

Stations of the Cross

1st Station: Jesus is condemned to death.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: Then Pilate saw that he was making no impression, that in fact a riot was imminent. So he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your concern.' And the people, to a man, shouted back, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' Then he released Barabbas for them. He ordered Jesus to be first scourged and then handed over to be crucified.

Matthew 27:24 -26

Reflection: What does it mean to be condemned – and to be condemned unjustly? We see poverty, injustice and unfairness all around us, the scale of the problem is too difficult for us to deal with and (like Pilate) we wash our hands of it. Remove the blinkers from our eyes because wherever there is suffering and injustice we cannot remain outsiders or uninvolved.

St. Vincent de Paul:

We should strive to keep our hearts open to the sufferings and wretchedness of other people, and pray continually that God may grant us that spirit of compassion which is truly the spirit of God.

2nd Station: Jesus takes up his cross.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: So in the end Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. They then took charge of Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out of the city to the place of the skull or, as it was called in Hebrew, Golgotha.

John 19:16-17

Reflection: Lord Jesus you accepted your cross, help us to accept whatever trials and sufferings we are given. When our problems seem too much for us, when disappointment, weariness and monotony grind us down - then, Lord, show us how to shoulder our burdens and follow steadfastly in your footsteps.

St Vincent de Paul:

The first step to be taken by one who wishes to follow Christ is according to our Lord's own words, that of renouncing himself – that is, his own senses, his own passions, his own will, his own judgement and all the movements of nature, making to God a sacrifice of all these things, and all of their acts, which are surely sacrifices very acceptable to the Lord. And we must never grow weary of this; for if anyone having, so to speak, one foot already in Heaven, should abandon this exercise, when the time should come for him to put the other there, he would run much risk of being lost.

3rd Station: Jesus falls the first time.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: And yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried. But we, we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God, and brought low. Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:4-5.

Reflection: In that moment it seemed that all that Jesus had achieved in his ministry was wasted. Under the weight of the cross, Jesus is too weak to carry on and falls to the ground. Then, slowly, he rises and carries on. Lord Jesus, help us to accept our weaknesses, teach us not to complain when things get too difficult for us and give us the strength to carry on with the work you have given to us.

St Vincent de Paul: Human nature grows tired of always doing the same thing, and it is God's will that this because of the opportunity of practising two great virtues. The first is perseverance, which will bring us to our goal. The other is steadfastness, which overcomes the difficulties on the way.

4th Station: Jesus meets his mother.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected- and a sword will pierce your own soul too-so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare'.

Luke 2:34-35.

Reflection: Mary sees her son kicked and driven like an animal but she can only watch – silent and in deep pain. Yet her trust in God was constant. There are times when we must watch as those we love suffer, help us to be faithful and to know that all things are in your hands.

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam: The science of charity reform is not transmitted through books and at assemblies' tribunes as much as by climbing stairs in the home of the poor, kneeling at his bed, suffering from the same cold as he does, and discovering the secret of a grief-stricken heart in the course of a friendly conversation. When we have accomplished this ministry, not for months, but over long years; when we have thus studied the poor at home, at school, at the hospital, not only in one city but in several, and also in the country, in whatever condition God placed him, then we can start to know the formidable problem of misery, then we are entitled to propose serious measures....

5th Station: Simon helps Jesus carry his cross.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: As they were leading him away they seized on a man, Simon from Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus.

Luke 23:26

Reflection: Simon was forced to carry Jesus' cross. He would have been ashamed to be seen helping a criminal or outcast. Help us not to be ashamed of helping those whom society condemns because we are the hands, the feet and the shoulders of Christ in our world of today. Lord, help us to speak words of kindness and to listen with attentiveness to all those who claim our time.

St Vincent de Paul: Since Christ willed to be born poor, he chose for himself disciples who were poor. He made himself the servant of the poor and shared their poverty. He went so far as to say that he would consider every deed which either helps or harms the poor as done for or against himself. . . . So when we visit the poor and needy, we try to be understanding where they are concerned. We sympathise with them so fully that we can echo Paul's words: 'I have become all things to all men.' Therefore we must try to be stirred by our neighbours' worries and distress.

