

The Way of the Cross
A Lenten Pilgrimage of Hope with Jesus



“If anyone wishes to come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:2)

Every journey through life is a deeply personal and forever unpredictable one. No two of us every do it in quite the same way. However, all of us no matter what our circumstances and beginnings, are at the mercy of change and also indebted to the fragility of time.

What do we do when life seems to unravel, when life doesn't seem right, when we have a sense of failure, or fear of the unknown? Where do we turn for understanding, for hope? Where is the model of strength we need to stay the course, to find hope? Where are the signs of promise that beckon us beyond the pain to its promising fulfillment?

One of the oldest devotions in Christianity, the Stations of the Cross, is a sign of the universal awareness of the presence of pain in life. It is part of life, necessary to contributing to growth of wisdom and to helping us stretch to the very breadth of our souls and our love. They are statements of faith, compassion, and conviction that lead us to a resurrection time on our journey to fullness of life. In the Stations of the Cross, the Way of the Cross, Jesus' gift to us is to show us what it means to lose everything in life and still go on to more of it. They are a model of how to live life when our own struggles are unavoidable, and life seems most oppressive, most unfair, most impossible to bear. Knowing that Jesus, too, has gone the way of injustice, fatigue, failure, public rejection and loss before us gives our own present struggles new hope and new light.

Praying with Jesus along the Way of the Cross helps us to look again, to deal with life with fresh and untried capacities, to discover dauntless ways of dealing with

pain and coming to wholeness again. They are about finding in the life of Jesus a deeper model of how to deal with the dark places in our lives, how to come to hope and not despair, to courage and not to fear, to an awareness of blessings instead of bitterness.

I invite you during Lent to follow the Way of the Cross, in hopes that it may help us move through Lent on a pilgrimage with Jesus to that fullness of life and hope that we celebrate at Easter. There are fourteen 'stations' or stops along the Way of the Cross. At each 'station' you stop, pray, read the story, pray the prayer, and contemplate the situation before moving on. As you move from one 'station' to the next, this becomes a devotional act, because you are walking with Jesus as He walks to Calvary.

First Station – Jesus is condemned to death

Story – Jesus stands before the chief priest, the elders, the scribes, and the whole council and they bound, beat and tortured Jesus. Now he is wrongfully condemned to punishment by death. His commitment to entering our lives completely begins its final steps, and we follow him in this final surrender as he is broken and given for us. Accused, judged, and condemned Jesus stands



totally undone, emotionally drained, more by the charges against him than by any act of physical violence. We can see what happens to the person who has publicly had blame laid upon them in one of those rush-to-judgement moments when no one really bothers to ask or let alone to listen to your own explanation of circumstances or your understanding of it or even your distance from the issue at hand. The innocent accused, this is the struggle of those whose goodness has forever been without question but who has, for whatever reason, suddenly become suspect. With one blow, the work of a lifetime of character building begins to crumble.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I view the scene. I become moved by both outrage and gratitude. I look at Jesus, at the crown of thorns, at the blood on his face, at his hands tied behind his back. The world turns on the innocent with a vengeance – on the woman who protests unjust pay, on the foreign worker seeking survival from starvation, on the homeless ones who lack either the skill or the support it takes to move up a shaky social ladder, on the person with an impeccable distinction but no way to disprove the evil of this unprovoked attack.

What we see maintained in Jesus is a strong sense of being held in the hands of God. It is our personal sense of self, drawing on that remembered sense from the well of the past, that calls us on because of what we know God wants us to be rather than what we want

people to think we are. Face to face with being honest with myself, who I know myself to be, a beloved child of God, precious in God's sight, that calls us to become whole again – to become the best of myself at the worst of times. How others treat us is not nearly as important as what we know ourselves to be. This first 'station' is a call to put our trust in God. Jesus, the model of inner strength at a time of serious public pressure, stands tall and strong in the face of injustice. He acknowledges the moment but does not give in to it. Jesus set out to witness to the love and justice of God for all peoples everywhere. We are called to do the same, to speak the truth with clarity, simplicity, and conviction. It raises for us a question: what is it in life for which we are willing to be condemned? And we also know that if we are condemned for standing to the truth we will not be standing alone, Jesus will be standing beside us, bearing the same pain for us.

