the pastoral issues in Jerusalem.

The relation of space and time in the celebration of important Christian feasts is unique to Jerusalem. The elaborate organization that Egeria witnesses could not have developed overnight, but it is impossible to pinpoint exactly when this coordination of space and time first took place. What is important to note is that *the sacred topography was by no means the only guiding principle in the development of stational practice in Jerusalem*. Just as influential was the now public nature of the *ecclesia* and its means of incorporating new members.⁹

Egeria also mentions how important the psalms are for Christians of the day. In her descriptions of Holy Week there is attention brought to the dramatic visitation to the final locations of Jesus' life. She states that gospel passages relating to the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ are read at each respective location.¹⁰

⁷ Gerard S. Sloyan, "Piety Centered on Jesus' Sufferings and Some Eccentric Christian Understandings of the Mystery of Calvary," *Worship*. St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota: 1993, page 100.

⁸ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 498.

⁹ Baldovin, 87.

¹⁰ Sloyan, 101.

Egeria also witnessed the ritual of venerating the Cross on Good Friday in Jerusalem, a practice that spread to Greece, and from Greece to Rome. She was present for it in fourth-century Jerusalem but it did not arrive in Rome until the seventh century.¹¹ This veneration shows a shift in devotion not only to the resurrection of Christ, but also of his Passion and death that led *to* the resurrection. The attention was given in the appropriate liturgical context, namely the Good Friday service focusing on Jesus' suffering and death on the cross.

This transformation in thinking about the Paschal Mystery was developed in later centuries. The Passion story became a prevalent theme placed in the foreground of pictorial art in the tenth century. Because of this, preference was given to certain scenes that had previously been neglected but were especially capable of arousing emotions. Not surprisingly, therefore, the scourging of Jesus appears in the Passion story for the first time in this time period.¹²

The stational liturgy practices in Jerusalem relate very closely to what are now the Stations of the Cross. The churches built on what were believed to be the actual locations of different points along Christ's walk to Calvary served as stations or halting points. Pilgrims would come to Jerusalem and walk the path that Jesus walked by visiting the various churches. It started to become customary that when those pilgrims would return to their homes they would construct tableaux of the places that they saw in Jerusalem. The first coherently related Stations of the Cross were built at the church of San Stefano in Bologna outside Palestine.¹³ They were structured as a group of churches forming one building as part of the Monastery of San Stefano.¹⁴ This composition of buildings for a set of Stations of the Cross may seem odd to modern-day Christians, but it was completely consistent with stational practices of the day. Those who traveled to Jerusalem wanted to recreate their experiences at home. Part of the experience for those pilgrims was the physical walking from place to place. When the stational aspect of the devotion was maintained, it gave those who were not able to travel to Jerusalem the simulated

¹¹ J.A. Jungmann. *Pastoral Liturgy*. Herder and Herder: New York, 1962, 54.

¹² Jungmann, 55.

¹³ *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 500.

¹⁴ Thurston, 6.

experience of taking a pilgrimage on their own. They were literally walking in Christ's footsteps.

To place this development in a historical context, it is important to note that the Crusades took place from 1095 to 1270, an unfortunate reality in many aspects, but something that sent many Catholics to the Holy Land and exposed them to the holy places present there. A coinciding movement with the Crusades was the tremendous development in Christian spirituality, especially in devotions to the humanity of Jesus, as well as to Mary and the saints.¹⁵ The Crusades influenced this development because the immediacy of suffering in the world forced people to reflect on the sufferings of Christ.

Crusaders who returned home after spending time in the Holy Land did what pilgrims before them had done—they created tableaux of the holy places seen in Jerusalem. They called these “Little Jerusalems.”¹⁶ The examples of the people who desired to replicate their experience of witnessing these holy places points to the obvious impact and reverence drawn from these sites in Jerusalem.

As people began to reflect upon and replicate the specific sites of Jesus' path to Calvary, they focused on the Passion story itself. People wanted special clarity and details. The favorite details obtained were those that stirred up feelings of sympathy and compassion.¹⁷ This marks a deliberate shift in mentality from Eusebius's cave of the Savior's resurrection. Instead of reflecting on the Passion in light of the resurrection, the point was to reflect on the sufferings of the Passion so as to elicit a response of compassion and remorse for Jesus' pain.

The liturgical life of the Church at this point was pervasive. Liturgy, however, was always clerical liturgy. There was an abundance of ministers during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in some towns creating a ratio of one priest for every twenty residents.¹⁸ While the celebration of Mass was something that the clergy did, there was a feverish intensity in religious

¹⁵ The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship, 272.

¹⁶ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 500.

¹⁷ Jungmann, 53.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

life. The Middle Ages was full of people going to extremes—intellectually or theologically.

Richard Keickhefer gives an accurate portrayal of the attitudes of the time:

Christendom had long been familiar with penitential self-affliction, patient submission to suffering, absorption in Christ's passion, and states of spiritual bliss or excitement that one might call mystical, yet...all these forms of spiritual life [became]...more pronounced, more widespread, and (perhaps most importantly), more widely respected than before.¹⁹

To suffer in the name of Christ was seen as one of the only, if not *the* only, way to connect oneself to Christ. Self-flagellation was a common and accepted form of prayer. Many of the saints from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries shared the mentality that Christ's patient enduring of suffering should be imitated. "Jesus' upraising from the dead came to be viewed, not as the momentous event giving meaning to the antecedent suffering; instead, the suffering has meaning of its own and the 'resurrection' signals little more than that the mystical ordeal is over."²⁰ This sad reality shaped the spiritual lives of Christians throughout the Middle Ages.

B. Franciscans

One particular saint who took the role of suffering in the name of Christ very seriously was St. Francis of Assisi. Francis devoted his life to living with and for the poor. He emaciated himself at various times in his life, attributing his actions both to solidarity with the poor and solidarity with Christ. Francis received the stigmata while on a forty-day fast on retreat, as well as receiving visions of the crucified Christ. After these experiences, he delved his spirituality into an even stronger devotion to the sufferings of Christ's Passion. His Friars Minor, the Franciscans, followed this mentality.

The Franciscans took custody of the holy places in Jerusalem in 1342.²¹ In part because of their founder's dedication to the Passion of Christ, the Franciscans saw it as part of their mission to promote devotion to the sites of the Passion story. This was most adequately

¹⁹ Sloyan, 109.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

²¹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 500.

expressed by creating replicas of the locations as illustrations for their Franciscan parish churches, hence a spreading of the popular devotion of the Stations of the Cross.

Around this same period of time people were creating an even more developed and detailed story of the Passion. A common practice was to take the basic story that already existed and add gore so as to make the story elicit more pity and more compassion. For example, the Gospel of John describes Jesus' arrest by stating, "The troops with their commander, and the Jewish police, now arrested Jesus and secured Him. They took Him first to Annas."²² A German article of 1350, on the other hand, states the same scenario in a much more colorful and upsetting manner:

Then they seized Christ with raving violent devilish gesticulations, one grasped his hair, a second his clothes, a third his beard. These three were as foul hounds as ever might cling to him...and so was pulled away...with fierce blows of mailed hands and fists upon his neck...his back, on his head...on his throat, on his breast...They tore his hair from his head...one pulled him back by the beard [twelve further lines of print]. So they dragged him down from the Mount... [four lines]. And they hauled him to the gate of town...until they brought him into Annas' house.²³

The motive in this prose version of the arrest of Jesus is obvious. The bottom-line facts of what happened are not the issue at question. The Christians of the day knew that guards arrested Jesus. What was more pressing for them was the question of *how* he might have been arrested and in what ways they could show compassion for the fact that he was arrested. Details were added (many times of their own personal design) so that they could more readily identify with Christ.

