

STATIONS OF THE CROSS



Petrie Catholic Parish

First Station

JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

The first station, condemnation without cause, is a call to put our trust in God when the world around us has abandoned us, when there is little of our own internal resources left on which we may depend, when we find ourselves despised by those with whom we most wanted to succeed.

Jesus, the model of inner strength at a time of serious public pressure, stands tall and strong in the face of injustice. He acknowledges the moment but does not give in to it. He does not betray either his faith in God or his own consciousness of the will of God for him. Instead, he stands up to his accusers with dignity and strength.

The question with which the first station confronts us is a stark one: What is it in life for which we are willing to be condemned? The goal in life is not to avoid condemnation. No one does. Life's great challenge is simply to decide who will condemn us and why. If we were better people, perhaps, we would be condemned more often.

Most of all, when we are condemned for the right reasons, the first station reminds us, we know we will not be there alone. Jesus will be standing beside us, full of pain for our sake, but head up and unyielding.

Second Station

JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

Having preached the world of the Beatitudes in a world of violence, having healed the hopeless, questioned the system, opened his arms to the outcasts and challenged the world to live differently so that life would be different for everyone everywhere, the cost of it all in jealousy, resentment, anger and ill will comes quickly. It is this burden of malice that is the cross Jesus reaches out to take hold of here. This is the cross he did not want but was willing to accept so that the world might see another way to be alive.

Real commitment implies that, like Jesus, we carry the burdens of our choices in bad times as well as good, on difficult days as well as easy ones, in the face of opposition as well as at times of great public or popular support.

The question with which the second station confronts us is a dangerous one: Having begun a good thing, will I pay the price to bring it to fulfillment? It's so easy to talk of great virtue, so simple to begin a thing. It's seeing it through the questions and criticisms and doubts and despair that really counts.

The very impulse to choose the best over the comfortable or the secure is sign that the resurrection has begun in us. Every action of Jesus to stretch the vision of Israel – the choice of the menstruating woman over the dictates of the law, the choice of the children over the prestigious adults, the choice of the Roman soldier over the officials of his own system – make him more and more an enemy of the system. But it also made him more and more clearly a sign of the presence of God on Earth, so will it do the same in us.

Third Station

JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

It is easy to look at the third station and forget that Jesus the wonder worker, at the height of his popularity, fell in the mud on a dirty garbage-strewn street of a sandy village in the Middle East. It is easy to forget now that he looked anything but regal, that the crown was made from the branches of a thorn bush, and that this is the one who said, "Come, follow me." It is easy to ignore the necessary question now: Will you? And if you do not follow this one, whom will you follow?

The day we fail in the face of everyone we have ever wanted to hear applaud us is the day of truth.

What we call failure is not the falling down," the proverb says, "but the staying down." The fact is that Jesus could have stayed down where he fell, having decided that he'd gone far enough, leaving it to his executioners to drag him the rest of the way. But he didn't. Instead, he showed us all that the important things in life are worth struggling for to the end.

The question with which the third station confronts us is a simple one: Is the struggle of my life worth enough to struggle for to the end? If I am not engaged in a large enough life issue, no amount of struggle can dignify the paltriness of it. On the other hand, if the struggle of my life is equal to the Gospel, to the coming of the reign of God here and now, no amount of duress can ever deter **it.**

The gift of life that comes with the third station is a simple one. What grows in us as we sit with this station is the awareness that reality is greater than either image or fantasy. It is coming to know that life consumed by the cosmetics of public appearance is, whatever it is built on, short-lived as well as endemically false. Money can only take us to the edge of the grave, power only lasts as long as people allow us to have it, sooner or later things go to rust and physical attributes will all eventually turn grey, get brittle, go dim and soft and thin and fragile.

To accept the reality as it is, to give ourselves for the lives of others, is the only thing that can enlarge our stature and will not diminish us as we go.

Fourth Station

JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

This fourth station is a life lesson far beyond either the dull or dour particulars of life. This station is about the place of love in life.