This is for me that I might be free, that I might have fullness and everlasting life. As the journey begins, I ask to be with Jesus, to follow the journey, I express my love and thanks.

**Second Station –
Jesus carries His
cross**

Story – Jesus is made to carry the cross on which he will die. It represents the weight of all our



crosses. What he must have felt as he first took it upon his shoulders! With each step he enters more deeply into our human experience. He walks in the path of human misery and suffering and experiences its crushing weight.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I contemplate the wood of the cross. I imagine how heavy it is. We all know what it is like to have heavy burdens, unpredictable burdens that are part of life for all of us. These are the ‘somethings’ that we simply cannot avoid, and it takes courage to carry them well. It is one thing when the tribulations of life come from our own hands, but when we did nothing to deliberately bring them on, the heaviness is even worse. And when we look at Jesus, we know that the cross that he is bearing in this second ‘station’ is one that others are determined to oppress and destroy – the burden of hatred and evil – that he takes up to carry so that the world might see another way to be alive.

Looking at Jesus carrying the cross, makes me ask what crosses do I take on, knowing the risk, understanding the cost, and being committed to the consequences? Looking around at what is going on around us, and taking some kind of responsibility, however small, for the welfare of others, for justice in our homes, our country, our world. This second ‘station’ calls us to involvement, that great commission of feeding the hungry, healing the sick, clothing the naked, visiting those in need. Real commitment implies that, like Jesus,

we carry the burdens of our choices in bad times as well as good times, on difficult days as well as easy ones, in the face of opposition as well as in times of support. The real challenge in having begun a good thing, is to see it through to the end.

In Jesus at this second 'station' we see that accepting the cross for the sake of another, choosing the best over the comfortable or the secure, awakens in our own hearts something new, and like Jesus, it makes us more and more a sign of the presence of God on earth. I reflect upon all it means that Jesus is carrying it. I look into Jesus eyes.

This is for me. So I place myself with him in this journey, in its anguish, in his freedom and surrender, in the love that must fill his heart.

Third Station – Jesus falls the first time

Story – The weight is unbearable. Jesus falls under it. How could he enter our lives completely without surrendering to the crushing weight of the life that so many on this earth experience! He experiences weakness and powerlessness. He is pulled up and made to continue. Here at this



third 'station' we see Jesus falling under the weight of all that seems to be life, but for so many of us is not real life. It seems that everything we do is about winning something or measuring one person against another or gathering goods in great quantity not because we need them but in case others take them, or so that others can't have them. Falling under the weight of all that seems not to be real, and seeing the real challenge of a new perspective that can distinguish real life from what is nothing but a sham. It is not in the things, the prestige, the better than others, that real life lies – and at this third 'station' Jesus falling and getting up again helps us see that fantasy ends and reality sets in. It reminds us that success often looks like failure. If Jesus hadn't fallen under the cross, who of us could possibly have come to see that what appears to be collapse may actually be the beginning of another insight into success? "What we call failure is not the falling down," the proverb says, "but the staying down."

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I stare at the weakness in his eyes. I can look at his whole body and see the exhaustion. As I behold him there on the ground, being roughly pulled up, I know forever how profoundly he understands my fatigue and my defeats. The day we fail in the face of everyone we have ever wanted to hear applaud us is the day of truth. That is the day we finally begin to determine what is really important in life. But such a time is not an easy time – like Jesus we may fall into the mud, and with great effort get up again, prepared to re-

examine everything. What is it that drives what we do? What are our goals in life? Are we living to make the world a better place, a stronger place, a more powerful place of love and compassion and justice for all?

It is the important things in life that are worth struggling for to the end. If the struggle of my life is equal to the Gospel, to the coming of the reign of God here and now, no amount of struggle can ever deter it. I believe that what grows in us as we sit at this third 'station' is the awareness that reality is greater than either 'oh I wish' or my fantasy. To accept reality as it is in hard times and good times, to give ourselves for the lives of others, is the only thing that can give us new life and hope, enlarge our life and not diminish us as we journey through life.