This desire to identify with a suffering Christ was not to take away from the resurrection. Again, the Christians of the day knew that Jesus rose from the dead, but that was not what concerned them. The idea of the resurrection did not give them something to hang their hat on for comfort. Sloyan writes eloquently how the image of the suffering Christ was a telling model for the poor:

A Savior in blissful repose with his Father and the Spirit, surrounded by the angels and saints, consoled them as a distant dream they aspired to, not as a present reality.

²² John 18:12, New American Bible.

²³ Sloyan, 121.

But a crucified Savior who could not forget the agonies he had endured for love of them was a different matter. A Redeemer, the bitterness of whose passion could never be blotted out in his memory, was a living, heavenly presence with which they could identify. And so they did.²⁴

Not surprisingly, the accounts of Jesus' Passion were continually added upon and expanded beyond the gospel data in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Passion plays were a popular occurrence, and new elements were added and given more major roles. Malchus, Longinus, Veronica, and devils urging the soldiers to arrest Jesus played large parts in the plays.²⁵ Veronica, whose name in Greek means "bearer of victory," was legendarily the woman who wiped Jesus' face. In the plays she also grew as one of the concrete members of the group of weeping women to whom Jesus talks.²⁶

The idea of Jesus falling three times was also developed during this time period. This idea was thought to be a projection from the passage in Mark which says that Jesus "fell to the ground"²⁷ when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemani, and that he went to talk to his sleeping disciples at three different times.²⁸ Once these scenes were placed into the Passion plays, they grew to be what people expected in the story and tradition was formed.

The image of Mary in the Passion story was another non-Scriptural development. None of the gospel accounts mention Jesus meeting his weeping mother on the way to Calvary. She is present in the gospels, and looks on while at the foot of the cross. The stories, however, represent her as a weeping woman occupied with her grief.²⁹ One of the earliest forms of the Stations of the Cross was actually called the Way of Sorrows, and it was a detailed description of the sorrowful Mary's supposed daily pilgrimage along the path of her crucified Son.³⁰ Tying that tradition with the devotion to the Stations of the Cross makes it understandable why Christians would then place the weeping Mary within the Passion story.

²⁴ Sloyan, 123.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Mark 14:35, NAB.

²⁸ Sloyan, 113.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Thurston, 4.

It's not surprising to see with all of the developments and additions to the Passion story taking place that there was a variety in the number of stations used for the Stations of the Cross. William Wey, an English pilgrim to Jerusalem in 1458 and 1462, was the first to use the word "station" when referring to the different points along the Way of the Cross. He documented his pilgrimages and commented on the variety of the number of stations used by different groups.³¹ It was not until the sixteenth century that the fourteen stations we use now grew to be the accepted set. They appeared first in the Low Countries³² and then spread until the eighteenth century.

On April 3, 1731, Pope Clement XII wrote a monita (*Monita ad recta ordinandum devotum exercitium Viae Crucis*) that standardized the number of stations to fourteen. The fourteen consisted of nine gospel scenes and five from popular tradition.³³ In that document he also advocated the spreading of the Stations of the Cross further than in strictly Franciscan parishes, as well as authorizing the building of stations outdoors.³⁴ When that monita was issued, St. Leonard of Port-Maurice, a Franciscan and avid supporter of the Stations of the Cross, saw it as his mission to spread the stations. From 1731 to 1751 he was said to have built over 572 stations! Most famous of his constructions is the Stations of the Cross inside the Colosseum in Rome. He was known as the "preacher of the Way of the Cross."³⁵

C. Saint Alphonsus Liguori

Another development after Clement's monita was Saint Alphonsus Liguori's meditations on the stations. Liguori, born in 1696 near Naples, founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, or the Redemptorists, in 1732. He founded a second more contemplative order, the

³¹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 500.

³² *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 450.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 501.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 500.

Redemptoristines, in 1750.³⁶ Liguori's expertise was in law, which he practiced for eight years, and moral theology. He brought the study of theology, especially moral theology, into a place of honor while he was the bishop in a small Neapolitan diocese called Saint Agatha of the Goths.³⁷ It was said of Liguori that he "would not allow his preachers to use the flowery preaching style customary at the time, but demanded a simplicity and zeal that could move both the hearts and convince the minds of ordinary people."³⁸

Liguori's ministry was focused on bringing common people to the mysteries of Christianity. The prayer that Liguori advocated was "the use of short aspirations, petitions, and acts of love, rather than discursive meditation with long reflection."³⁹ He believed that shorter, more focused prayers would assist people in leading their minds toward deeper thoughts. Liguori used this standard for writing his meditations on the Stations of the Cross. Each station begins with a short reflection—a few sentences—on the particular station. At the end of every station everyone says, "I love Thee, my beloved Jesus; I love Thee more than myself; I repent with my whole heart of having offended Thee. Never permit me to separate myself from Thee again. Grant that I may love Thee always, and then do with me what Thou wilt."⁴⁰ This short refrain becomes a mantra for the people participating in the stations. Just as Liguori hoped for preaching to affect his parishioners, these reflections could move the hearts and minds of the people.

II. Contemporary Understandings

A. A Personal Connection to Christ's Suffering

³⁶ Richard P. McBrien, Editor. *The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. Harper San Francisco, 1995: 35.

³⁷ Harold Castle. "Saint Alphonsus Liguori," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 1. Online edition editor: K. Knight, Robert Appleton Company. 1907, 5.
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01334a.htm>.

³⁸ McBrien, 35.

³⁹ Castle, 8.

⁴⁰ *The Way of the Cross According to the Method of St. Alphonsus Liguori*. Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., Rockford, IL: 1987, 5.

A common theme throughout different meditations on the Stations of the Cross is the relationship between our sins and Christ's sufferings. In every reflection there is a desire to make a personal connection to the sufferings that Jesus underwent in his Passion. Liguori reminds the participant of Jesus' actions, starting each reflection with the word "consider." The participants are invited to consider what Jesus went through at each step in his Passion, and simply reflect on why he did what he did. By recognizing that Jesus suffered and died for every individual shows the personal connection involved. Additionally, in the first station, "Jesus Is Condemned to Death," Liguori writes, "My adorable Jesus, it was not Pilate, no, it was my sins, that condemned Thee to die."⁴¹ Since the reason for Jesus' Passion and resurrection is the salvation of humanity, every person shares a personal involvement in why Jesus suffers.

Liguori's meditations were in popular usage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴² Since that time, many people have taken it upon themselves to write reflections on the Stations of the Cross. These can be used in ritual services because the Roman Catholic Church has not issued any official texts to be used for the service. Just as it began as a practice of the people as a popular devotion, it continues to be a ritual of the people. People can connect themselves personally to the sufferings of Christ in his Passion without having to go through the self-flagellation that was characteristic previously. Now, contemporary settings for the stations and extrapolations on how Christ's sufferings mimic our own draw people into the devotion to the Cross.

Theologians explain the personal connection with Christ's sufferings differently. One position is to say that each person is connected to the Passion because of individual responsibility for Christ's affliction. A section in one meditation book on the first station says, "My sins of rash judgment helped condemn You to death."⁴³ The same book repeats the phrase,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 450.

⁴³ Rosalie SanGiovanni. *Stations of the Cross*. Queenship Publishing Company: California, 1998, 5.

“Imprint in my mind and on my heart Your wounds and all Your pains”⁴⁴ after every station. The constant repetition of culpability ingrains in the reader a sense of responsibility for the crucifixion.

Another bilingual meditation book takes a similar stance on one’s personal responsibility, but sets it in a much lighter tone. Instead of coming right out and stating a role in condemnation, this book points to the end result of the suffering. We are personally connected and involved with the suffering because it was for us—the point of the Passion was the salvation of all humanity. Therefore, every member of humanity is involved. The book states, “Let your body, then, be our salvation, and your blood, forgiveness of our sins. Because of the gall you drank for us, take from us the devil’s gall.”⁴⁵ It continues with a list of hardships that Jesus endured and burdens from which humanity was delivered.

