

## St. Joseph's Church: Penfield NY The Way of the Cross

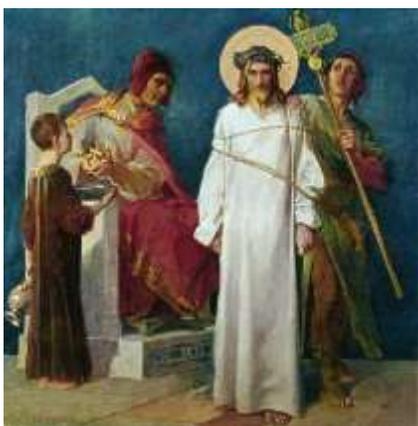
Praying the Way of the Cross is a powerful way to enter into the mystery of God's gift of Jesus to us. It makes reflecting on the passion of Christ an encounter of personal imagination. It involves my senses, my experience, and my emotions. The more I come to experience the love of Jesus for me, the more deeply I feel humbled and grateful.

From the earliest days of Christianity, followers of Jesus told the story of his passion, death and resurrection. When pilgrims journeyed to see Jerusalem, they were anxious to see the places where Jesus suffered, died, and rose for our salvation. In the 1500s, villages all over Europe began to make replicas of the Way of the Cross, the Via Doloroso, with small shrines commemorating these sacred sites in Jerusalem. Eventually these small shrines became the 14 Stations of the Cross with which we are now familiar.

The Good News is that Jesus entered into our life experience completely, even suffering and dying. He fell into the merciful hands of an infinitely loving Father, who raised him from death to new life. We will all share eternal life with Christ if we can fall into the hands of the same merciful, loving God. And along the way, we need to know that we are not alone. Jesus is with us as one who knows our suffering, and the death we face.

Today, as we pray the Way of the Cross, we are invited to enter into a gifted faith experience. We can discover who Jesus is for each of us. We open our hearts to Christ, which leads us to respond in prayer. Through that prayer, we are led to solidarity with those who are persecuted, tortured, unjustly accused, or victimized, sitting on death row, carrying impossible burdens, facing war outside our door each day, carrying impossible burdens, confronted with terminal illness, or simply fatigued with life. Let us journey along the Way of Christ's Cross...

### 1<sup>st</sup> Station: Pilate Condemns Jesus to Death



*You stand before the crowd after being beaten. You never deny yourself, yet humbly accept the punishment given to you by those who had witnessed your miracles. It's easy to look at this scene now and think, 'How could they have accused you and condemned you to death? All you did was love every person you met.' Yet they are not alone in their condemnation of you. Jesus, forgive me for the ways in which I condemn and pierce others with my words and actions. Help me to love like you and to learn from your example.*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Station: Jesus Takes up His Cross

*You have endured a sleepless night, betrayal by your friends, and a beating that is too horrible to fully imagine. You've been whipped, stripped, and spit on by countless faces, some of whom last week treated you as royalty as you entered the city. And now, they hand you a cross to carry. The weight of it is far more than any number of pounds we can figure. For in carrying the cross, you carry the weight of our sins.*



## 3<sup>rd</sup> Station: Jesus Falls the First Time



*As you walk through the narrow streets, every movement, every jolt burns and reopens your wounds. The pain along with the weight of the cross becomes too much and you fall. There is no one there to stop the battle that you fight for us. Even though you know what still lies ahead, you do not stop, but somehow find the strength to continue.*

## 4<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

*Amid all the shouts and jeers from the crowd that move like a wave in your mind as you struggle to remain conscious, one voice stands out. At first it is so faint that you wonder if it is real, but then as your eyes meet and you see her face you are not surprised that she is there for you. She has always been there for you. Her 'Yes' to the Father has been a light in the darkness. And now, here in your darkest hour, she is there. Jesus, help me to remember that I am never alone in my struggles. Help me know your love for me and when things are hard between us, help me to remember the light of your Mother in my life.*



## 5<sup>th</sup> Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross



*The soldiers who had beaten you all day had what appears to be a moment of compassion. Instead, their selfish motives override their opportunity for charity. They only want to follow their orders to get you up to the place where you will be crucified. How beaten you look that they decide to grab Simon a Cyrenian out of the crowd to help you carry the cross. He follows behind you, walking in your steps, helping you move forward. You press on, knowing that the worst is yet to come. Jesus, open my ears to hear the ways that you call me to serve. Help me follow Simon's example of helping others. Help me to know what it means to be a true and faithful servant.*

## 6<sup>th</sup> Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

*Thorns cut so deeply into your head that even seeing where you should step next is almost impossible. Until now, all who approached you, other than your mother, either shout at you or spit in your face. Veronica approaches. She walks differently. She reaches out her hands and wipes your face with her cloth, suddenly her face of compassion becomes clear. No words are necessary, both your eyes say it all. For in that moment, your dignity as a human is restored. Jesus, help me to see your presence in others. Give me the courage to follow Veronica's example of treating others with love even when no one else does.*



## 7<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time



*The soldiers are enraged at you. They can't understand how Simon's help is not enough. They hit you again and again before they remember that you have to be alive to be crucified. The beating stops, but the taunts become louder and harsher. At this moment you can stop this! You are the Messiah. You have the power to reveal yourself. But you know that you must be faithful to your Father's promises to His people. Remembering your love and your faithfulness you get up, and with your dirty wounds, each step becoming harder, you keep going. Jesus, help me to believe in your faithfulness and love for me. Give me the grace to follow through on my word to others. Help me to be a person of integrity.*