This is for me. In grief and gratitude, I watch him stand again and gain an inner strength. I accept his love and express my thanks.

Fourth Station – Jesus meets his mother

Story – Jesus' path takes him to a powerful source of his strength to continue. All his life, his mother had taught him and supported him in her love. Now they look into each others' eyes – how pierced through her heart must be! How pained he must be to see her tears! Now her grace-filled smile blesses his mission and



stirs his heart to its depth. Love and trust in God bind them together. This fourth 'station' is about the place of love in life. At this fourth stop we see Jesus in need of support, of the place where care becomes a worldwide part of the human community. Here we see Mary, his mother, the one who never goes away, regardless of what is happening or being said.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – As I watch them in this place along the way, I contemplate the mystery of love's power to give strength. She knows the sorrow in every mother's heart who has lost a child to tragedy or violence. It is one thing to have zest enough for the future; it is valiant to recognize reality and to embrace it with spirit. But it is something else entirely to find ourselves alone in the midst of the painful but defining moments of life – birth, death, humiliation, failure and rejection. At this 'station' there is a truth: with love we can do anything, even the clouded parts of life that have been so necessary and commonplace. We see Jesus and his mother, they have leaned on one another all their lives. There is no way that they will change that now – they love and suffer together for each other and for the sake of the world which they serve.

Here at this stopping place we see unconditional love, the kind of love that cannot be diminished under any conditions, regardless of any accusations, whatever the cost to the self. This fourth stop shows us that we must learn to do the same, to love without boundaries, to

love without censure, without condemnation. Love lets the rest of the world do that. It is for the lover to simply accept what is and stand by to see it through. There is a unity that bonds souls in times of shared pain. And we see the freedom that comes with real love. A love that at the same time can let go, free to let others become the wholeness of themselves. A love that allows others to do what they are meant to do in life. I look at the two of them very carefully and long for such love and such peace.

This is for me, such incredible freedom. I find the words for expressing what is in my heart. Why do I love and how well?

Fifth Station – Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross

Story – Jesus even experiences our struggle to receive help. He is made to experience the poverty of not being able to carry his burden alone. He enters into the experience of all who must depend upon others to survive. He is deprived of the satisfaction of carrying this burden



on his own. And Simon of Syrene finds himself in that place where we don't want to be involved, he wasn't asked but told to give a hand, and yet also knew it must be done. Often we excuse ourselves – too busy, too tired, too old, too something .. embarrassed, irritated ... all things that also tell us that we are being called to do something because there is a need and are aware that there are times when we also are in need of help.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I look into Jesus' face and contemplate his struggle. His weariness and fragility, helplessness. I see how he looks at Simon, with utmost humility and gratitude. It is this that also gives us the clear message, that the deep meaning in our lives is to get involved. Often it is the outcasts – the poor, the weak, children, those on the street, in war, racism, and sexism ... bowed down under the weight of injustice, suffering from a system that has made them outcasts, invisible, and worthless that call to us with humility and gratitude, who soften our hearts and open our souls for the help and care that they need. It is the power of presence in the lives of the suffering, being where suffering is that is the great and gracious witness. Like Simon of Cyrene knowing what must be done, this is one of life's greatest moments when we choose it. We can ignore it, try to ignore it – too tired, too busy, don't want to get involved ... and yet there is a tug at the heart, knowing it must be done. So often when this happens we discover that it is not so much what Simon did for Jesus as what Jesus did for Simon that counts. Then we learn

to recognize that by the very fact of our coming face to face, getting involved with the other, Jesus is changing our life too. When we open our hearts to the other in need, we are very likely to discover that our own hidden needs have been healed in the process. We have let more life in than we are accustomed to and find ourselves meeting the Jesus-figures who walk by looking for our help, our presence, our companionship through life.