Central to it all is Mary, the mother, the one who never goes away regardless who says what about this saviour of the people who is at one and the same time the enemy of the state, the apostate of the law. Mary who herself braved the negative reactions of both religion and culture to have this child refuses to deny him now. Love for the outcast is the gift she brings to the moment. The proclamation of presence is the sermon she preaches.

The fourth station of the cross teaches us the freedom that comes with real love. Jesus and Mary meet under the worst of circumstances. He has become an enemy of the state, an outcast from the synagogue. She is a widow left alone in a male world without the sustenance of her only son and no visible means of support. Both of them, in a way, are condemned to death. But she does not beg him to change his life for her sake, she does not spend herself in self-pity and he does not tailor his life given for others to give only to her.

The question with which the fourth station of the cross confronts us is: Why do we love and how well? If we love another for our own sake, that love is doomed for both of us because it stands to twist both of us into shapes that are not our own. The truth is that there is no one who can ever satisfy all our needs. The moment of new life happens for us when we can love the other and at the same time let them go. Let them free to become the wholeness of themselves. Allow them to do what they are meant to do in life. And let them do it better because they feel the support of genuine love every step of the way. Love like that can never fail us because the freedom we give to the other to become frees our own becoming as well.

Fifth Station

SIMON HELPS JESUS CARRY HIS CROSS

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

The fifth station confronts a rigidly stratified world with the great crossover moments of life. What are we supposed to do when we find ourselves face to face with something no one wants to get involved in but what we also know must be done? It's more common a problem than we like to think.

Simon of Cyrene was hurrying by, too, they tell us, when Roman soldiers, fearful that their prisoner would die before they had a chance to crucify him on Calvary, forced him into helping Jesus lift the heavy cross.

There is no word recorded in scripture about how Simon responded or why he hadn't stopped to help in the first place, but we can guess: He was embarrassed, perhaps; irritated, perhaps; repulsed, perhaps. And all those things are exactly the proof that we are being called to do something. The fact is that when we feel like that about something, it is sure proof that we are being called to respond to it-because, obviously, we need as much help in dealing with this thing as does the person we're avoiding on the street.

The determining dimension of new life in us at this station is the rise of new consciousness in us. We become more alive because we learn to let more life in than we are accustomed to. We have, in fact, come to live very protected lives. We have blown a great bubble around ourselves -often more pious than really holy- which, until now, we never recognized was there.

We go through life meeting, partying, working with the same people. We dig a moat of church-going, civic engagements and neighbourhood gates around us to the point that we never see what is on the other side of those barriers. We keep the drawbridges of our small worlds raised and run the risk of missing the Jesus-figures who walk by looking for our help, our presence, our companionship through life.

Sixth Station

VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

Veronica has become part of the universal spiritual psyche in the Stations of the Cross because the witness of Veronica to the power of witness stands for all to see. What does Veronica do? Not much. What does Veronica mean to the spirit of the stations? Close to everything.

The sixth station of the cross calls us to realize that compassion is the counterpart of justice. To fail to practice mercy in the presence of injustice is to neglect half the face of God. Jesus does not resist the journey to the cross but he does respond most to the act of comfort in the midst of oppression.

Veronica walked out of the crowd of curious onlookers and horrified spectators and bloodthirsty zealots and performed a work of mercy, no questions asked, no judgements rendered. And for her trouble, she left, tradition tells us, with an image of the face of Jesus on the very towel she used to give him relief.

The meaning is obvious. Every time we make life physically better for someone else, the face of Jesus becomes clearer and clearer in us. We become more of what we are meant to be. We rise up out of a petty past and become a clearer, cleaner, brighter picture of the face of Jesus ourselves.

The question with which the sixth station confronts us is: Who is there, whose life you deplore, that you have reached out to help?

Seventh Station

JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

Here in the seventh station we see Jesus fall again, more tired this time, more dejected this time, even less committed, perhaps. Why not just die in the dirt? Why try to get up at all?

It is the eternal question of life in general. More important, it is the question of the spiritual life, too.