While some authors easily recognize humanity’s role and responsibility in the Passion, others have a harder time wrapping themselves around the issue. How could someone two thousand years after the fact be affecting and causing that far-off event? Marie Rouanet’s reflection on the Stations from a female perspective asks that very question: “We are not responsible; our hands are clean of the shedding of any blood—can we really still believe that we are innocent?”⁴⁶ This question calls to mind Pontius Pilate’s role in the crucifixion. Pilate hands Jesus over to the crowd, seemingly “washing his hands” of any responsibility. How is not stopping suffering different from participating in it? While one individual could not stop the suffering that Jesus went through, the very nature of a human being as a sinful creature shows the necessity for Christ and Christ’s redemption through the Cross.

A different approach to one’s personal connection to Christ’s suffering is the idea that humanity, too, has a cross to bear and uses Christ as an example of how to endure through it. A fundamental part of this understanding is Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “Are you not aware

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Jorge Perales, editor. *Oracional Bilingüe: A Prayer Book for Spanish-English Communities*. Liturgical Press. Collegeville, MN: 1994, 72.

⁴⁶ Marie Rouanet. *The Way of the Cross: The Women of Jerusalem Follow Jesus*. The Liturgical Press. Collegeville, MN: 2001, 11.

that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”⁴⁷ In the Roman Catholic *Book of Blessings* this understanding of sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ is present. It states, “Grant that, nailed to the Cross with you, we may die with you and so rise with you.”⁴⁸ Other meditation books present the side of sharing in suffering more predominantly. For example, Clarence Enzler’s reflections on the Stations make several allusions to taking up one’s “daily cross.”⁴⁹ In the introductory prayer, Jesus speaks to the reader whom he refers to as “my other self” and suggests the role of humanity is to continue the work Jesus started during his brief time on earth. The prayer says, “And therefore my way of the cross two thousand years ago and your ‘way’ now are also one.”⁵⁰ The reader, considering himself or herself as continuing Jesus’ ministry on earth, can identify with Jesus’ sufferings on the way.

One can associate one’s own situations with those Jesus went through, good or bad. People both challenge and assist others in their lifetime. For the fifth station, when Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry his cross, Bishop Edward Grosz wrote, “I thank you for the people you send into my life to help me bear the burdens of daily living.”⁵¹ This idea points to how many people view one’s personal connection with the Passion, as a path to follow in discipleship. *This Far by Faith*, an African-American Lutheran Book of Worship, quotes Luke 14:27 and states, “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”⁵² It later continues, “Plant his cross in our hearts, so that in its power and love we may come at last

⁴⁷ Romans 6:3-4, NAB.

⁴⁸ *Book of Blessings*. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Liturgical Press. Collegeville, MN: 1989, 526.

⁴⁹ Clarence Enzler. *Everyone’s Way of the Cross*. Ave Maria Press. Notre Dame, IN: 1986, 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵¹ Bishop Edward M. Grosz, DD. *Walking With Jesus: The Way of the Cross*. Pauline Books and Media. Boston: 1999, 13.

⁵² *This Far by Faith: An African-American Resource for Worship*. Augsburg Fortress. Minneapolis: 1999, 98.

to joy and glory.”⁵³ All people must identify themselves with Jesus in his ministry and his suffering because only in desiring to live the life of Jesus can anyone attempt to glorify God in his or her actions.

Praying the Stations of the Cross can only be fruitful when it results in the selfless love of other people. Jesus’ suffering only has meaning in the resurrection, all of which started with the selfless gift of the Father of his only Son. Humanity is connected with Christ’s Way of the Cross in that we are also called to serve the suffering with our very bodies. “Father in heaven, your Son, Jesus Christ, still carries his cross in his persecuted brothers and sisters throughout the world.”⁵⁴ The suffering people of the world are carrying crosses that every Christian is called to help carry: “Give us, we beg you, the courage and dedication to sacrifice and suffer with those who are in need, the least of your people.”⁵⁵ By identifying with Jesus in this central moment of his life one can understand the entirety of the Christian message, which is to love selflessly as God does.

B. The Use of the Scriptures

The Stations of the Cross developed as a popular devotion of the people, and so some of the individual stations carry with them some legend and folklore. It is interesting, then, to see how some meditation books use the Scriptures as a basis for their reflections. Some books use Bible references minimally—or not at all—while others use nothing else. One book that never cites Biblical passages, Clarence Enzler’s *Everyone’s Way of the Cross*, simply alludes to actual verses and gives a more general understanding of what is happening. The point of Enzler’s reflection, however, is to show how each individual’s daily life and daily crosses can mimic that of Jesus, something not explicitly found in any of the gospel accounts.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵⁴ *The Way of the Cross with Text from the Scriptures*. Barton-Cotton, Inc. Baltimore: 1965, 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

On the opposite extreme of Enzler, there are meditation books that use Scripture passages for every single station. One meditation book, *The Way of the Cross with Text from the Scriptures*, emphasizes the importance of Scripture in popular devotion. The foreword states, “The Second Vatican Council in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* directs that popular devotions be in some fashion derived from the Sacred Liturgy and lead back to the Liturgy. Since the Liturgy is so Scriptural it would seem that popular devotions should also incorporate Scripture more abundantly into their exercises.”⁵⁶ The editors of this meditation booklet believe that using Scripture is the clearest way to connect the Stations of the Cross to the Liturgy. This connection gets interesting when the station itself is *not* rooted in Scripture. For example, Veronica wiping the face of Jesus did not take place in any of the gospel stories. In *The Way of the Cross with Text from the Scriptures*, there are two different Scripture passages used for this sixth station. The first is from the Gospel of Matthew:

‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?’ And answering the king will say to them, ‘Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me.’⁵⁷

This passage invites the reader to be like Veronica and wipe the faces of those we see suffering in our world. The second Scripture story shared is from the Hebrew Scriptures, a pattern that this book follows for the rest of the stations. It says, “A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; he who finds one finds a treasure. A faithful friend is beyond price, no sum can balance his worth. A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy, such as he who fears God finds; for he who fears God behaves accordingly, and his friend will be like himself.”⁵⁸ Similar to the first Scripture passage used, this section does not speak directly to the subject matter of the station, but rather connects to the emotion and motivation behind it. One is encouraged to view this station as a reminder of what it means to serve and to be a true friend.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁷ Matthew 25:37-40, NAB.

⁵⁸ Sirach 6:14-17, NAB.

Jorge Perales's bilingual meditation book also makes great use of Scripture. There are only three times in the entire service that any spoken prayers are not quotations from the Bible. The first is a short opening prayer, the second is a closing prayer reminding all those participating that Christ's sufferings were for our salvation, and the last is a call and response that occurs at the beginning of each station. The pair of phrases is very common among the various ways of praying the devotion: "We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you... Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world."⁵⁹ This call and response originated and was spread by the Franciscans.⁶⁰ The use of Scripture for the fourth station, "Jesus Meets His Mother," is particularly interesting. Perales uses Lamentations to convey the sorrow of Mary: "At this I weep, my eyes run with tears. Come, all you who pass by the way, look and see whether there is any suffering like my suffering."⁶¹ It is interesting that instead of using the Scripture reference to show what happened, the Scripture is used to convey an emotion of what might have happened, since there is actually no Scripture reference to Mary meeting Jesus on the way. That does not mean that it could not have happened, but only that there is not a Scriptural basis for it.

The second piece of Scripture used for the same station in Perales's meditation book follows a similar theme. It quotes an actual event that happened between Jesus and his Mother, but not directly related to the Passion, in order to elicit emotion from the reader to connect with the sorrow of Mary. The passage is from Luke when Mary and Joseph are searching for the child Jesus and find him in the Temple. It states, "'Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.' 'Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'"⁶² Using the Scripture in this way reminds the reader of the relationship between Jesus and his Mother, as well as the relationship between Jesus and his Father in Heaven—the suffering endured in this world is not an end, but something that points to eternal salvation.

⁵⁹ Perales, 56.

⁶⁰ Liguori, 3.

⁶¹ Lamentations 1:10, NAB.