This is for me. So, I feel anguish and gratitude. I express my thanks that he can continue the journey. That he has help. That he knows my inability to carry my burden alone. I say what is in my heart, with deep feeling

Sixth Station – Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Story – Jesus' journey is at times brutal. He has entered into the terrible experiences of rejection and injustice. He has been whipped and beaten. His face shows the signs of his solidarity with all who have ever suffered injustice and vile, abusive treatment. He encounters a compassionate, loving



disciple who wipes the sweat and blood off his face. Here we see a truth: nothing we do for the suffering other ever goes unnoticed or unnoted. The kindness we bring to great moments of pain and grief marks us and lasts forever not only in the heart of the person whose pain we assuage but in our own soul as well.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – What does the face of Jesus hold for me? What do I see as I look deeply into his face? Can I try to comfort the agony and pain? Can I embrace him, with his face so covered with his passion. This is a woman that stepped out of the crowd, and here at this stopping place we see compassion and witness take the centre of our hearts. This is both an act of compassion and also a witness to the evil of brutality and injustice. Here is another challenge, to be what we are meant to be, to do what must be done no matter who approves, no matter who thinks that this is neither the time nor the place. This is a real challenge to us – no where are we to allow the Jesus figures of our day, the poor and the oppressed, to suffer where we are. Compassion is the counterpart of injustice. Here we see that harbouring a sense of righteous anger when the poor are oppressed is not enough. We are to reach down and lift them up in whatever way we can from their despair. Justice is not enough; mercy is what makes it real.

Every time we make life physically better for someone else, the face of Jesus becomes clearer and clearer in us. We become more of what we are meant to be. We rise

up out of our petty past and become a clearer, cleaner, brighter picture of the face of Jesus ourselves. And so we are left with a question: will we ourselves ever do anything for those who live in the mesh of violence and deprivation, to raise them up, to give them hope, to stop the pain they breathe? And the challenge is one that we can meet, it is not only the big things, but the little things done in kindness, love and mercy that remove the pain and suffering from the face of those in need.

This is for me in wonder and awe. I behold his face now wiped clean and see the depth of his suffering in solidarity with all of us.

Seventh Station – Jesus falls the second time

Story – Even with help, Jesus stumbles and falls to the ground. In deep exhaustion he stares at the earth beneath him. “Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return.” He has seen death before. Now he can feel the profound weakness of disability and disease and aging itself, there on his knees, under the



weight of his cross. Faced with the same things that overcame him before, Jesus must have wondered how to meet all this a second time. Dealing with the same things that come around again makes the heart go weak! How can he, how can we, even dare to think of getting up and going on again! In fact, why even bother to try?

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I contemplate Jesus brought very low as I behold him on the ground and my heart goes out to him. Doubt is one of the great spiritual challenges of life. We live with it at one level or another every day of our life. This is especially true when we have to face the same issues we faced before. What if this time all we don't save us now? What if we try again and fail? At this seventh stopping place we are at a crossroads that will determine how we go through life, it is a time that can make or break a person. We can live either 'I can't do this' or 'yes, I can do this'. For Jesus at this seventh 'station' we see that the spiritual life is not an easy walk, it is a solemn sacred effort to make life count, to make good on what we set out to make of ourselves, to become the wholeness of our selves. And it is exhausting and at the same time is of the essence of greatness. We know that life is a journey of falling down and getting up over and over again – we are here to give our best and give our all in our love of God, ourselves, others and the world. It is that inner call of love: "Here I am, Lord. Send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

It doesn't matter whether we win or lose in the process. What is important is that we give ourselves to something big enough to grow beyond ourselves. It is faithfulness that really is the heart of the matter here at this seventh stopping place. This is what makes us a beacon of hope for those who come after us. There is no such thing as weakness for those who are strong enough to keep on trying. I store up this image in my heart, knowing that I will never feel alone in my suffering or in any diminishment, with this image of Jesus on the ground before me.

This is for me, so I express the feeling in my heart.

