

LOOK TO THE **CROSS**



Reflections on the Way of the Cross
by Catholic Spiritual Writers

Pope Francis Invites You to Pray the Stations of the Cross

The stations of the cross invite us to enter more deeply into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. Our Christian faith urges us to look to the cross. How I wish that all men and women of good will would look to the cross if only for a moment! There, we can see God's desire: violence is not answered with violence, death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue and peace is spoken. As we reflect on the various events of the stations using the scriptures, we might well ask ourselves: Who am I? Who am I, before my Lord? Who am I, before the suffering Jesus? Where is my heart? Which of these persons am I like? May these questions remain with us throughout this Lent and Holy Week.

Note: Whether alone or with a group, you might begin each station reflection with an opening prayer: *Lord, by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free. and a response: You are the Savior of the world.*

Acknowledgements:

Jens Soering, *The Convict Christ: What the Gospel Says About Criminal Justice* (Orbis Books, 2006). St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *Come Be My Light* (Doubleday, 2007) and *The Love of Christ* (Harper & Row, 1982). Joyce Rupp, *Your Sorrow Is My Sorrow: Hope and Strength in Times of Suffering* (Crossroad, 1999). Catherine de Hueck Doherty, *Fragments of My Life* (Ave Maria Press, 1979). Anthony de Mello, SJ, *Sadhana: A Way to God* (Image Books, 1984). Leonardo Boff, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World: The Facts, Their Interpretation, and Their Meaning Yesterday and Today* (Orbis Books, 2011). Caryll Houselander, *The Risen Christ* (Sheed & Ward, 1958). Pope Francis, *Homily March 24, 2013*. Laurence Freeman, *Jesus the Teacher Within* (Continuum, 2000). Henri J. M. Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy* (Doubleday, 1983). Richard Rohr, *Essential Teachings on Love*, eds. Joelle Chase & Judy Traeger (Orbis Books, 2018). Jean Vanier, *Living with the Poor: Learning from Mary and Joseph* (Daybreak Publications, 1982). Charles Edward Miller, Oscar J. Miller, Michael M. Roebert, *The Word Made Flesh* (Alba House, 1983).

Pilate Condemns Jesus to Death

1

Pilate spoke to the crowd, “What do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify him!” He asked, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, handed him over to be crucified. —Mark 15:12-15

When God took on human flesh, he did not become a priest or a monk, a king or a general, a poet or a philosopher. Instead, he became a death row prisoner, a condemned criminal executed alongside two thieves. Yet we somehow manage to overlook this and prefer to think of Jesus as the beautiful baby in Mary’s arms, the miracle worker, the eloquent preacher or the resurrected Son. Christ is indeed all of those—but his most important work was to die as a common criminal. To say Jesus was not a “real” convict because he did not commit any crime misses the point. A convict is merely a person who has been tried, sentenced and (in capital cases) executed, regardless of his or her actual guilt.

—Jens Soering
The Convict Christ



How might the image of Jesus
as a condemned criminal change my
thinking about him?

Jesus Takes Up His Cross

2

The soldiers stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they led him away to crucify him.
—Matthew 27:27-31

Crosses used to frighten me, but now I embrace suffering even before it actually comes. I need much of Christ's strength to persevere in trust, in that blind love which leads only to Jesus crucified. When suffering overtakes us, let us accept it with a smile. Suffering in itself is nothing; but suffering that is sharing in the passion of Christ is a wonderful gift. The suffering in the world is like an enormous Calvary, where the Body of Christ is crucified once more. We must suffer with Christ and that is why we want to share in the sufferings of the poor.



—St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta
*Come Be My Light
& The Love of Christ*

What crosses is Jesus inviting me to share with him now in my life?

Jesus Falls the First Time

3

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. —Isaiah 53:4-6

Our Lord sends the crosses; we do not have to invent them. Our Lord sometimes makes you feel the weight of the cross. This weight seems unbearable, but you carry it because in his love and mercy, the Lord helps you and gives you strength. In times of darkness and distress of the spirit, Jesus is with you. You see nothing but darkness, but the light of the Lord is all around you and pervades your spirit. You see yourself forsaken but Jesus is holding you tighter than ever to his divine heart. Suffering, no matter how difficult it may be, when compared to the good that is accomplished, makes every pain a joy for the soul. The

longer the trial to which God subjects you, the greater the goodness in comforting you during the time of the trial and afterwards.