⁶² Luke 2:48-49, NAB.

The Stations of the Cross is practiced in certain Protestant congregations as well. It is interesting to see the use of Scripture in those rites. In the African-American Lutheran Stations of the Cross there are only eight stations, each based on a Scriptural account. The six stations from the traditional set of fourteen that are not included are the three falls of Jesus, Jesus meeting his mother, Veronica wiping the face of Jesus, and Jesus being taken down from the cross.⁶³ In the Episcopal Stations of the Cross, however, all of the traditional fourteen are included. The beginning of one Episcopal meditation booklet states that it is “Compiled from Biblical and Liturgical Texts.”⁶⁴ This makes it seem as though the non-Scriptural stations are on par with those from Scripture. Another meditation booklet has the same texts for the actual stations but has more of a disclaimer in the introduction concerning the stations: “The number of stations, which at first varied widely, finally became fixed at fourteen. Of these, eight are based directly on events recorded in the Gospels. The remaining six (numbers 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 13) are based on inferences from the Gospel account or from pious legend. If desired, these six stations may be omitted.”⁶⁵ The inclusion of the six non-Scriptural stations points to the tradition of the Church, but if a parish decides against it, they could be ignored.

C. A Medieval Focus Remains for Some

It is interesting that even in some of the modern reflections on the Stations of the Cross there remains the medieval tendency to focus on the sufferings of Christ in terms of one's personal responsibility or culpability for them. The recent movie by Mel Gibson, *The Passion of the Christ* (released on Ash Wednesday in 2004) exemplifies this medieval focus on the bloody suffering and the guilt that all should feel for it. The fourteenth-century gratuity that was added to the Passion story in order to elicit feelings of remorse and guilt is mimicked in this movie, which was supposed to remind the viewer of his or her role in the crucifixion of Christ. A *New*

⁶³ *This Far by Faith*, 96.

⁶⁴ *The Way of the Cross*. Third Printing, Forward Movement Publications: Cincinnati, 1.

⁶⁵ *The Way of the Cross*. The Church Hymnal Corporation: New York. 1987, 4.

York Times review of the movie illustrates the seemingly unnecessary violence portrayed: “*The Passion of the Christ* is so relentlessly focused on the savagery of Jesus' final hours that this film seems to arise less from love than from wrath, and to succeed more in assaulting the spirit than in uplifting it. Mr. Gibson has constructed an unnerving and painful spectacle that is also, in the end, a depressing one. It is disheartening to see a film made with evident and abundant religious conviction that is at the same time so utterly lacking in grace.”⁶⁶ Gibson received much criticism for his film due to worries of anti-Semitism. Gibson denied any idea of anti-Semitism, claiming that the film was about every individual person's role in the Passion.

The film is about sacrifice, an idea that was strongly emphasized in the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church. Sacrifice during Mass is still understood and taught, but there is less of a focus on it. The atmosphere the film creates, that of watching a sacrifice taking place in another language one does not understand but can only read along with in subtitles, hearkens to the Latin Masses focused on sacrifice before Vatican II. It is no surprise, then, that Mel Gibson is part of a schismatic group of Catholics who deny any validity to the Second Vatican Council. The sad reality, therefore, that existed in the Middle Ages in regard to personal harm and guilt for the sufferings of Christ are being emphasized again by reflections and films like Gibson's *Passion*. Recently I was in Aquinas Bookstore, a Catholic bookstore in South Bend, and was disturbed to see a table with jewelry and keychains from Gibson's *Passion*. I was not disturbed by the fact that there was merchandise, but by what the merchandise was. The necklaces and keychains were all silver nails hanging on a black rope. The idea was that one would have a personal reminder of his or her role in Jesus' crucifixion every single day. That mentality does not carry the understanding that Jesus died for our sins so we could be made new and live with God for eternity. That mentality states that we personally caused the pain and suffering Jesus endured, and we should feel terrible for it.

⁶⁶ A.O. Scott. “Good and Evil Locked in Violent Showdown.” *New York Times Online*. <http://movies2.nytimes.com/mem/movies/review.html?oref=login&title1=Passion%20of%20the%20Christ> . February 25, 2004.

D. John Paul II's Stations of the Cross for Good Friday

There is another line of reflection on the Stations of the Cross in our modern era that does not carry the same idea of personal culpability for the Passion. The mindset associated with it is rather on what humanity can learn by seeing how Jesus deals with his suffering and what it therefore calls Christians to do for others.

In 1991, Pope John Paul II used a new set of fourteen stations for the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday based solely on the Scriptural accounts of the Passion. This eliminates Veronica wiping the face of Jesus and Jesus meeting his mother on the path to Calvary, two stations that seemingly lifted some of the intense violence of the account. In the "Introduction" to her book responding to John Paul II's new Stations, Megan McKenna explains why different non-Scriptural elements were added to the devotion, giving responsibility to popular piety, emotional content, and simple ignorance of the Scriptures in the Middle Ages when most Christians were not reading the Bible in their homes. McKenna writes:

Over time, depending upon who designed the devotion, pieces were added that were not in the Scriptures but they wanted them to be. Veronica added herself, it is thought, as part of the devotional practice. Christians found it difficult to stand up to evil and resist sin, so they added the three stations of Jesus falling, though the Bible does not record that He did so. And because of great devotion to the Mother of God, they added a station where the two, mother and son, met and another where she held his lifeless body in her arms before putting Him into the tomb. This image, of course, became the pieta.⁶⁷

The Pope then created a new set of Stations based on the gospel accounts of the Passion narrative. John Paul II wanted the new Stations to have contemporary reflections written for them so that they would adequately portray the world in which Christ's Passion is received.

McKenna writes:

The stations were not just about the Way of the Cross that Jesus trod in his passion, but about the Way of the Cross that all believers, especially those who suffer violently, innocently, needlessly, and in the cause of justice, still walk in their passion in contemporary society. This devotion is not so much about the

⁶⁷ Megan McKenna. *The New Stations of the Cross: The Way of the Cross According to Scripture*. Image Books Doubleday. New York: 2003, viii.

past as about the present reality of the Crucified One in our midst still suffering and dying at our hands.⁶⁸

The ideology behind the Pope's Stations is not hidden. Individuals are connected with the suffering of Christ because of the way that many in today's world are still suffering unjustly. While McKenna states that this devotion is not about the past, by framing each station around a particular Scriptural event, one can look at each station and say, "Jesus went through this. I can do this," or, "I can help those who are going through this." This applies particularly to those who are marginalized in society.

The organization of the Stations of the Cross is different with John Paul II's new set of Stations. While the Stations overlap on some, there are several Stations that are new to the Pope's set. There is a more pronounced focus on the events leading up to Christ's actual journey on the path to Calvary. More attention is given to Jesus' rejection from friend and foe, as well as to the physical torture he underwent. The italicized stations are those that are not included in the traditional set:

Traditional

1. Jesus Is Condemned to Death
2. Jesus Carries His Cross
3. Jesus Falls the First Time
4. Jesus Meets His Sorrowful Mother
5. Jesus Is Helped by Simon of Cyrene
6. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus
7. Jesus Falls the Second Time
8. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus Falls a Third Time
10. Jesus Is Stripped of His Clothes
11. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross
12. Jesus Dies on the Cross
13. Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross
14. Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

John Paul II's

1. *Jesus Prays in the Garden of Olives*
2. *Jesus Is Betrayed by Judas*
3. Jesus Is Condemned to Death
4. *Jesus Is Denied by Peter*
5. *Jesus Is Handed Over to Pilate*
6. *Jesus Is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns*
7. Jesus Carries His Cross
8. Jesus Is Helped by Simon of Cyrene
9. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem
10. Jesus Is Crucified
11. *Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief*
12. *Jesus on the Cross Gives His Mother to His Disciple*
13. Jesus Dies on the Cross
14. Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

Virgil Elizondo edited a meditation book on the Pope's Stations of the Cross that highlights how they relate to the struggles of Latin American and Hispanic Catholics in the Americas. John Paul II's intention of having the Stations point to those marginalized in society is keenly felt in Elizondo's collection of meditations. Elizondo closely aligns the Native Americans and blacks in the early days of American colonization to Jesus. Elizondo writes, "We invite our readers to take this journey with us, to share our suffering, to experience our crucifixion, and to taste in anticipation our Easter joy."⁶⁹ This focus on evangelization and mission attached to the devotion of the Stations of the Cross calls all people to identify with Christ and explains why it is important to practice the devotion. Elizondo writes, "The Way of the Cross continues to reveal the persistent malice of a world dominated by sin and the inexhaustible love of a God who seeks to save us in spite of ourselves."⁷⁰ The purpose of the Stations of the Cross—and the reason that one should reflect on them in devotionals—is to constantly remind oneself of the unconditional love of God. God's love sent Jesus to earth, God's love sacrificed his only Son to be crucified for the salvation of humanity, and God's love continues to dwell in us day after day.