Eighth Station – Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Story – The women of Jerusalem, and their children, come out to comfort and thank him. They had seen his compassion and welcomed his words of healing and freedom. He had broken all kinds of social and religious conventions to connect with them. Now they are here to support him, and he feels



their grief, and suffers knowing he can't remain to continue to help them in this life. He knows the mystery of facing the separation of death. He has known at one moment the excitement of being hailed and applauded and followed, and at the other moment the condemnation, the cruelty, and anger and the rejection. At this eighth 'station' we see a group of unknown, almost rag-tag people, women with children, whose brave presence come to thank Jesus for all he did for them. So often it is those for whom the social system has put down, who display the most gratitude for the small acts of kindness they have received.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I look at the faces so full of love and gratitude, loss and fear. I contemplate what words might have passed between them. It is an example telling us that justice must come, or we will all suffer for the lack of it. To seek justice without mercy, to do mercy but not seek justice is, in both instances, to live a partial life. To feed the hungry but fail to question the policies that make people hungry or leave people hungry neglects the real issue. For us the challenge is to see beyond the person to the environment, to the social policies of a system, to the circumstances for an understanding of life. This brings the gift of beginning to live life to the fullest. It is when we struggle to do this that we become less likely to allow individuals to bear the sins that belong to us all. Then, we rise to a new level of wisdom. We do more than live ourselves; we begin to give life to others, as well.

I remember all his tender, compassionate, merciful love for me. I place myself with these women and children to support him.

This is for me, so I let this scene stir up deep gratitude.

Ninth Station – Jesus falls a third time

Story – This last fall is devastating.

Jesus can barely proceed to the end. Summoning all his remaining strength, supported by his inner trust in God, Jesus collapses under the weight of the cross. His executioners look at him as a broken man, pathetic yet paying a price he

deserves. They help him up so he can make it up the hill of crucifixion. There is something about the taste of failure that dampens the soul, but when failure comes time after time, having fallen twice, Jesus falls again for the third time, how hard it is to face that inner question ‘what is the use?’ ‘why bother?’. And yet we see Jesus here making the choice to go on anyway, go on despite the effort of it all. We see Jesus here doing what looked impossible for him, and in doing so gives us the gift of showing us that it is not what we do easily that



calculates the depths of a person's soul, it's what we do beyond all the odds that matter. The person that doesn't give up but crosses the finish line long after others have crossed it, is really the winner.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I pause to contemplate him there on the ground. The brokenness that makes me whole, the surrender that gives me life. I pause to experience and receive how completely he loves me. I see in Jesus' that life is a matter of going on beyond the possible. This ninth 'station' shows us that It is when the work is draining but we do it anyway because others will suffer if we do not, that we are fully alive. When the great ideal of our hearts is far, far beyond our resources, but we strive for it regardless, we are fully alive, and the world is better because we are here. Jesus example here shows us that there is nothing we want to do that is impossible: like the person running in the race, it will only take us a little longer to do it – but once started, we will not give up.

The call of this ninth 'station' is to refuse to give up doing what the world needs to have done simply because we do not succeed at it on the first try. The call is to see failure as part of the process of our lives and to learn from it accordingly. There is no call as important as refusing to quit doing what is worth doing. It is perseverance. And when we refuse to give up, when we go on trying, something new is born in us. Instead of a sense of failure, the very effort of trying recreates our

sense of purpose, our sense of commitment, the timelessness of our dream. He is indeed completely poured out for me.

This is for me as I treasure this gifted experience, I express what is in my heart.

Tenth Station – Jesus' clothes are taken away

Story – Part of the indignity is to be crucified naked. Jesus is completely stripped of any pride. The wounds on his back are torn open again. He experiences the ultimate vulnerability of the defenseless. No shield or security protects him. As they stare at him, his eyes turn to heaven. Being stripped naked in public is particularly chilling. There is no dignity left, no status, no solemnity, no real person left to see.



Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I pause to watch the stripping. I contemplate all that is taken from him and how he faces his death with such nakedness. I reflect upon how much of himself he has revealed to me holding nothing back. The spiritual summons of the tenth 'station' is to the development of genuine humility. Here we see Jesus with that true humility, that self-knowledge, that total openness before the God of unconditional love. The humble person is the one who knows who they really are, puts on no airs in an attempt to be otherwise. Humble people know, too, that God knows exactly who they are and loves them totally, God's precious one.

The humble person cannot be humiliated because the humble person does not wear a mask to begin with. What you see in them is what they are, and what they are is what you see. For us this tenth stopping place confronts us with the inevitable in every life: somewhere along the way we each get stripped of what we have spent our lives acquiring, of things closest to our hearts, of possessions or positions that made us who we thought we were. Jesus here gives us that pause that leaves us to discover who we have really become, and who we want to be ready to become, who we really are, someone worthwhile. The freedom that comes with being honest with the self and open with others leaves us perfectly free. It is a moment of great liberation, a moment of new life. Being willing to be the self and nothing more is the beginning of truth, the essence of humility, the coming of peace. I look at him in his humility.

