

INTRODUCTION

In the opening paragraphs of *The Joy of the Gospel*, which was published in 2013, Pope Francis invites us all to a renewed personal encounter with Christ. In order to experience true and full human happiness, he reminds us, we must learn again to walk with Christ. Those who make this choice are not disappointed. Each time we turn our heart toward him, we find him there, waiting for us, just as the father of the prodigal son stood waiting at the crossroads for his beloved child to return.

Pope Francis invites us to return to Christ again and again, and to walk with Christ in our daily lives. “Now is the time,” he tells us in article 3. “Now is the time to say, ‘Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace.’”

We are invited to walk with Christ, and what more fitting path could there be than the pathway of the cross? Let us set out now on this journey, pausing at each station to meditate on the self-giving love of Christ that must now become our own lifestyle of love.

Bear in mind as we reflect and pray that, even though this is a story about Jesus’ way of the cross, it is also a story about us. We pray for the grace to see how carrying our cross is a reality today. May these moments of prayer open your eyes to see this grace in your life. May you be moved to become grateful for the self-giving love of Jesus, which does set you free, but also helps you to see and recognize those who are being crucified in our society today—by hate, prejudice, illness, poverty, disease, and illiteracy. May you leave here determined to work for the peace and justice of the Reign of God.

OPENING PRAYER

(As the ministers enter the sanctuary, all rise. Facing the cross, all pray together.)

All ✠ In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Loving Jesus,
You took up your cross
with complete love for us.
You walked the way to your death
in order to give us the freedom of new life.
We willingly take up our own crosses today
and follow you on your journey,
walking with you on this pathway of love.

Only you can lead us away from selfish darkness
to the light of self-giving love.
Stir up within us the desire to forgive our enemies,
to love our friends more deeply,
and to take upon our own shoulders
the needs of the poor and vulnerable
whom you love so much.

Dear Mary, Mother of God,
be our example of courage now
as we face this way of the cross.
Pray for us as we journey here
that our lives might be filled with grace.

Give us clean hearts, Holy Spirit,
and kindle within us the fire of your love.
Let us be thankful for the merciful love of Christ,
which led him to embrace the cross.
And lead us now to the loving arms of God our Father
with whom we hope to live
forever and ever. Amen.

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 did not seem to want Jesus to die. As the crowds
called for his death, Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil
has he done? I have found in him no ground for the
sentence of death” (Luke 23:24). And yet, in the end,
yielding to public pressure, he washed his hands of it
all and delivered Jesus to be crucified.

It is really true that Jesus should have received jus-
tice from Pilate. He was, after all, the ruler and the one
with power. But his personal security and safety over-
took him. He was afraid to move against the crowds.

Let this be a lesson for us. The crowds want us to
judge and condemn others in the name of God for
their sins or beliefs. The crowds condone prejudice
and hatred. They condone war and violence. Do we
dare to stand against such crowd thinking? Or are we
more like Pilate, letting the demands of such crowds
determine our own attitudes and actions?

[A BRIEF MOMENT OF SILENT PRAYER]

In the words of Pope Francis

[DAILY HOMILY ON JUNE 23, 2014]

ALL People who judge others are wrong, mistaken,
and defeated because they assume God’s place;
but God is the one and only judge.
God often “takes his time” when rendering judgment
and does not operate according to human ways
or conceptions.
Jesus spoke of picking a splinter in a neighbor’s eye
while failing to tend to the plank in our own.
“He who does this is so obsessed with the person
he wants to judge...
that the splinter will not let him sleep!
He who judges becomes defeated, ends badly,
because the same measure will be used to judge him.
Jesus, before the Father, never accuses;
it is the opposite, he defends!”

LEADER Jesus, Lord and Giver of Life, we may either support
others with love or hand down wrongful sentences of
social death. Keep us from pointing our fingers at the
wrongs of others. Keep us from condemning others,
rejecting them, sending them into exile, or failing to
welcome them among us. Let your Spirit be with us to
give us the courage to speak up for the weak and walk
with them on their journey. We pray in your name.

ALL Amen.

The Second Station

JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS

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

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

LEADER The idea of carrying one's cross in life has somewhat
gone out of fashion these days. We would rather hire
someone to do that for us or, better yet, not have to
deal with a cross at all.

The soldiers who handed Jesus this cross thought
they had complete power over him. How mistaken
they were. The power to dominate others is actually
a weakness. Jesus did not choose the cross, and yet
he seemed to know deep down that carrying it would
lead to the real power of self-giving love. He bore the
cross, in other words, for us.

Today, the burden of the cross is borne by those
who suffer economic hardships, unemployment, in-
security, and homelessness. It is borne by immigrants,
victims of war and violence, and the ones we reject.
Like Jesus, they did not ask for their cross, and yet
they must carry it.

And we, for our part, must now step forward to
carry their crosses as well. Like Jesus, we bear it for
them. The cross becomes lighter if we all carry it
together. Will you pick up their burdens, or will you
watch from the sidelines as they struggle up the hill?

[A BRIEF MOMENT OF SILENT PRAYER]

In the words of Pope Francis

[PRAYING THE WAY OF THE CROSS ON APRIL 18, 2014]

ALL The cross is a reminder
of how much evil people are capable of
and how much love Jesus had for a sinful humanity.
One's cross may be heavy because she is abandoned;
another's heavy because he has lost a loved one;
and for others it is heavy because they have
taken on the pain of evil.

Jesus shows "that evil will not have the last word";
love, mercy, and forgiveness will be victorious.
"From the cross we see the monstrosity of [human]kind
when it lets itself be guided by evil.

But we also see the immensity of the mercy of God,
who doesn't treat us according to our sins,
but according to his mercy."

Pray that you may find strength in the trials of your cross,
and live in the hope of God's resurrection and love.

LEADER Be with us, Christ our Light, for in the darkness of the
night our world seems lost to evil. People struggle to
find work, we cannot seem to find peace, and we hun-
ger for justice in our world. May we faithfully carry the
crosses of each other so that as one people we might
live in your love.

ALL Amen.

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 With these words, the prophet Isaiah describes the suffering of Jesus:

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)

Yes, Jesus fell. He was frail now and very human. He held the light of heaven in his hands, and he offered peace to the world, and yet, in the chaos, fear, and pain of that way of the cross, he simply fell to the ground under the weight of it all.

But even now, at this moment of weakness, Jesus remains our teacher. None of us is as strong as we need to be. Each of us carries a weight sometimes under which we too may fall. Jesus teaches us to trust in his Father at these moments, to accept our weaknesses, and to admit our limits and frailty.

Jesus fell at this point along his journey, but he also got up again. Will you get back up? Will you turn falling into rising? And likewise toward others—can you accept it when those around you fall? Can you show mercy to them?

[A BRIEF MOMENT OF SILENT PRAYER]

In the words of Pope Francis

[THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL, NO. 3]

ALL “How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost!

Let me say this once more:

God never tires of forgiving us;

we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy.

Christ, who told us to forgive one another

‘seventy times seven,’

has given us his example:

he has forgiven us seventy times seven.

Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders.

No one can strip us of the dignity

bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love.

With a tenderness that never disappoints,

but is always capable of restoring our joy,

he makes it possible for us

to lift up our heads and to start anew.”

LEADER Lord Jesus, give us the grace to rise when we fall and to turn our hearts back to you. And strengthen us to help raise up all those near us who have also fallen, especially our poorest sisters and brothers.

ALL Amen.