6th Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: Like a sapling he grew up in front of us, like a root in arid ground. Without beauty, without majesty (we saw him), no looks to attract our eyes; a thing despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, a man to make people screen their faces; he was despised and we took no account of him.

Isaiah 53:2-3.

Reflection: It is an ancient tradition of the Church that, when Veronica wiped the bloody face of Jesus, there was an image of Christ left on the cloth. We too see that same face of Jesus in every act of kindness, every offer of support and every act of mercy that is done in His name. So whenever eyes fill up with tears of suffering, of desperation, loneliness or injustice then we have the opportunity to wipe away the tears of Christ.

St Vincent de Paul: If you consider the poor in the light of faith, then you will observe that they are taking the place of the Son of God who chose to be poor. Although in his passion he almost lost the appearance of a man and was considered a fool by the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews, he showed them that his mission was to preach to the poor: 'He sent me to bring the good news to the poor.' We also ought to have this same spirit and imitate Christ's actions, that is, we must take care of the poor, console them, help them, support their cause.

7th Station: Jesus falls a second time.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: Now I have fallen, they crowd round delighted, flocking to jeer at me; strangers I never even knew with loud cries tear me to pieces, riddling me with gibe after gibe, grinding their teeth at me.

Psalm 35:15-16.

Reflection: Jesus, who was sinless and innocent, had to struggle to his feet and continue his journey to the cross. There are times for us when all seems to fail and we don't feel that we can carry on. Give us the strength to accept our responsibilities and to persevere in doing your will.

St Vincent de Paul: Extend your mercy towards others, so that there can be no one whom you met without helping. For what hope is there for us if God should withdraw his mercy towards us.

8th Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: Large numbers of people followed him, and of women too, who mourned and lamented for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children.

Luke 23:27-28.

Reflection: In the midst of terrible suffering and pain, Jesus offers words of comfort to the weeping women of Jerusalem. His words tell the women not to weep because of what is happening to him, but to look deeply at the paradox of what is happening and fear for the consequences for the Hebrew nation. We today are the children of those women and the call for repentance and accountability is made to each one of us.

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam: "The question which is agitating the world today is a social one. It is a struggle between those who have nothing and those who have too much. It is a violent clash of opulence and poverty which is shaking the ground under our feet. Our duty as Christians is to throw ourselves between these two camps in order to accomplish by love what justice alone cannot do."

9th Station: Jesus falls the third time.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.

Philippians 2:6-8.

Reflection: Though totally innocent, Jesus was treated as a common criminal and completely drained of strength collapses on the road. This indignity is matched only by our frequently falling away from him. Jesus chose the path of obedience and self-denial. We fall from him by our half-hearted following of the Gospel, by our half-kept promises and by putting our own comfort before our Christian duty. However, no matter how many times we fall, no matter how grave our sins each time we rise to start again we know that we will encounter the mercy and support of God.

St Vincent de Paul: Perfection consists in one thing only, which is doing the will of God. For according to Our Lord's words, it suffices for perfection to deny self, to take up his cross and to follow Him. Now who denies himself and takes up his cross and follows Christ better than he who seeks not to do his own will, but always that of God? Behold, now how little is needed to become a saint? Nothing more than to acquire the habit of willing, on every occasion, what God wills.

10th Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it. Then they crucified him, and shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get.

Mark: 15:22-24.

Reflection: Jesus is stripped of clothing, of disciples and of friends; alone, naked and vulnerable and with nothing to protect him from the agony to come. We work for possessions, position, and security, but try to hide our sins and weaknesses. Help us Lord, to let go of our prejudice and pretensions and be stripped of all that comes between us and doing your will.

St Vincent de Paul: The most powerful weapon to conquer the devil is humility. For, as he does not know at all how to employ it, neither does he know how to defend himself from it.

11th Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: Now with him they were also leading out two other criminals to be executed. When they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him there and the two criminals also, one on the right, the other on the left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing'. Then they cast lots to share out his clothing.

Luke: 23:32-34.

Reflection: The soldiers stretch the arms of Jesus and hold his hands and wrist against the wood and with one blow smash the hammer against the nail and through the flesh. Then they seize the other arm and repeat the process. Next, raising his knees so that his feet are flat against the wood they hammer in more nails. Jesus could have chosen to come down from the cross. Instead he chose to die with two criminals, not to react to those who taunted him and to ask his Father to forgive all those who had been involved in this crucifixion. We look at you, Jesus, and ask, 'Are we worth this much?'