III. A Modern Day Stations of the Cross

A. Which Set of Stations to Practice

There are multiple sets of the Stations of the Cross that could be practiced. While some are strictly Scriptural and others bring in elements of local traditions, they all focus on the central truth that Christ suffered and died in order to bring about salvation for humanity. The inclusion of "Veronica" or the confusion over how many times Jesus really did fall do not change the reality being recalled. The Stations are simply a way for us as humans to connect with the Passion of Christ and to learn how to change our lives because of it.

⁶⁹ Virgil Elizondo, Editor. *Way of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in the Americas*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., New York: 1992, ix.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, xiv.

Seven Stations overlap between the traditional set observed in most Catholic churches and the set by Pope John Paul II for Good Friday. These include: Jesus Is Condemned to Death; Jesus Carries His Cross; Jesus Is Helped by Simon of Cyrene; Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem; Jesus Is Crucified (or Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross); Jesus Dies on the Cross; and Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb. Of the remaining seven from the *traditional* set, five are not based on Scripture while two are: Jesus Is Stripped of His Clothes and Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross. These two are Scriptural, but not included in the Pope's set. They point to the humility and weakness of Jesus as a human being. He was stripped of everything—even his clothing—and then, when he was dead, he had to be taken down off of the cross by his friends. The acknowledgment of Jesus being stripped of his clothing in his humanity hearkens to Philippians, which states that Jesus humbled himself by taking the form of a slave. This Station is an important one that demonstrates the idea of humility.

A Station from the traditional set that is not Scriptural but does portray the message of serving one's brother or sister is: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus. The actual person "Veronica" did not exist, but by envisioning the event of someone comforting and aiding Jesus in his suffering gives humanity a model of how to react to those who are troubled or in pain. Reflecting on Jesus' suffering should call one to assist those in need. Jesus tells his disciples, "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."⁷¹ The character of Veronica is a tangible example of serving the person of Jesus. The challenge given to the rest of humanity is to see Jesus' face in all those who need compassion.

To keep the traditional number of fourteen Stations, five more would need to be chosen. From the Pope's set of Stations, there are four that stand out as particularly important and moving for the message of the Passion. Jesus Prays in the Garden of Olives gives a wonderful message of surrendering through prayer. The phrase to focus on in this Station is "Thy will be done," which speaks to all who struggle to accept things in their lives. Jesus Is Denied by Peter shows human weakness. We are all called to live a life following Christ and his message. At

⁷¹ Matthew 25:40, NAB.

times, we will fail, even deny the very existence of Jesus in our lives. Though we may give up on Christ, he will never give up on us. Peter, who turns around and becomes a leader of the Church—the “rock” on which Christ built his Church—exemplifies this statement.

Another two Stations taken from the Pope’s set which closely follow the message of the Passion both take place while Jesus is on the cross. The first is Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief. This Station profoundly shows the role of forgiveness in Jesus’ ministry. The thief has obviously done wrong in his life—otherwise he would not be in the position he is. As a result of his statement of humility and faith in Jesus, however, Jesus grants this repentant man salvation. Those of us who read this today can identify with the thief, who realizes his sinful ways and comes to Jesus seeking redemption. The other important Station toward the end of Jesus’ life is Jesus on the Cross Gives His Mother to His Disciple. While this was one moment in time when Jesus was speaking to one disciple, it is a message for all people at all times. In one of His last breaths, Jesus gave his mother to all humanity. The importance given to this statement demands reflection—how is Mary related to the Passion of Christ, and therefore to all of our journeys to live Christian lives?

One more Station could be added that does not come from either the traditional set or John Paul II’s set for Good Friday. Before any of the actual events of the Passion take place, Jesus gathers his apostles in a room to reveal to them the plan of salvation. The Last Supper gives meaning to the painful and sorrowful events that follow. This Station is present in the Chinese culture (Pope John Paul II included it in a Stations of the Cross for World Youth Day in China)⁷² and is integral to the message of the Passion. By starting with Christ gathering his apostles and offering his very Body and Blood, the rest of the Stations can be read in the context of the Eucharist. Christ gave his life so that we could achieve salvation. Jesus gave his Body and Blood so that we could be nourished on the journey. By receiving Christ’s very self, humans become the Body of Christ in the world and can therefore serve their neighbors.

⁷² Chinese Stations of the Cross booklet, translated by Priscilla Wong in the Campus Ministry Department at the University of Notre Dame.

This is what I would consider a modern set of the Stations of the Cross:

- I. Jesus Gathers His Apostles for the Last Supper
- II. Jesus Prays in the Garden of Olives
- III. Jesus Is Condemned to Death
- IV. Jesus Is Denied by Peter
- V. Jesus Carries His Cross
- VI. Jesus Is Helped by Simon of Cyrene
- VII. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus
- VIII. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem
- IX. Jesus Is Stripped of His Clothes
- X. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross
- XI. Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief
- XII. Jesus On the Cross Gives His Mother to His Disciples
- XIII. Jesus Dies on the Cross
- XIV. Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

B. Modern Reflections

The over-arching theme for the reflections on the Stations of the Cross is the idea that by meditating on the sufferings Christ endured one should become more aware of the suffering surrounding him or her. Jesus gives a model of how to love those around one—selflessly and unconditionally. Jesus’ actions claim salvation for all people, not just those who choose to be saved. There is, of course, sorrow attached to thinking about this topic, but not a guilty sorrow, not a self-mutilating sorrow. We are invited to participate in Christ’s suffering by being Christ to the world. Christ’s Passion can only have meaning in us if we go and live as the Body of Christ today. One must think of St. Teresa of Avila’s prayer: “Christ has no Body now but yours, no hands but yours here on this earth.”

Here are three sets of reflections based on this theme. One is for the traditional set of fourteen Stations, another is for the Pope’s Stations on Good Friday, and the final includes my own set of modern Stations of the Cross.

Traditional Set

I. Jesus Is Condemned to Death

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Pilate said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with Jesus called Messiah?’ They all said, ‘Let him be crucified!’ But he said, ‘Why? What evil has he done?’ They only shouted the louder, ‘Let him be crucified!’ When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood. Look to it yourselves.’ Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.”⁷³

People. How many times do we “wash our hands” of the plight of others? Jesus was a scandalous and dangerous person for society in the eyes of many. In today’s world, people who are considered scandalous and dangerous for society are condemned to Death Row. Do we stand by, letting this condemnation take place? Since we do not push the button for lethal injection, can we “wash our hands” of the deaths taking place?

Loving Father, help us to always stand with the marginalized members of society who cannot speak for themselves. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

II. Jesus Carries His Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Then he said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.’”⁷⁴

⁷³ Matthew 27:22-24, 26, NAB.

⁷⁴ Luke 9:23-24, NAB.

People. What crosses in our lives do we resist? Do we enjoy the luxuries of our lives while our brothers and sisters struggle without their basic needs? What “crosses” could we take up, small and large, to benefit the people around us—a few more dollars in the Church collection, a few hours a week at the local homeless shelter, a vacation spent with the poor and destitute?