The questions with which the seventh station confronts us are grave ones. Is there anything important enough in our lives, our goals, our faith for which we are willing to endure both pain and doubt, more than the desire to run away from it? And if not, what kind of spiritual life can possibly be sculpted out of a life lived only on the surface of glitz and the passing pleasures of the moment?

As Mary Pickford said of those moment, "Today is a new day. You will get out of it just what you put into it..... If you have made mistakes, even serious mistakes, there is always another chance for you. And supposing you have tried and failed again and again, you may have a fresh start any moment you choose...." The message is a clear one: It is the choices we make that determine who we really are in the end. It is not the mistakes we make that make us small, it is choosing to surmount them that makes us great.

Being willing to get up again in the attempt to live life well is the resurrection moment promised in the seventh station.

Eighth Station

JESUS MEETS THE WEEPING WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

The call of the eighth station is two-fold. First we are challenged to put down the judgements and the prejudices that turn societies into social prisons. We are called to open our lives to the souls of those whose social behaviours repulse us but whose state is more the result of the social system itself than it is of any act of their own. Then we are called to change the society in which this kind of oppression and injustice is permitted to go on unchecked and even unnoticed.

The eighth station of the cross compels us to consider the long-range implications of our actions. It is the counterpoint of the sixth. The sixth station reminds us that mercy must prevail. The eighth station tells us that justice must come or we will all suffer for the lack of it. To seek justice without doing mercy, to do mercy but not to seek justice is, in both instances, to live a partial life. To feed the hungry but fail to question the policies that make people hungry or leave people hungry neglects the real issue.

The question with which the eighth station of the cross confronts us is: Do we really reject what we call sinful or do we really reject only the sinners themselves? The question brings us to face ourselves at our deepest, darkest core. This station calls us to go beyond what is to what must be.

Ninth Station

JESUS FALLS THE THIRD TIME

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

There is something about the taste of failure that damps the spirit. But when the failure comes time after time, as it does in this ninth station when, having already fallen twice, Jesus falls again, then the very marrow of a person's soul is frozen in place. What is the use? we say. Why bother? we begin to wonder.

The ninth station of the cross demands that we persevere in doing good, in being what we must be, in holding our course even when the pressures around us mount to break our spirits. Just when we think we have come to a plateau in life, things change. The job disappears, the home begins to fragment, sickness slows us down, relationships break our heart. It all seems useless. All the efforts seem to be for nothing. Then it is time to realize that there is nothing we now take for granted in life that wasn't first considered either untenable to do or insane even to think about. That's when getting up and starting over becomes one of the miracles of life. When Jesus falls, Jesus certainly wants to quit. But Jesus' life was about accepting the consequences of love and justice, whatever that might be. Quitting was not an option.

When we refuse to give up, when we go on trying-whatever the odds against success- something new is born in us. Instead of a sense of failure, the very matter of trying recreates our sense of purpose, our sense of commitment, the perpetuity of the dream. What does it matter if justice never comes, as long as we refuse to abandon the ideal? What happens to the vision of equality if we never let go of our demand for it? And on the other hand, what will happen to the will of God for the world if we doggedly go on giving our own lives to it so that others may know its fullness in their own?

To rise to new life in our own time, it is necessary that we rise to every call of every station to which Jesus leads us.

Tenth Station

JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

The question which the tenth station faces us is: What is underneath the garments of pomp, authority, dignity and wealth that we have so carefully cultivated around us? Anything at all?

The Jesus who stands before us naked and unashamed, dignified and full of conviction is calling us to pay more attention to who we are than what we have so cunningly conspired to pretend to be.

When we have finally stopped the posturings and personal exaggerations of life, the freedom that comes with being honest with the self and open with others leaves us perfectly free. Now, nothing can possibly shame us again. No one can say anything about us that we have not already admitted, if not to others, certainly to the self. Now we cannot be slighted because we know who we are. We cannot be embarrassed by the past because we have already embraced and confronted it. We cannot be left to the vultures of life because there is no way left to pick us to the bone that we have not already reckoned with ourselves. It is a moment of great liberation. It is a moment of new life.