—St. Pius of Pietrelcina
(Padre Pio)

What crosses am I most
struggling with in my life?



Jesus Meets His Mother

4

Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” —Luke 2:34-35

Mary’s sorrows are like ours. Parents whose children are lost, into crime, murdered, or suffering from a serious illness know how much their sorrow is like hers. Very few persons want to come face to face with what is painful, messy, broken, and bruised in their lives. How much easier it is to avoid what needs healing, to turn away and to go toward legitimate forms of busyness because it is simply too overwhelming to meet our suffering head on. Mary met her bloodied and disfigured son with great tenderness and love. Something in us refuses to do this. We tend to move away from, rather than toward, what hurts us. We choose to disconnect from it rather than to approach our suffering with compassion and care.

—Joyce Rupp
Your Sorrow Is My Sorrow



What hurts in my family life am I most trying to move away from rather than embrace?

Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

5

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. —Luke 23:26

I have often spoken of identification with the poor with a love that is color-blind. It is an identification that only love can achieve by complete forgetfulness of self and total concern for the other person. It is an identification so deep, so complete, that it becomes part of oneself—like breathing! It is a way of love that is willing—nay, eager—to be a Simon of Cyrene to the passion of Christ in others. Not reluctantly, but eagerly and joyfully, this love picks up the cross carried by the neighbor—the heavy cross of pain, sorrow and fear, and shares the weight of it as far as is humanly possible—and a little beyond! This identification is a love that incarnates the abstract words we use so glibly every day—“sympathy,” “empathy,” “understanding.” It is a personalized love that never counts the loss of giving.

—Catherine de Hueck Doherty
Fragments of My Life



Who most needs my help today to
bear their cross and suffering?

Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

6

He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. —Isaiah 53:2-3

Imagine you see Jesus standing before you looking at you lovingly and humbly. Both of these attitudes can cause difficulty. Many find it hard to imagine Jesus looking at them lovingly—their image of Jesus is the image of someone who is harsh and demanding, someone who, even if he loves them, loves them only if they are good. The second attitude they find even more difficult to accept—that Jesus should look at them humbly. Impossible! Once again, they have not understood the Jesus of the New Testament. They have never taken seriously the fact that Jesus has become their servant and slave, the one who washes their feet, who willingly died the death of a slave out of love for them.



—Anthony de Mello, SJ
Sadhana: A Way to God

What can I say to Jesus to respond
to his look of love for me?

Jesus Falls the Second Time

7

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. —Psalm 22:14-15

To carry the cross as Jesus carried it means taking up a solidarity with the crucified of this world—with those who suffer violence, who are impoverished, who are dehumanized, who are offended in their rights. Jesus' cross and death, too, were the consequence of such a commitment to the deserted of this world. To preach the cross, today, is to make it gradually impossible for human beings to crucify other human beings. But this struggle involves the cross. It means carrying that cross with courage, and hanging upon it with constancy. Thus to live is to live a life founded in the Life that no cross can crucify, but can only reveal as still more victorious. To preach the cross, then, means this, and this alone: to follow Jesus.

—Leonardo Boff
*Passion of Christ,
Passion of the World*

How might I renew my
commitment today to follow
Jesus and his ways?



Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

8

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” —Luke 23:27-28

Compassion is giving oneself to suffer in sympathy with that which cannot be changed in another’s life. Sympathy with Christ in those who suffer his passion is a rare thing. Christ rose bearing his wounds. There are other Christs today who are not always recognized as such because they carry wounds, stigmata—his stigmata. People who bear a burden of hereditary disease, temperament or temptations, and neurotics or borderline cases may be shunned by society. The mentally ill who are often abandoned by their families, the elderly who have outlived their friends and feel unwanted, those broken in mind or spirit are people in whom Christ asks for compassion. In these,

Christ asks that we be awake to his presence and to his suffering in them and offer the redeeming sympathy of love.

—Caryll Houselander
The Risen Christ

How might I respond more compassionately to those around me today?



