

PRAYING
THE STATIONS
OF THE CROSS
FOR SENIORS

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Opening Prayer

God, your Son never grew old. He can't teach us about getting old, can he? What can Jesus' saving death—as premature as it was—teach us about advancing years, about loneliness, about arthritis, failing eyesight, failing energy, and failing memory, about rising costs and fixed income, about the tide of uncertainties that seems to swell over us with each year?

Father, even though Jesus did not grow old, I can sense that there are tender and poignant lessons for me in his last hours. His passion and death, which I ponder in these stations of the cross, reveal, above all, that fullness of life is attained not so much by its length as by its intensity and faithfulness.

I pray these stations now, God, because I believe that Jesus will illuminate what it means to age with faith and patience, with spiritual vigor and true wisdom, with cheerfulness and generosity, with optimism and abiding hope. As Abraham and Sarah, and Zechariah and Elizabeth learned, old age is not just a time of diminishment but a time of fulfillment and challenge as well. From Jesus' passion and death, I will take comfort in this all the days of my life. Amen.

The First Station

JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

The finality of Pilate's words seared Jesus' soul: sentenced to die by crucifixion, a criminal's death. Only hours earlier, in the stark loneliness of Gethsemane, Jesus accepted without reservation all that his Father would ask of him: "Not my will, but yours be done." Fear-filled but composed, Jesus embraced the death sentence and so fulfilled his years in the loving surrender of his life.

As we age, we may come to see our advancing years as a fate we are sentenced to. We often rebel against the common-sense course of nature; for all creatures—stars, swans, and snakes—are born, grow old, and die. But if we can learn to embrace our aging as Jesus did his cross, our old age can be so much more than a fate to be tolerated; it can be an opportunity for continuing growth into the life and love of God.



*God, by your grace, open my eyes
to the true meaning of aging.
Let me embrace it joyously,
as my true birthright, as a challenge
to develop in wisdom and grace.
Amen.*

The Second Station

JESUS ACCEPTS HIS CROSS

The fear he felt in Gethsemane becomes cold reality as Jesus feels the heavy beam of the cross on his beaten shoulders. What was only fear now begins to be actual pain. This burden also leaves no doubt that crucifixion is unavoidable. Whatever anticipation there may have been about his fate, it will now, over the next few hours, dissolve into naked reality. Jesus will accept each phase of his execution as it comes. His heart, strained with love and pain, is open to all who will follow on this path to Calvary.

Jesus faced a moment when fear became reality, but we do not enter “old age” at a similar set point in life. The signs of slowing down, the stronger eyeglasses, the increase of aches and pains, the loss of friends and independence—these occur gradually, at different ages, with lighter or heavier burdens for different people. But however these signs come to us, and however the unavoidable reality of aging sets in, how important it is to keep our minds and hearts open to what these years will bring: the satisfaction and joys as well as the heartaches and pains. With the wisdom of our years, we move from fear to reality with an upbeat frame of mind.



In Jesus' name, God, grace me to be realistic about my age. Help me to grip the reality of these years, to face my circumstances as they are, and to make the most of them. They are, Compassionate Parent, the path you have given me to come to you.

Amen.

The Third Station

JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

As often as we contemplate the weakened, weary Jesus falling to the dust, we focus on the pain of collapsing under the heavy wood and suffering still more bruises. What was most difficult and painful, in fact, was not the falling but the getting up. As he was whipped into rising to reassume his cross and continue toward Calvary, Jesus had to rely on inner strength, on his character and motivation, to go on.

Not many people are inclined to view their senior years as a time of renewal and positive accomplishments. We may be tempted to see this phase of life only as going downhill both physically and psychologically. But even though we may “fall” in this sense, there are many occasions when we “get up again” and go on productively with life. We must never settle for the idea that old age is a time when nothing significant happens anymore. There is much more to each day than getting through it. This is still a time for new insights, for personal relationships, for creative activities, for deeper wisdom, and for richer spirituality.



*God, by your grace, may I rise from
the discouragement I sometimes feel.
May I go on through this time of my life
with a profound sense of renewal and grateful
anticipation for each new day you give me to love,
to create, to ponder, to converse, to learn,
and to speak with you. Amen.*