## 8<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

*Their wailing sounds like a funeral. They cry and weep as if you are already dead. While air still passes through your lungs and your heart still beats, to them, you are dead. They know you are on your way to be crucified and because of the beating you have endured you already look like you should not be breathing at all. Yet in this moment consumed by death, you speak words of life and say, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me.' Jesus, help me to listen to your words of life. Show me ways that I can put you first.*



## 9<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time

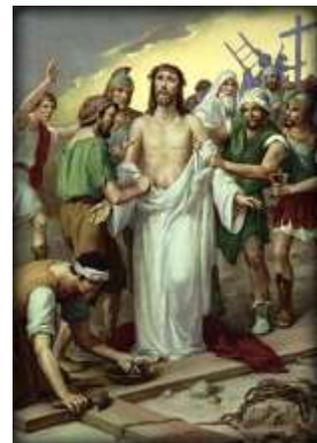


*Again you fall, this time from sheer exhaustion. Only your will presses you forward while your body refuses. How difficult it must be to be you, fully God and fully man. God knows that this has to be finished and that it is not yet complete. Man feels the excruciating pain and every bone in your body wants to stop right here and move no further.*

*Somehow both join together and you muster the strength to get up. You vow to not fall again because now you can see the place they are leading you to. You know the end is close and so you press on. Jesus, help me to follow your ways. Help me remember your victory over my sin. Give me the grace to recognize when I sin and the desire to sin no more.*

## 10<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

*In some ways to get to this point is a relief because you know this is almost over. In other ways it is terrifying because you know the worst pain possible for man to endure is still waiting for you. By now your bloodied cuts have dried into your garments, because of this they act as a layer of skin for you since so little of your own remains. As the soldiers strip you bear it is not the nakedness that is painful but rather the vicious tearing of your skin. The cuts that had closed, now reopen and once again a river of blood runs all over your body. You are stripped of your dignity as a man, for even animals are given a swifter, less painful death. Jesus, help me to look past the outside of others. Help me not to judge them by how they look or what they wear. Help me to find my self-worth and identity in you.*



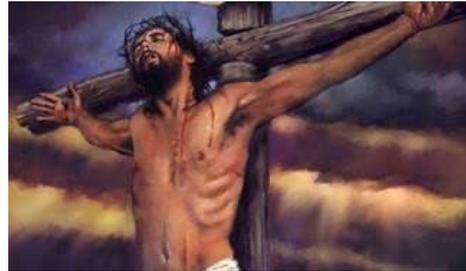
### 11<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross



*Lying down on wood is not foreign to you. The first place you were laid in love when you came into this world was in a wooden manger. Now it is out of love that you lay here on this wooden cross. The soldiers pull your right arm out beside you and then horrific pain flows through your entire body. The nail pierces not only your hand but also your whole body. The soldier pounds it in, only stopping to wipe your blood off his own face. Again the nail is driven into your other hand and the pain jolts your entire body. Pain shoots up your legs as they nail your feet. Jesus, I'm sorry for nailing you to the cross with my own sin. Help me to seek your forgiveness and mercy for the times that I sin.*

### 12<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

*Above your head is the inscription, 'King of the Jews'. You use every last ounce of life to lift your body so that you can speak, you do not look the part. Yet, every word out of your mouth is one of love, truly from another kingdom. The faces of all humanity must flash before your eyes as one by one you recount whom you are doing this for. And finally you say, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit...it is finished.' You breathe your last and it looks as though this is the end. Jesus, help me never forget your love for me. Help me to know that you died for me. Fill me with comfort in knowing that I never suffer anything you don't understand.*



### 13<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus is Taken Down From the Cross



*The first arms that held you in this world are also the last. Your mother was told a sword would pierce her heart the day she presented you as an infant to the Father. Now as she holds your body that is mangled beyond recognition she sees not only the man she now holds, but also the child she held and her heart is pierced. Your comfort to her will come but in this moment she has only the Father to be with her in her sorrow and pain. All hope seems gone. Jesus, help me to trust in you. Help me to place all of my hope in you and give me peace in knowing that you are Lord over all things.*

14<sup>th</sup> Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

*You are laid to rest by Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene, Mary your mother and a few other women. As your body is anointed, Mary Magdalene remembers your eyes penetrating her heart. Tears stream down her face along with the others there as they too remember your love. They wrap your body in clean linens and lay it in a new tomb. The stone is rolled over the entrance and now it surely is the end. Up to this point, death is final. While those you have lived with, laughed with and cried with are in their heightened sorrow believing all is over, you are conquering sin and death.*



*Jesus, I love you, I need you, and I trust you. Amen.*

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My Lord Jesus Christ, two graces I beg of you before I die;

The first is that in my lifetime I may feel in my soul and in my body, as much as possible, that sorrow which you, sweet Jesus, endured in the hour of your most bitter passion;

The second is that I may feel in my heart, as much as possible, that abundance of love which you, Son of God, were inflamed, so as willingly to endure so great a passion for us sinners.

*...St. Francis of Assisi*