Jesus Falls the Third Time

9

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me...It has left me stunned, faint all day long. —Lamentations 1:12-13

What kind of a King is Jesus? He is scourged, insulted and abused, receives a crown of thorns, a staff, a purple robe: his kingship becomes an object of derision. But on the cross Jesus' kingship shines forth: his royal throne is the wood of the cross! With Christ, we know that the King we follow and who accompanies us is very special. He is a King who loves even to the cross and teaches us to serve and love. And we are not ashamed of his cross! On the contrary, we embrace it, because we have understood that in giving ourselves, in emerging from ourselves we have true joy and that, with his love, God conquered evil. We carry a crucifix to tell everyone that on the cross Jesus knocked down the wall of hostility that divides people and nations, and brought reconciliation and peace.

—Pope Francis
Homily (March 24, 2013)

What most keeps me from
embracing my crosses
and struggling to carry them?



Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

10

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his seamless tunic, woven in one piece from the top and said, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” —John 19:23-24

We re-enact the cross, as victims or as crucifiers, many times each day. When we gossip, spread rumors, slander or lie we are crucifiers. When we mock cruelly, strip others of their dignity, denigrate, humiliate or marginalize others on the basis of race or creed we are the soldiers who cast lots for the robe of the crucified at the foot of his cross. Every divorce court, every family or community, institution or multi-national corporation where dignity is denied is a Golgotha. For every human being there is a crucifier. And every human being can become a crucifier. The cross shows how painful it is for human beings, individually and collectively, to accept the offer of love and to hear the truth about themselves.

Resistance to love turns the heart to stone.

—Laurence Freeman
Jesus the Teacher Within



How have my actions contributed to the “crucifying” of others this Lent?

Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

11

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.
—Mark 15:25-27

O Lord, what can I say to you? Is there any word, any thought? any sentence? You not only became human for me but also suffered the most cruel death for me. I wish that I could find a fitting response, but in contemplating your passion and death I can only confess that the immensity of your divine love makes any response seem totally inadequate. Let me just stand and look at you. Your body is broken, your head wounded, your hands and feet are split open by nails, your side is pierced. It is all over now. It is finished. It is fulfilled. It is accomplished. Gracious, generous, forgiving Lord, I adore you, I praise you, I thank you. Your cross has been planted in this world as the new sign of hope.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
A Cry for Mercy



As I look upon Jesus crucified,
what response can I make?

Jesus Dies on the Cross

12

They put a sponge full of the sour wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

—John 19:29-30

Christianity is a bit embarrassed by the powerless one, Jesus, and made his obvious defeat into a glorious victory. Who wants to be like Jesus on the cross? It just doesn't look like a way of influence, a way of access, a way that's going to make any difference in the world. We worship this naked, homeless, bleeding loser, crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem, but we want to be winners—at least until we learn to love the so-called little, poor people. Yes, those with mental and physical disabilities, minority groups, refugees, prisoners, those with addictions and those without financial wealth—all who have “failed” in our social or economic success system—can be our best teachers in the ways of the Gospel.

They represent what we are most afraid of and what we most deny within ourselves.

—Richard Rohr

Essential Teachings on Love

Who has been my best teacher in
the true ways of the Gospel?



Jesus Is Taken Down From the Cross

13

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. —Matthew 27:57-60

Mary stands beneath the cross, close to her crucified son. She does nothing; she can do nothing for him. She is there, present to him. She lives his agony but at the same time, through her eyes, she affirms him. For his hour has come, the hour for which he had come into the world. Mary does not slip into sadness, completely withdrawn in herself. She is there, sustaining Jesus to the very end. Mary teaches us that when we are close to a child or an adult who has been completely broken, one for whom it seems we can do nothing, it is important to stay there, to be with him. Through our loving faithful presence we can give him or her some strength and peace. We are to trust and have a heart surrendered to God, in the face of the unfathomable mystery of human suffering.

—Jean Vanier
Living with the Poor



How might I become better at just
“being with” others who
are suffering?

Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

14

Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. —Matthew 27:59-60

Like Jesus we too are moving toward a tomb—our own! From the moment we began life in the darkness within our mother's body, we were on our way toward the darkness of the grave within mother earth. Death is inevitable. Since for many that is not a very bright prospect, our society is reluctant to admit the fact of death. We attempt to cover it over with euphemisms and pretense; no one ever dies, he or she “passes away.” Face death we must, but we should do so in the light of Easter Sunday. There was a tomb for Jesus because he had really died. We are going to die someday, but when Jesus comes again in glory, our grave like his will be found empty.



—Charles Edward Miller,
Oscar J. Miller
& Michael M. Roebert
The Word Made Flesh

What most frightens me about
my own death? What most
consoles me?