Loving Jesus, you accepted your cross to gain salvation for the world. Help us realize how we can serve your people by taking up our own crosses. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

III. Jesus Falls the First Time

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. 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.”⁷⁵

People. How weak is our humanity. Jesus struggles under the weight of his cross, just as we struggle to follow Christ’s way for us. How often do we give up when we fail to live the life that we strive toward? Like Jesus, we must pick ourselves up and continue on the journey.

Loving God, strengthen us in our baptismal promises so that we may rise again to serve your people with compassion and joy. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

IV. Jesus Meets His Sorrowful Mother

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

⁷⁵ Isaiah 53:4-5, NAB.

Reader. “To what can I liken or compare you, O daughter Jerusalem? What example can I show you for your comfort, virgin daughter Zion? For great as the sea is your downfall; who can heal you?”⁷⁶

People. It is hard to witness weakness and pain, both in us and in others. Do we avert our eyes from those who are suffering, or do we meet them where they are? How do we respond to our own weaknesses?

Loving Lord, open our eyes to see the suffering taking place in our midst. Help us resist the temptation to avoid the pain in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones. Only by seeing the pain that is present can we begin to be an instrument of your grace. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

V. Jesus Is Helped by Simon of Cyrene

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.”⁷⁷

People. How do we respond to Christ in our everyday lives? Simon was a worker and a father, probably not wanting to be associated with this condemned man, Jesus. Many do not want to be connected with those on the edge of society—do we fall into this temptation? Do we cringe at the idea of going to a soup kitchen, a shelter, or to any unfamiliar place?

Loving and welcoming Jesus, you call all people to yourself. Help us to reach out to those who need our assistance, no matter their state in life. By helping others bear their crosses we are helping you. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

VI. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

⁷⁶ Lamentations 2:13, NAB.

⁷⁷ Mark 15:21, NAB.

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirst and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the King will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”⁷⁸

People. The opportunity for us to wipe the face of Jesus surrounds us daily, but we often fail to recognize it. Jesus lives in all people, including us.

Loving Jesus, help us to see your face in all of your people. Remind us that all people are our brothers and sisters, one people created by the one God. Help your people to live as the united Body of Christ.

VII. Jesus Falls the Second Time

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy. When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.”⁷⁹

People. When we are in periods of doubt and hardship, do we fall prey to despair? Do we forget the blessings we have in our lives? Do we let our own desires for comfort and pleasure blind us to the common good?

⁷⁸ Matthew 25:37-40, NAB.

⁷⁹ John 16:20-22, NAB.

Loving Creator, you shared in our weakness. Help us remember that you will always be there to lift us up. Help us realize that our comfort is not the ultimate goal—we must offer ourselves as an instrument for your love and justice. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

VIII. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’”⁸⁰

People. Many times we can get caught up in the emotionalism of the world and of our lives.

Terrible things happen every day—people are killed unjustly; people die of hunger; people are discriminated against. Do we simply mourn for them superficially, or do we try and do something to change the reality in which people live?

Loving Savior, you reminded the women of Jerusalem that they must work for the future of their world. We are similarly called to change the injustices of the world—help us change our reflection into action, our intentions into reality. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

IX. Jesus Falls the Third Time

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

⁸⁰ Luke 23:27-29, NAB.

Reader. “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”⁸¹

People. Seeing Jesus weakened under the weight of the cross reminds us of our own weakness. We can do anything we do only with the grace of God. When we are struggling, do we ask God to lift us up, or do we rely on our own strength?

Loving Redeemer, help us accept our weaknesses and ask you for assistance, for we can do nothing without your help. Give us the strength not only to lift ourselves up, but also to lift up those around us who are struggling under pressures too heavy to bear. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

X. Jesus Is Stripped of His Clothes

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped off his clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about him.”⁸²

People. Do we fear being ridiculed? When others make rude and discriminating comments or jokes, do we laugh it off or sit silent and let them continue? Where do our priorities lay—are we more concerned about saving our reputations in this finite life or about living eternal life with God?

Loving Liberator, you remind us that the dignity of human life is worth sacrificing for. You humbled yourself and were stripped of everything in the face of those who persecuted you. Help

⁸¹ Matthew 11:28-30, NAB.

⁸² Matthew 27:27-28, NAB.

us stand up for justice and dignity, even when we are uncomfortable and vulnerable. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XI. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified them him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.’”⁸³

People. Do we willingly forgive those who hurt us—physically, mentally, or spiritually? Jesus was tortured and humiliated, but still loved unconditionally and forgave his persecutors. Would we be willing to forgive?

Loving Consoler, grant us the patience and peace of mind necessary to forgive those who treat us unjustly. Remind us that we are called to a vocation of love. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XII. Jesus Dies on the Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’”⁸⁴

People. How much do we trust God? Enough to lay our lives on the line? Do we question God’s will in our lives when it seems contrary to our own plans?

⁸³ Luke 23:33-34, NAB.

⁸⁴ Mark 15:37-39, NAB.

Loving Jesus, when you gave up your spirit, you trusted the Father ultimately to receive you and raise you in glory. Help us in our doubt. Help us in our unbelief. Help us see where you are calling us. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XIII. Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “They shall look on him whom they have thrust through, and they shall mourn him as one mourns for an only son, and they shall grieve over him as one grieves over a firstborn.”⁸⁵

People. It is so hard to let go. The reality of your death is shown when your friends hold your limp body as they take you down off the cross. Could we accept the reality?

Loving Light, your sacrifice ends as you are taken from the cross. Help us accept the reality of death in the world. While separation from our loved ones is difficult, your will is greater than our selfish desires. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XIV. Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Zechariah 12:10, NAB.

⁸⁶ Matthew 27:57-60, NAB.

People. How willing are we to give up what we consider precious? We hold our lives, our possessions, and our achievements in such high regard. Do we give of our first fruits to those who have more need?

Loving Provider, you give us all that we need in this world. Joseph of Arimathea gave of what he had so that your Son might have a burial place. May we give of ourselves for the good of others. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

John Paul II's Set for Good Friday

I. Jesus Prays in the Garden of Olives

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Then going out he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. When he arrived at the place he said to them, ‘Pray that you may not undergo the test.’ After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.’ And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him”⁸⁷

People. Do we realize the power of prayer? When faced with hard decisions or choices, do we turn to God for guidance? Are we open to what God will say to us in those quiet moments?

Loving Listener, remind us that you are always waiting for us to turn to you. Help us to be steadfast in prayer, for all is resolved in you. Make us a people of prayer. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

II. Jesus Is Betrayed by Judas

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

⁸⁷ Luke 22:39-43, NAB.

Reader. “While he was still speaking, a crowd approached and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas. He went up to Jesus to kiss him. Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’”⁸⁸

People. Do we accept Jesus’ call to discipleship, or do we merely state our intentions outwardly and on the inside continue our own quiet betrayal? What does it mean for us to be followers of Christ?

Loving Master, help us to accept what it means to follow you. We must follow your example and welcome the marginalized and help the poor and destitute. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

III. Jesus Is Condemned to Death

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Pilate said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with Jesus called Messiah?’ They all said, ‘Let him be crucified!’ But he said, ‘Why? What evil has he done?’ They only shouted the louder, ‘Let him be crucified!’ When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood. Look to it yourselves.’ Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.”⁸⁹

People. How many times do we “wash our hands” of the plight of others? Jesus was a scandalous and dangerous person for society in the eyes of many. In today’s world, people who are considered scandalous and dangerous for society are condemned to Death Row. Do we stand by, letting this condemnation take place? Since we do not push the button for lethal injection, can we “wash our hands” of the deaths taking place?

⁸⁸ Luke 22:47-48, NAB.

⁸⁹ Matthew 27:22-24, 26, NAB.

