



The Stations of the Cross Behind the Walls

Reflections
composed by Father George Williams, SJ,
and team
for the men of San Quentin
and other prisoners

Leader: It is for freedom Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (*Galatians 5:1*)

Station I: Jesus is sentenced to death.

Leader: The entire assembly rose up and led Jesus before Pontius Pilate.
They started his trial by saying:
“We found this man subverting our nation
and calling himself the Messiah, a king.”
They demanded loudly that he be crucified,
and their shouts increased in violence.
Pilate then decreed that what they demanded should be done. (*Luke 23*)

All: God so loved the world that He gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. (*John 3:16*)



Reflection on the Station

Beaten and exhausted, You are brought before a judge
and the crowd is asked to choose.
You yearn for the love of Your people but they reject You.
“Give us Barabbas!” they yell, and with a sad heart,
You prepare Yourself for the agonizing way of the cross to Calvary.
Innocent, You are condemned to death,
betrayed by one of your closest friends.
Pilate, the Roman governor, tries to wash his hands of guilt,
to avoid being blamed for executing an innocent man.

Prayer: Jesus, when I feel my hands chained in a courtroom,
let me remember that Your hands too were handcuffed
when You were made to stand before Pontius Pilate.
When I come before judges, Lord Jesus,
let me feel that You are near to me. Lord, don't let me despair;
instead, let me trust that You will be with me in everything that happens to me.
Innocent or guilty, I give my life into the Father's hands as You did. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station II: Jesus accepts his Cross

Leader: The guards stripped off Jesus' clothes
and wrapped him in a red military coat.
Then they began to mock him.
They spat at him and beat him.
Finally, when they had finished tormenting him,
they stripped him of the coat, dressed him in his own clothes,
and led him off to crucify him. (*Matthew 27:27-31*)

All: It was our infirmities that he bore,
our sufferings that he endured. (*Isaiah 53:4*)



Reflection on the Station:

You accept the cross, knowing fully the agony to come.
You take upon Your battered shoulders the weight of all our sins.
In the Garden of Eden it was a living tree
and Adam and Eve's disobedience that brought death into the world.
Now, through the dead wood of the cross,
You show us the way back to true life.
You do not run from the suffering of the cross.
You share in all the suffering of humanity as You carry Your cross,
and in the shedding of Your blood, we are reconciled to God.

Prayer: Jesus, in my cell, let my heart change
as I think of the cross that You carried for my sins.
Lord Jesus, help me so that I will not cause others pain,
or be a heavy cross for others to carry.
Jesus, my Savior, here locked away,
I will take up my cross, heavy as it seems to me,
and I will carry it without anger or hatred or bitterness.
Help me to follow You! Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station III: Jesus Falls for the First Time

Leader: He endured the suffering that should have been ours,
the pain that we should have borne.
All the while we thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God.
But because of our sins he was wounded,
beaten because of the evil we did.
We are healed by the punishment he suffered. (*Isaiah 53:4-7*)

All: God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to Himself,
and He has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. (*2 Corinthians 5:19*)



Reflection on the Station:

Soon after taking up the cross
You fall for the first time.
The terrible burden of carrying the weight of our sins
becomes unbearable and you stumble to the ground.
All the while the crowd mocks and insults You,
clinging to their sins even as you seek to lift them away.
We put our God face down in the dust
so we do not have to bear your gaze upon our sins.

Prayer: Jesus, I have stumbled and fallen many times.
Please don't let the cruelty of people
stop you from being compassionate and forgiving
to someone like me.
Look with mercy on me, for I have sinned.
Help me, Lord, never to gang up on anyone else who has fallen or sinned,
no matter what they have done.
Teach me to be as forgiving as You are. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station IV: Jesus meets Mary, his mother

Leader: Then Simeon said to Mary, his mother:
“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be spoken against,
so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.
And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” *(Luke 2:34-35)*

All: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Reflection on the Station:



You meet Mary Your Mother on the way.
Seeing her brings relief and regret.
For her to see You so tortured breaks Your heart.
She is helpless to save You,
but she relieves Your suffering merely by her presence.
She shares in Your suffering.
Even though the guards keep you physically apart,
You are still united in love.
You seek to comfort her in her sorrow.
She stands by in love and constant prayer,
never yielding to hatred for those who are turning away from You.
Mary understands the power that love has over evil.