This is for me, and I share my feelings of gratitude.

Eleventh Station – Jesus is nailed to the cross

Story – Huge nails are hammered through his hands and feet to fix him on the cross. As the cross is lifted up, the weight of his life hangs on those nails. Every time he struggles to pull himself up to breathe, his ability to cling to life slips away. Here we see the distortion of a great life and



even greater plans and in great proportions. It was the cutting off of life in the very thick of it. It was the cost to be paid for confronting the authorities of both synagogue and state in an attempt to make both institutions what they were meant to be for all of us, all of the world.

The cross of Jesus was a real cross, and the real crosses of our lives are not just minor irritations or little tests of our faith. They are not just an experience of a temporary discomfort. They are life changing. They are permanent. To be nailed to the cross means that there is little chance for change, this situation is forever. For example, and there are many examples that we might

face, taking care of a seriously brain-damaged child is that, however much love or sense of responsibility, this situation will never change – total care is needed.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I make myself watch the nails being driven through his flesh. And I watch his face. I contemplate the completeness of his entry into our lives. This eleventh stopping place is a real call to faith, to believe that a loving God is also present in darkness so deep that nothing can possibly soften it. It is trust that the God who created us and loves us will hold us up through this moment so that the darkness does not break our hearts. This stopping place brings us all to face the moments when we know we must do what we do not want to do and, more than that, feel we cannot possibly do, however it changes our lives. When what we know to be right exacts more from us than we think we can give, then Jesus nailed to a cross is our only hope that one day the cross we seek to avoid will have been worth it. It is then that we feel a great freedom, as we embrace the cross, and we learn to live in ways we never imagined possible and find ourselves made new, new hopes, new dreams, new life. Can there be any pain or agony he would not understand?

This is for me, nailed to a cross to forever proclaim liberty to captives. What sorrow and gratitude fill my heart.

Twelfth Station – Jesus dies on the cross

Story – Between two criminals, a mocking title above his head, with only Mary and John and Mary Magdalene to support him, Jesus surrenders his last breath: “into your hands I commend my spirit”. What is worse than the actual event of death is the



awareness of the degree of loss that comes with it. There is the sense that this violent death fills everyone with the sense of having been able to do nothing to have stopped it. This leaves us haunted. Thinking of those left behind, what can possibly fix the lives that are left to mourn? Nothing else will be quite the same. How is it possible to go on alone? These are empty times for everyone.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I stand there, at the foot of the cross, side by side with all of humanity, and behold our salvation. I carefully watch and listen to all that is said. And then, I

experience the one who gives life pass from life to death, for me. The call to us at this stopping place is not so much to faith as it is to hope. Hope does not tell us that soon life will be the same again as it was before the loss. Hope tell us that life will go on, differently, yes, but go on nevertheless. Hope tells us that the pieces are there for us to put together, if only we will give ourselves to the doing of it. When Jesus dies on the cross, something entirely different rises. And that something is the call to us to make the best in life live again. Jesus in dying lovingly places himself in the hands of God, into the hands of God who has said 'this is my beloved, in whom I am well pleased'. Here we see a gift from Jesus in the form of a question: am I able to accept the daily deaths of life, both the great ones and the small, knowing that death is not the end of life, only its passing over to something new in me? Hopefully I learn from Jesus that, like his death, my deaths may bring new life to the world around me as well. At this stopping place I can begin to understand that while death is a mystery it is also an opportunity to start life anew. It is a door through which most of us will walk at least several times in life. Remembering what has been, and drawing on our own lived wisdom, we can choose to go through these doors and find new ongoing life. A wonderful quote from Joan Chittister: "And yet it is out of the dark, wet dust of yesterday that life forever blooms. When we take hold of life with all its deaths and all its resurrections, life becomes an eternal hotbed of creation given into the hands of the creature so that creation can go on creating."