Loving Father, help us to always stand with the marginalized members of society who cannot speak for themselves. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

IV. Jesus Is Denied by Peter

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “When a maid saw him seated in the light, she looked intently at him and said, ‘This man too was with him.’ But Peter denied it saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ A short while later someone else saw him and said, ‘You too are one of them;’ but Peter answered, ‘My friend, I am not.’ About an hour later, still another insisted, ‘Assuredly, this man too was with him, for he also is a Galilean.’ But Peter said, ‘My friend, I do not know what you are talking about.’ Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.’ He went out and began to weep bitterly.”⁹⁰

People. How consistent are we in our faith? Are we a follower of Christ when it is easy, when we are surrounded by other followers? Do we have the same level of faith at Sunday Mass as when we pass the homeless person on the side of the road?

Loving Provider, remind us to always live the life that you are calling us to live. The only way receiving you in the Eucharist can bear fruit in our lives is if we strive to serve the people of the world as you do. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

V. Jesus Is Handed Over to Pilate

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

⁹⁰ Luke 22:56-62. NAB.

Reader. “Pilate addressed them again, for he wanted Jesus to be the one he released. But they only shouted back, ‘Crucify him. Crucify him!’ He said to them for the third time, ‘What wrong is this man guilty of? I have not discovered anything about him that calls for the death penalty. I will therefore chastise him and release him.’ But they demanded in loud cries that he be crucified, and their shouts increased in violence. Pilate then decreed that what they demanded should be done. He released the one they asked for, who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, and delivered Jesus up to their wishes.”⁹¹

People. What do we stand up for? When we are in a group, what do we shout for and about? Do we use our power to defend the weak and powerless, or do we instead use it to advance our own gain, our own prestige? Who are we calling out to be crucified?

Loving Advocate, help us to stand with Jesus. Help us to stand with those who are weakened by the abuse of others and not with those who incite violence amid your people. Grant us all the strength to be examples of your patience and justice. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

VI. Jesus Is Scourged and Crowned With Thorns

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Pilate’s next move was to take Jesus out and have him scourged. The soldiers then wove a crown of thorns and fixed it on his head, throwing around his shoulders a cloak of royal purple. Repeatedly they came up to him and said, ‘All hail, King of the Jews!’ slapping his face as they did so.”⁹²

People. We are horrified when we hear about Jesus’ body being whipped and beaten. How could someone do this to him? But how blind are we to the persecution and suffering that occurs every

⁹¹ Luke 23:20-25, NAB.

⁹² John 19: 1-3.

day for the living Body of Christ? Do we recognize and call out in horror when God's children are being scourged?

Loving Father, make us instruments of your peace in this world. Help us to follow your will so that those who need our compassion and support may receive it. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

VII. Jesus Carries His Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Then he said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.’”⁹³

People. What crosses in our lives do we resist? Do we enjoy the luxuries of our lives while our brothers and sisters struggle without their basic needs? What “crosses” could we take up, small and large, to benefit the people around us—a few more dollars in the Church collection, a few hours a week at the local homeless shelter, a vacation spent with the poor and destitute?

Loving Jesus, you accepted your cross to gain salvation for the world. Help us realize how we can serve your people by taking up our own crosses. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

VIII. Jesus Is Helped by Simon of Cyrene

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Luke 9:23-24, NAB.

⁹⁴ Mark 15:21, NAB.

People. How do we respond to Christ in our everyday lives? Simon was a worker and a father, probably not wanting to be associated with this condemned man, Jesus. Many do not want to be connected with those on the edge of society—do we fall into this temptation? Do we cringe at the idea of going to a soup kitchen, a shelter, or to any unfamiliar place?

Loving and welcoming Jesus, you call all people to yourself. Help us to reach out to those who need our assistance, no matter their state in life. By helping others bear their crosses we are helping you. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

IX. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’”⁹⁵

People. Many times we can get caught up in the emotionalism of the world and of our lives.

Terrible things happen every day—people are killed unjustly; people die of hunger; people are discriminated against. Do we simply mourn for them superficially, or do we try and do something to change the reality in which people live?

Loving Savior, you reminded the women of Jerusalem that they must work for the future of their world. We are similarly called to change the injustices of the world—help us change our reflection into action, our intentions into reality. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

X. Jesus Is Crucified

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

⁹⁵ Luke 23:27-29, NAB.

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified them him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.’”⁹⁶

People. Do we willingly forgive those who hurt us—physically, mentally, or spiritually? Jesus was tortured and humiliated, but still loved unconditionally and forgave his persecutors. Would we be willing to forgive?

Loving Consoler, grant us the patience and peace of mind necessary to forgive those who treat us unjustly. Remind us that we are called to a vocation of love. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XI. Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.’ The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, ‘Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied to him, ‘Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’”⁹⁷

People. We remind ourselves to stand up for those who are falsely accused or who face unjust punishments, but what about those who have been rightfully charged with committing a crime? How do we respond to those people? Do we respond like Jesus, forgiving them even as they stand condemned, or do we sit back and say that whatever they get they deserve?

⁹⁶ Luke 23:33-34, NAB.

⁹⁷ Luke 23:39-43, NAB.

Loving Jesus, help us to see your face in all of our brothers and sisters, especially in those with whom it can be so difficult. Remind us that we are not the final judges of humanity—you alone are our source of redemption and salvation. Help us to abide in your justice. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XII. Jesus On the Cross Gives His Mother to His Disciple

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold you son.’ Then he said to his disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”⁹⁸

People. Giving his mother to his disciple, Jesus gives his mother to all people who follow him—all of us are called “the beloved disciple.” By telling us this, Jesus reminds us that we are one family united in him. We are all sons and daughters of God through Jesus. Do we treat our neighbors as brothers and sisters? Do we think of strangers as family?

Loving Brother, we are all one family in you. Help us to nurture that family through all of our actions, thoughts, and words. Bring us closer to one another and in turn closer to you. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XIII. Jesus Dies on the Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ John 19: 26-27.

⁹⁹ Mark 15:37-39, NAB.

People. How much do we trust God? Enough to lay our lives on the line? Do we question God's will in our lives when it seems contrary to our own plans?

Loving Jesus, when you gave up your spirit, you trusted the Father ultimately to receive you and raise you in glory. Help us in our doubt. Help us in our unbelief. Help us see where you are calling us. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XIV. Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. "When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed."¹⁰⁰

People. How willing are we to give up what we consider precious? We hold our lives, our possessions, and our achievements in such high regard. Do we give of our first fruits to those who have more need?

Loving Provider, you give us all that we need in this world. Joseph of Arimathea gave of what he had so that your Son might have a burial place. May we give of ourselves for the good of others. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

My Modern Set

I. Jesus Gathers His Apostles For the Last Supper

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 27:57-60, NAB.

Reader. “When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it again until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.’ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you that from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.’”¹⁰¹

People. Jesus tells us, “Do this in memory of me.” Do we mimic Jesus’ actions in our daily lives? What all are we called to do in remembering the ministry of Jesus—feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned? Do we follow Jesus’ command?

Loving Rescuer, you framed your Passion around the Eucharistic offering of yourself to your people. By receiving your Body and Blood we become one with you and form the mystical Body of Christ in the world. We are called to serve. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

II. Jesus Prays in the Garden of Olives

V. We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You;

R. Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Then going out He went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed Him. When He arrived at the place He said to them, ‘Pray that you may not undergo the test.’ After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling, He prayed, saying, ‘Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me; still, not My will but Yours be done.’ And to strengthen Him an angel from heaven appeared to Him”¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Luke 22: 14-20.

¹⁰² Luke 22: 39-43.

People. Do we realize the power of prayer? When faced with hard decisions or choices, do we turn to God for guidance? Are we open to what God will say to us in those quiet moments?

Loving Listener, remind us that You are always waiting for us to turn to You. Help us to be steadfast in prayer, for all is resolved in You. Make us a people of prayer. Help Your people live as the united Body of Christ.

