

INTRODUCTION

Each time we go to Mass, we find ourselves praying for mercy. “Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.” Again in the *Gloria*, we repeat this familiar appeal: “You are seated at the right hand of the Father: *have mercy on us*” (italics mine). And later again, we return to this theme: “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, *have mercy on us*” (italics mine). What’s going on here?

We do not pray for mercy because we believe that God has failed to be merciful to us already. We know that God has a tender and merciful heart. We do not pray for mercy because we believe that, by doing so, we can change God from being angry at us for our sins to being kind. The wonder of our faith is that, while we are still sinners, God watches as the father did for his prodigal son, watches for us to come home to his loving arms. No; we pray for mercy because in our prayer we open our hearts to receive this amazing gift, this powerful and life-changing and generous gift of God’s endless mercy.

We must receive God’s mercy. That’s the secret to the Stations of the Cross. We retell this story of Jesus’ self-giving love in order to open our hearts to what is already given to us: mercy. We do not earn it; we don’t even deserve it; *but we have it.* That’s the miracle.

As we reflect and pray, bear in mind that even though this is a story about Jesus’ way of the cross, it is also a story about us. May these moments of prayer open our eyes to see this grace in our lives. May we be moved to recognize those who are being crucified in our society today—by hate, prejudice, illness, poverty, disease, and illiteracy. May we leave here determined to have the same mercy on all others that God has on us.

The First Station

JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

LEADER The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death.
We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER “Pilate spoke to them again, ‘Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?’ They shouted back, ‘Crucify him!’ Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified” (Mark 15:12–13, 15).

Jesus had just celebrated Passover with his closest friends. In the warm intimacy of their shared meal, Jesus had washed their feet, fed them with the bread of life, and loved them with mercy and tenderness. But their joy turned to bitter disappointment when he was betrayed, arrested, and condemned. How could Judas have led the soldiers to Jesus? How could he have used that fateful kiss, a sign of love, to betray him? How could Judas have had no mercy on Jesus, his beloved friend?

We too betray Jesus when we put ourselves first, allowing others to fend for themselves. We abandon him when we ignore the poor, choosing instead to feed, clothe, and house ourselves first while the poor sit at our gates suffering. We condemn others like Judas did Jesus when we follow the pathway of selfishness and sin rather than self-giving love.

[A BRIEF MOMENT OF SILENT PRAYER]



In the words of Pope Francis

[FEBRUARY 15, 2015, HOMILY]

ALL: “The way of the church is not to condemn anyone for eternity”
but to pour out the balm of God’s mercy
on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart.
We in the church must leave behind her four walls
and go out in search of those who are distant,
those who are on the “outskirts” of life.
We must adopt fully God’s own approach,
which is that of mercy.
The church must feel the impetus
to become like Jesus for all of humanity.

LEADER Jesus, like your disciples, we are weak in faith. May your grace empower us to be like you in our daily lives. May we empty ourselves of selfishness so that we may be filled with mercy for others, especially those who suffer most. Move our hearts, we pray, to engage in the works of mercy that can heal the world.

ALL Amen.

Stabat Mater

*At the cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful Mother weeping,
near her Son until the end.*

The Second Station

JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS

LEADER The Second Station: Jesus takes up his cross.
We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER “After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him” (Mark 15:20).

The soldiers who now mocked and humiliated Jesus treated him as less than human. To them, he was something to be tossed about, laughed at, and spit upon. Isaiah had written about the Servant of the Lord, saying he would be despised, a man of sorrows, a lamb being led to slaughter (Isaiah 52:13—53:12).

After Jesus’ death, many of his followers were also condemned, and some were imprisoned or killed. In our own day, men and women speak up for justice in the face of governments or corporations who seek only profit while destroying the environment or using people as pawns. Those who seek such justice for the poor are often condemned, mocked, and imprisoned; some are killed in the streets or at the altar. They are Christ for us today.

[A BRIEF MOMENT OF SILENT PRAYER]



In the words of Pope Francis

[JULY 2013, RIO DE JANEIRO]

ALL “The cross of Christ invites us also to allow ourselves to be smitten by his love, teaching us always to look upon others with mercy and tenderness.”

This is especially true of those who suffer, those who need help and are vulnerable, those who are waiting for us to do something, to take a concrete action on their behalf.

No one can think of the cross without giving something of him or herself to Christ.

LEADER Jesus, give us the courage to take your place in this trial, to take up our own cross and follow in your footsteps. May we be a voice for the poor and oppressed. May we offer our lives for the sake of peace and justice. We open our hearts to receive your grace, the grace that empowers us to love with tenderness in the face of violence and hatred. May that grace be all we need to become your hands and voice in today's world.

ALL Amen.

Stabat Mater

*Through her heart, his sorrow sharing,
all his bitter anguish bearing,
now at length the sword has passed.*

The Third Station

JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME

LEADER The Third Station: Jesus falls for the first time.
We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER “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” (Isaiah 53:4–5).

Many people in the crowds around Jesus may have turned their back on his suffering. Some may have watched with horror but did not step forward. But from that crowd did come forth someone to help Jesus up, to touch him with mercy and tenderness.

Who among us has not fallen under the weight of the cross we are given to carry? Some days the burden may be too much for us, the call to self-giving love may be only a distant cry, or we simply fold beneath the work, pain, or loneliness of life. And sometimes we fall beneath the weight of our own sins.

[A BRIEF MOMENT OF SILENT PRAYER]



In the words of Pope Francis

[AUGUST 3, 2015, AT THE PARISH OF SANTA MARIA
MADRE DEL REDENTORE]

ALL Christians can't fool Jesus, acting like saints in church
but living like pagans the rest of the week.
Jesus knows what is in our hearts.
He knows we are sinners,
but we need not fear his wrath or judgment.
Jesus looks upon us only with mercy and tenderness.
We too, therefore, must go to people with the same love.
With the caress that Jesus taught us,
we go to those whose burdens weigh them down.

LEADER Jesus, let us turn our hearts to you now and likewise look
with love upon ourselves and those around us. Give us
the strength to get up from our sinfulness and the burdens
of life and move onward, knowing you walk with us in all
things.

ALL Amen.

Stabat Mater

*O how sad and sore distressed
was that Mother, highly blest,
of the sole-begotten One.*