Being willing to be the self and nothing more is the beginning of truth, the essence of humility, the coming of peace.

Eleventh Station

JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

The cross brings with it a sense of finality, the judgement of forever. There is no going back from here. Jesus is nailed to a cross from which there is no return. The glory days are over. The followers are scattered. The entire enterprise seems lost. It is the bleak and final moments of the dream. There is no way whatsoever to plumb the depths of such depression in the human soul.

The call of the eleventh station is the call to faith, to believe that a loving God is also present in darkness so deep that nothing can possibly assuage it. It is the call to faith in the God of Timelessness in a time of total defeat. It is trust that the God who created us and loves us will hold us up through this moment so that the darkness does not break our hearts.

The eleventh station of the cross brings us all to face the moments when we know we must do what we do not want to do and, more than that, feel we cannot possibly do, however it changes our lives.

When what we know to be right exacts more from us than we think we can give, then Jesus nailed to a cross is our only hope that one day the cross we seek to avoid will have been worth the climbing.

Twelfth Station

JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

When Jesus dies on the cross, something entirely different rises. And that something is the call to us to make the best in life live again.

The twelfth station of the cross brings us face to face with the finality of defeat. Sometimes things don't have a happy ending in life. They just grind on until loss becomes the new normal.

Sometimes we fail. There are things we are not suited to do, however much we want to do them. Then, valour lies in simply being willing to begin again, somewhere else.

Sometimes we're beaten. Others are more talented, perhaps, or better prepared, or hungrier in their pursuit of the present grail than we are any longer able to be.

Sometimes we're lost. Sometimes we're humiliated. Sometimes we're misunderstood.

The question with which the twelfth station confronts us is an awesome one: Am I able to accept the daily deaths of life, both the great ones and the small, knowing that death is not the end of life, only its passing over to something new in me? Hopefully, I learn from the Jesus who gave up himself, his mission, his life in ways that all seemed totally wrong, that the deaths I died may bring new life to the world around me as well.

When we take hold of life with all its deaths and all its resurrections, life becomes an eternal hotbed of creation given into the hands of the creature so that creation can go on creating.

Thirteenth Station

JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

We wonder what life was ever about if this is all it comes to, despite all the good will, all our great struggles to have it be otherwise. When we realize that only God is God, that we are not in charge of time or truth or the architecture of our definition of the perfect world. Then, we understand: This next step is, like Jesus, to give ourselves over to the arms of God and trust.

The question on which the thirteenth station concentrates us is a straightforward one: Am I prepared to let go of everything I ever wanted so that God's will can come through me in another way?

When we reach the point in life where we no longer insist on being able to control all the paltry little situations of life, we are now prepared to be broken open to the life of God, however it comes. At this point, I understand that God will enter my life, my heart, my soul in more ways that I could ever imagine. Rather than through this one spiritual channel, I will begin to find God hidden in new ideas, beckoning me to new beginnings, offering me the grace in the midst of pain to let go. Then and only then, do all the deaths of the past become what they have always been meant to be, simply steps on a road that is never the end, always a new beginning of the never ending, never static search for God.

Fourteenth Station

JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

Leader: We adore You O Christ and praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

The fourteenth station of the cross brings us to grapple with the grace of closure. Some phases of life end and cannot be retrieved. They go by before we're ready to see them go. Worse, their going may feel like ignominy at the time or may even look to the world like failure. Then the finality of loss may sting with grave injustice and may grieve us beyond all telling of it. Yet only in the ability to realize that life goes on from one stage to another, from one kind of presence to another, can we ever come to new life. When Jesus submits to the death of his ministry, when Jesus allows both state and synagogue to still the thunder of his voice, one life ends so that another can begin-ours as well as his- so that the echo of his might thunders on in us.

The question that the fourteenth station of the cross leaves in our soul is a resounding one: Am I able to trust that the tombs of my life are all gateways to resurrection?