She understands forgiveness,
even when faced with such terrible violence and hatred.

Prayer: Jesus, when I get visits,
I often see the pain and the tears
that my family feels when they see me here.
Sometimes Lord, it is harder to take
than my own frustration at being locked up.
When I think back to things that I did to hurt my family,
or ways that I didn't help or that I ignored them,
my heart wants to break with guilt.
Lord Jesus, help me to be as good to my loved ones now as I can be. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station V: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry His cross

Leader: As the soldiers led Jesus away,
they seized Simon from Cyrene,
who was on his way in from the country,
and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. (*Luke 23:26*)

All: If anyone would serve me, let him follow me;
where I am, there will my servant be. (*John 12:26*)

Reflection on the Station:



You allow Simon to help You carry the cross.
He is a simple man, a farm worker coming in from the fields.
He is humble and knows what it is like to be down and out,
so he helps You in Your time of greatest need.
Do we really understand what You are giving us in the cross?
In the cross lies our salvation. In the cross we are never alone.
In the cross we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers,
helping each other and making reparation
for the wrongs we have done.
Through the cross we are freed
from all the chains and prisons of this world.

Prayer: The other prisoners around me, Lord,
also carry many heavy crosses;
their fears for their families,
their sins and sense of guilt,
the uncertainty of their future,
anger, frustration and sadness.
Lord Jesus, show me how to help them carry their crosses.
Make me strong enough not to shut myself in my own little world,
but let me reach out to others with Your help. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station VI: Veronica wipes Jesus' face

Leader: Now the Lord is the Spirit,
and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
And all of us, with unveiled faces,
seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror,
are being transformed into the same image
from one degree of glory to another;
for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. *(2 Corinthians 3:17-18)*

All: As often as You did this for the least of my brothers and sisters,
You did it for me. *(Matthew 25:40)*

Reflection on the Station:



The story of Veronica comes from the early legends and traditions of the first Christians. Veronica was a bystander at the crucifixion. She saw Your need and offered her compassion. She showed great courage by stepping out from the crowd and risking arrest herself. She took her veil and wiped the blood and sweat from your face. From this small act of kindness she was given the image of Your face imprinted on her veil. In helping You to see, she saw the face of God. Veronica shows us that when we treat one another

with love and compassion,
we see God's face in all of our brothers and sisters.

Prayer: Jesus, give me a heart of compassion
so that I can reach out to those who are in need.
I want to see Your face in anyone who is suffering or in pain. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station VII: Jesus falls the second time under the cross

Leader: How long, O LORD?
Will You forget me forever?
How long will You hide Your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and answer me, O LORD my God! (*Psalm 6*)

All: It was thus that he humbled himself,
obediently accepting death -- even death on a cross. (*Philippians 2:8*)

Reflection on the Station:



Now all assistance is gone.
There will be no more help for You,
no more kindness on the way.
From now on, until the triumph over the tomb,
there is only the misery of loneliness.
You fall in this loneliness,
again overcome by the weight of evil.
You are worn out by the physical and emotional torture.
The crowd still mocks and insults You.
There is no pity for You
as you fall face-down in the dust a second time.
Denying our own sinfulness
allows us to hurt You and one another.