I console Mary and John and Mary. And let them console me.

This is for me, this is the hour to express the deepest feelings within me.

Thirteenth Station – the body of Jesus is taken down from the cross

Story – What tender mourning! Jesus' lifeless body lies in his mother's arms. He has truly died ... A profound sacrifice, complete.

There is nothing left to do but admit the loss. Life is like a crystal ball, fragile and brittle to the touch. Life is a gift of momentous proportions but is given without the security of knowing that once it is achieved it will be unyielding to change. In Jesus we

see that life comes to us as the reckless joy of possibility but it comes, too, with the agonizing awareness that someday, when we least expect it, we may need to let go of it to begin all over again.



Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation – I behold this scene at the foot of the cross. I contemplate touching, caressing his body. I remember all his hands have touched, all who have been blessed by his warm embrace. I pause to let it soak in. He knows the mystery of death. We were not meant to be alone. With this comes the realization that only God is God, that we are not in charge of time or truth or the creation of a perfect world. And then we understand that like Jesus, the next step is to give ourselves over into the arms of God. The question that we have at this thirteenth 'station' is a very straightforward one: am I prepared to let go of everything I ever wanted so that God's will can come through me in another way? This is the moment when if we reach the point of no longer insisting to be in control, that we are prepared to be broken open to the life of God however it comes. Here is now a gift: God will enter my life, my heart, my soul in more ways than I can imagine. Then I begin to understand that all the deaths of the past become what they have always been meant to be, simply steps on a road that is never the end, always a new beginning of the never-ending longing for God.

This is for me, He has fallen into God's hands. That I might love as I have been loved. I pour out my heart to the God of all mercies.

Fourteenth Station – Jesus is laid in the tomb

Story – They take the body of Jesus to its resting place.

The huge stone over the tomb is the final sign of the permanence of death. In this final act of surrender, who would have imagined this tomb would soon be empty or that Jesus would show himself alive to his



disciples, or that they would recognize him in the breaking of bread? Oh, that our hearts might burn within us, as we realize how he had to suffer and die so as to enter into his glory, for us. There is relief that comes when the suffering has ended. The one we love cannot be hurt again. And that is good.

Prayer – We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Meditation - I pause to contemplate this act of closure on his life. In solidarity with all humanity, his body is taken to its grave. I stand for a moment outside this tomb. This final journey of his life has shown me the meaning of his gift of himself for me. This tomb represents every tomb I stand before with fear, in

defeat, struggling to believe it could ever be empty. And all of us have tombs in our lives. It is precisely then when the tombs of our lives become one thing or another: they can become a shocking propulsion into a world we never foresaw and do not want – or they become a seal on the goodness of life past that demands we give our own life now to the completion of the unfinished journey. Otherwise, what is the value of the past? What was the good of the dream? What is the purpose of life? Thinking about Jesus and this fourteenth stopping place, it is the tomb itself that presses us to live and to grow out of the best of the past to the rest of the future. This last ‘station’ really helps us to see that the call of Jesus journey was not to death and despair at all – not to focus on our burdens, our darkness – but to take what is good from the past and go forward with it into a future that is bursting with new life. This last stopping place asks us to wrestle with closure. It helps us to see that only in the ability to realize that life goes on from one stage to another, from one kind of presence to another, that we can ever come to new life. We see that Jesus gives in to death, to closure, one life ends so that another can begin. All resurrections in life come out of the little deaths of life. Every new tomb signals that another life is about to begin – it is the very nature of tombs to require new life from us – we need to bring the past to new life. This stopping place asks us if we are able to trust that the tombs of our lives are gateways to resurrection.

This is for me. In the fullness of faith in the Risen One I express my gratitude for this way of the cross. I ask Jesus, whose hands, feet and side still bear the signs of his journey, to grant me the graces I need to take up my

cross to be a servant of his own mission, that I let the
tombs of my life indeed be the gateways to
resurrection.

(These Stations of the Cross were inspired by material from
the website stritalic.org GoodFri2013 Stations Cross 1 and
Sister Joan Chittister's meditations, with some free changes
and adaptations for use by Sister Doreen)

(Images pictures of SSJD Stations of the Cross)