St Vincent de Paul: The Church teaches us that mercy belongs to God. Let us implore him to bestow on us the spirit of mercy and compassion, so that we are filled with it and may never lose it. Only consider how much we ourselves are in need of mercy.

12th Station: Jesus dies on the cross.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: It was now about the sixth hour and, with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The veil of the Temple was torn right down the middle; and when Jesus had cried out in a loud voice, he said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit'. With these words he breathed his last.

Luke: 23:44-46.

SILENCE

Reflection: Nailed to a tree, racked by pain and anguish, Jesus empties his humanity and gives himself up to death. He has endured faithfully to the end. Lord, help us to see, in this act of obedience, the mystery of our redemption.

St Vincent de Paul: Let us give ourselves to God completely, renounce ourselves, our personal satisfactions, our ease, and our vanity. We should recognize that our greatest enemy is ourselves. Yet let us do all the good we can and do it with all possible care. It is not enough to help the neighbour, to fast, to make mental prayer, to work on the missions. All that is good, but not enough! We must do all this in the same spirit as did our Saviour and in the way he did, humbly and purely, so that the name of God be glorified and his holy will accomplished.

13th Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: It was now evening, and since it was Preparation Day (that is, the vigil of the Sabbath), there came Joseph of Arimathaea, a prominent member of the Council, who himself lived in the hope of seeing the kingdom of God, and he boldly went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate, astonished that he should have died so soon, summoned the centurion and enquired if he was already dead. Having been assured of this by the centurion, he granted the corpse to Joseph who bought a shroud, took Jesus down from the cross, and wrapped him in the shroud.

Mark: 15:42-46.

Reflection: Once more, Mary cradles in her arms the lifeless body of the son she bore. The son she had cradled in her arms on that first night in a stable in Bethlehem. We too must part from those we love and have loved us and grief will come to each one of us. But in that grief, our hope is safe in God's loving hands – from our cradle until our grave we are wrapped in love.

St Vincent de Paul: *We have never so much cause for consolation, as when we find ourselves oppressed by sufferings and trials; for these make us like Christ our Lord, and this resemblance is a true mark of our predestination.*

14th Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: Joseph then laid the body in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Joset were watching and took note of where he was laid.

Mark: 15:46-47.

Reflection: In the cold, eerie silence of the closed tomb, it seems that death has been victorious. But death will lose its sting when Jesus emerges triumphant on the third day. This plan, formed long ago has been fulfilled. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus give hope and guidance to our difficulties and struggles. Christ has set us free – but free to be his hands, his feet and his body here on earth.

St Vincent de Paul: *Free your minds from all that troubles you; God will take care of things. Trust in him, I beg you, and you will have the fulfilment of what your heart desires.*

15th Station: Jesus is raised from the dead.

Leader: *We adore you, O Christ and we praise you.*

All: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scripture: On the first day of the week, at the first sign of dawn, they went to the tomb with the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on entering discovered that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there. As they stood there not knowing what to think, two men in brilliant clothes suddenly appeared at their side. Terrified, the women lowered their eyes. But the two men said to them, 'Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? He is not here; he has risen. Remember what he told you when he was still in Galilee: that the Son of Man had to be handed over into the power of sinful men and be crucified, and rise again on the third day?'

Luke: 24:1-7.

Reference: Death could not hold Jesus who is Lord of Life. No sin, no sickness, no power nor physical death has any hold over us, now that Jesus has risen from the dead. Through the death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ we know that we will inherit eternal life.

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam: You have felt the emptiness of material pleasures, you have felt the hunger for truth crying out within you; you have gone for light and comfort to the barren philosophy of modern apostles. You have not found food for your souls there. The religion of your forefathers appears before you today with full hands; do not turn away, for it is generous. It also, like you, is young. It does not grow old with the world. Ever renewing itself, it keeps pace with progress, and it alone leads to perfection.

Prayer of St Richard of Chichester:

*Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,
For all the benefits you have won for me.
For all the pains and insults you have born for me.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
May I know you more clearly,
Love you more dearly
And follow you more nearly:
Now and forever.*