Prayer: Here, locked away, O Lord,
I want to turn my life over to You.
But Jesus, You know I still fall and sometimes I fall hard.
The good way of life that You call me to,
well, sometimes it seems so far away.
Sometimes I give in to my own weakness,
my own way of still being trapped by the ways I choose to live.
I fall and I fail You. Lord, don't give up on me!
Be at my side to pick me up and put me on the right path again.
Help me to ask for forgiveness and start over again on Your path. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station VIII: Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem

Leader: A great crowd of people followed Jesus,
including women who mourned and cried for him.
Jesus turned to them and said:
“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me.
Weep for yourselves and for your children.” *(Luke 23:27-28)*

All: I give You a new commandment: love one another. *(John 13:34)*

Reflection on the Station:



The women weep for You
but they do not realize
that their own guilt and that of their children
is more deserving of tears.
It is our sin that crucified You.
By rebelling against God,
we reject the very mercy and forgiveness we need most,
for it is in You alone that we have the hope of eternal life.
We are so attached to this world.
But You tell us to weep for those who lose eternal life
by separating themselves from You.

Prayer: Show me Lord, how to comfort my loved ones.
Let me be patient and understanding with them.
Help me not to argue with them,
and if they speak harshly, let me respond peacefully.
Help me to love them
and not try to control them or make selfish demands on them.
Comfort my family and bring them lots of peace.
Make us a stronger family Lord,
but if that doesn't happen, even though I really want it,
then help me to continue to love them
even as I feel their distance from me. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station IX: Jesus falls for the third time.

Leader: Those who love their life will lose it,
and those who hate their life in this world
will keep it for eternal life.
Whoever serves me must follow me,
and where I am, there will my servant be also. (*John 12:25-27*)

All: Whoever wishes to come after me, let him deny himself,
take up his cross, and follow me. (*Matthew 16:24*)

Reflection on the Station:



Your strength is gone, You fall a third time.
Weakened by constant pain,
You once again fall into the rocky dirt.
Wounded and broken,
You bear the insults and profanities of the hate-filled crowd
that wants a worldly leader to worship instead of God.
We seek only our own comfort
while You, our God and Creator,
lie bleeding on the ground before us,
humbling Yourself, crawling in dirt for us.
What more proof of Your love for us could we possibly need?

Prayer: Jesus, teach me to surrender my life into the Father's hands.
Let me place in His hands the anger I feel inside of me,
the frustration of being here,
all my temptations, my hopes and my fears,
the darkness and sadness that sometimes surround me,
all the misunderstandings that come my way every day.
Everything in my life, Lord, I surrender to You.
I ask only that You send me Your love,
Your forgiveness and Your peace. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station X: Jesus is stripped of His clothes.

Leader: When the guards brought Jesus to the site of Golgotha, which means “Skull Place,” they tried to give him wine drugged with myrrh, but he would not take it. Then they crucified him and divided up his garments by rolling dice for them to see what each should take. (*Mark 15:22-24*)

All: Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth. (*Isaiah 53:7*)

Reflection on the Station:



The guards seek to leave you nothing -- they try to strip away Your dignity with Your clothes. They mock You in Your nakedness. But You are God and are not shamed. Your innocence overcomes the guilt of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Like them, we try to hide our sins by covering over our guilt with false and hypocritical masks. You, in Your innocence and humility, reveal the truth of our shame.

Prayer: Jesus, You know how degrading it is to be strip-searched. There will always be people who disrespect me: COs and prisoners who open old wounds of anger or hardness in my heart, and make me want to respond to them with violence in word and action. Here, disrespect can become a game of power or strength or toughness. Jesus, show me how to act as You did on the way to Your death. Let me find my strength and peace in You. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station XI: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Leader: They crucified Jesus and two other criminals as well,
one on his right and the other on his left.
Jesus said, "Father, forgive them;
they do not know what they are doing." (*Luke 23:33-34*)

All: God has loved us and has sent his Son
as an offering for our sins. (*1 John 4:10*)

Reflection on the Station:



Wounded, mangled, bleeding, you allow them
to hammer nails into Your hands and Your feet.
From Your Sacred Heart of Compassion,
You bleed for love of us.
You give us Your love as we nail you to a cross.
You become one with the cross,
absorbing completely the burden of our sin,
all the rage and loneliness and anxiety and despair
and hatred and lust and and lies of all mankind
through all the ages, nailed into Your flesh,
and still you love us.