III. Jesus Is Condemned to Death

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Pilate said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with Jesus called Messiah?’ They all said, ‘Let him be crucified!’ But he said, ‘Why? What evil has he done?’ They only shouted the louder, ‘Let him be crucified!’ When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood. Look to it yourselves.’ Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.”¹⁰³

People. How many times do we “wash our hands” of the plight of others? Jesus was a scandalous and dangerous person for society in the eyes of many. In today’s world, people who are considered scandalous and dangerous for society are condemned to Death Row. Do we stand by, letting this condemnation take place? Since we do not push the button for lethal injection, can we “wash our hands” of the deaths taking place?

Loving Father, help us to always stand with the marginalized members of society who cannot speak for themselves. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

IV. Jesus Is Denied by Peter

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

¹⁰³ Matthew 27:22-24, 26, NAB.

Reader. “When a maid saw him seated in the light, she looked intently at him and said, ‘This man too was with him.’ But Peter denied it saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ A short while later someone else saw him and said, ‘You too are one of them;’ but Peter answered, ‘My friend, I am not.’ About an hour later, still another insisted, ‘Assuredly, this man too was with him, for he also is a Galilean.’ But Peter said, ‘My friend, I do not know what you are talking about.’ Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.’ He went out and began to weep bitterly.”¹⁰⁴

People. How consistent are we in our faith? Are we a follower of Christ when it is easy, when we are surrounded by other followers? Do we have the same level of faith at Sunday Mass as when we pass the homeless person on the side of the road?

Loving Provider, remind us to always live the life that you are calling us to live. The only way receiving you in the Eucharist can bear fruit in our lives is if we strive to serve the people of the world as you do. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

V. Jesus Carries His Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Then he said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.’”¹⁰⁵

People. What crosses in our lives do we resist? Do we enjoy the luxuries of our lives while our brothers and sisters struggle without their basic needs? What “crosses” could we take up, small and large, to benefit the people around us—a few more dollars in the Church collection, a few hours a week at the local homeless shelter, a vacation spent with the poor and destitute?

¹⁰⁴ Luke 22:56-62. NAB.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 9:23-24, NAB.

Loving Jesus, you accepted your cross to gain salvation for the world. Help us realize how we can serve your people by taking up our own crosses. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

VI. Jesus Is Helped by Simon of Cyrene

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.”¹⁰⁶

People. How do we respond to Christ in our everyday lives? Simon was a worker and a father, probably not wanting to be associated with this condemned man, Jesus. Many do not want to be connected with those on the edge of society—do we fall into this temptation? Do we cringe at the idea of going to a soup kitchen, a shelter, or to any unfamiliar place?

Loving and welcoming Jesus, you call all people to yourself. Help us to reach out to those who need our assistance, no matter their state in life. By helping others bear their crosses we are helping you. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

VII. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirst and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the King will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Mark 15:21, NAB.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 25:37-40, NAB.

People. The opportunity for us to wipe the face of Jesus surrounds us daily, but we often fail to recognize it. Jesus lives in all people, including us.

Loving Jesus, help us to see your face in all of your people. Remind us that all people are our brothers and sisters, one people created by the one God. Help your people to live as the united Body of Christ.

VIII. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’”¹⁰⁸

People. Many times we can get caught up in the emotionalism of the world and of our lives.

Terrible things happen every day—people are killed unjustly; people die of hunger; people are discriminated against. Do we simply mourn for them superficially, or do we try and do something to change the reality in which people live?

Loving Savior, you reminded the women of Jerusalem that they must work for the future of their world. We are similarly called to change the injustices of the world—help us change our reflection into action, our intentions into reality. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

IX. Jesus Is Stripped of His Clothes

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

¹⁰⁸ Luke 23:27-29, NAB.

Reader. “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped off his clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about him.”¹⁰⁹

People. Do we fear being ridiculed? When others make rude and discriminating comments or jokes, do we laugh it off or sit silent and let them continue? Where do our priorities lay—are we more concerned about saving our reputations in this finite life or about living eternal life with God?

Loving Liberator, you remind us that the dignity of human life is worth sacrificing for. You humbled yourself and were stripped of everything in the face of those who persecuted you. Help us stand up for justice and dignity, even when we are uncomfortable and vulnerable. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

X. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified them him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.’”¹¹⁰

People. Do we willingly forgive those who hurt us—physically, mentally, or spiritually? Jesus was tortured and humiliated, but still loved unconditionally and forgave his persecutors. Would we be willing to forgive?

Loving Consoler, grant us the patience and peace of mind necessary to forgive those who treat us unjustly. Remind us that we are called to a vocation of love. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 27:27-28, NAB.

¹¹⁰ Luke 23:33-34, NAB.

XI. Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.’ The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, ‘Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied to him, ‘Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’”¹¹¹

People. We remind ourselves to stand up for those who are falsely accused or who face unjust punishments, but what about those who have been rightfully charged with committing a crime? How do we respond to those people? Do we respond like Jesus, forgiving them even as they stand condemned, or do we sit back and say that whatever they get they deserve?

Loving Jesus, help us to see your face in all of our brothers and sisters, especially in those with whom it can be so difficult. Remind us that we are not the final judges of humanity—you alone are our source of redemption and salvation. Help us to abide in your justice. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XII. Jesus On the Cross Gives His Mother to His Disciple

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold you son.’ Then he said to his disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”¹¹²

¹¹¹ Luke 23:39-43, NAB.

¹¹² John 19: 26-27.

People. Giving his mother to his disciple, Jesus gives his mother to all people who follow him—all of us are called “the beloved disciple.” By telling us this, Jesus reminds us that we are one family united in him. We are all sons and daughters of God through Jesus. Do we treat our neighbors as brothers and sisters? Do we think of strangers as family?

Loving Brother, we are all one family in you. Help us to nurture that family through all of our actions, thoughts, and words. Bring us closer to one another and in turn closer to you. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XIII. Jesus Dies on the Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’”¹¹³

People. How much do we trust God? Enough to lay our lives on the line? Do we question God’s will in our lives when it seems contrary to our own plans?

Loving Jesus, when you gave up your spirit, you trusted the Father ultimately to receive you and raise you in glory. Help us in our doubt. Help us in our unbelief. Help us see where you are calling us. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

XIV. Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you;

R. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Reader. “When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his

¹¹³ Mark 15:37-39, NAB.

new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed.”¹¹⁴

People. How willing are we to give up what we consider precious? We hold our lives, our possessions, and our achievements in such high regard. Do we give of our first fruits to those who have more need?

Loving Provider, you give us all that we need in this world. Joseph of Arimathea gave of what he had so that your Son might have a burial place. May we give of ourselves for the good of others. Help your people live as the united Body of Christ.

Conclusion

The Stations of the Cross is a devotion ultimately meant to send people out into the world after reflecting on Jesus’ actions during his Passion. In the early centuries of Christianity, people wanted to be able to reflect and meditate on the steps along Jesus’ road to Calvary without actually traveling there. Their goal was to be able to simulate a mission trip across the ocean so that they could fully participate in the mystery of Christ’s Passion. Today we can also participate in that same mystery by the same devotion.

The devotion of the Stations of the Cross is one way to convey the multifaceted reality of the Paschal Mystery. An important message to receive from this particular way of meditating on the last moments of Christ’s life is the universal call to service and mission received after meditating on the several specific glimpses into Jesus’ reactions to his suffering. When Jesus silently bears the pains of humanity, our reaction is not to inflict on ourselves our own pains. Our reaction is to recognize those who are enduring pain in our midst and come to their assistance by whatever means is appropriate. While we reflect on the time when Christ’s physical body was taken from our material earth, we must remember that the mystical Body of Christ—the Church—is present and must continue Christ’s work until he comes again.

¹¹⁴ Matthew 27:57-60, NAB.

*Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet, on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks
Compassion on this world
Yours are the feet
With which he walks to do good.
Yours are the hands
With which he blesses all the world
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet.
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours.
-St. Teresa of Avila*