Jesus, what goes through Your mind
as they throw You to the ground and kneel on Your arms
so that they can drive iron nails into each of Your hands?
Then they force Your feet together and pound the nails through them
and smash them tight against the wooden board.
Are You even able to think as You feel so much physical pain,
a pain that becomes even worse when they pull the cross upright
and your whole body's weight falls suddenly and horribly
on Your nailed hands and feet?
Your whole body is in agony because in order to breathe,
You have to pull on Your nailed hands and push up on Your nailed and bloody feet.

Prayer: Jesus, I know I will never suffer as much as You did,
and You did it because You loved me.
Jesus, help me to be faithful to You. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station XII: Jesus dies on the cross

Leader: When noon came, darkness fell on the whole countryside and lasted until about midafternoon.
At that time Jesus cried out in a loud voice,
“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”
Then uttering a loud cry, he breathed his last. (*Mark 15:33-37*)

All: Now is the acceptable time!
Now is the day of salvation! (*2 Corinthians 6*)

Reflection on the Station:



You hang on the cross
with only a few faithful friends at Your feet.
Your Mother watches as her Son bleeds to death.
There is no mercy for You,
yet You plead for mercy for us.
You even give us the Mother You chose for Yourself.
You are completely alone.
As You die, cursed and ignored,
with no possibility of human comfort,
You cry from the cross Your agony.

Prayer: Jesus, as I think about Your death,
I ask forgiveness for anything I have done to hurt anyone.
I place at the foot of Your cross
anyone who is a victim of what I have done.
I ask You to bless them and keep them close to You.
I ask that You change me
so that no one else will ever be a victim of my actions. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station XIII: Jesus' Body Is Taken Down from the Cross

Leader: There was a man named Joseph,
an upright and holy member of the Council.
He approached Pilate with a request for Jesus' body.
He took it down and wrapped it in fine linen. *(Luke 23:50-53)*

All: Come, all You who pass by the way,
look and see whether there is any suffering like my suffering. *(Lamentations 1:12)*

Reflection on the Station:



Your Body is taken down from the cross
and given to Your Mother,
and she holds You for a few moments.
In her womb You were welcomed into human life.
Now You go to her in death.
Mary is entrusted with the Body of Christ.
So it is with us.
Your Mother welcomes us into her arms
and heals and soothes through Your grace.
Mary is the Mother of the Church,
the mother who accepts and prays for

the wounded, the brokenhearted, and the condemned --
all those who the world has rejected.

Does Mary remember how she held You
when You were a baby or a little boy?

Do her clothes become stained with the blood that flows
from a hundred places on Your body?

Do words exist that can describe the cry of grief that comes from her now?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me compassion
for all the women who suffer from the sufferings of their children.
Let me know a little of their grief and sorrow. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

Station XIV: Jesus' mother and friends lay his body in the tomb

Leader: Taking Jesus' body, Joseph wrapped it in fresh linen
and laid it in his own new tomb
which had been cut from a formation of rock.
Then he rolled a huge stone
across the entrance of the tomb and went away. (*Matthew 27:59-60*)

All: With Your blood You purchased for God
people of every race and tongue, of every people and nation. (*Revelation 5:9*)

Reflection on the Station:



Jesus, Your friends do what they can to clean Your body;
they bury You in a borrowed tomb.
When the stone rolls over the entrance,
they walk away, weeping and exhausted.
Their dreams died with You that day.
They could not have seen the glory
of Your Easter rising from the dead that was yet to come.
We think we can place You far away,
outside ourselves, in a tomb, while we live.
But the only real life is in You.
By casting You away we give ourselves over to death.
But you never turn away from us.

We turn away from Your Church, but she will endure
and the gates of hell will never defeat her.
The Body of Your Church is continually renewed
whenever we learn to turn away from our selfishness.

Prayer: Jesus, where I am now often seems like a tomb,
like a complete end of my life -
the death of every hope and dream I ever had.
How can I get through this time Lord?
Even if I get through it,
my future often looks empty or like an endless series of more problems.
Send me, Lord, the glory of Your resurrection to fill me with hope.
Fill my heart with Your peace and hope.
Jesus, my savior, teach me to love. Amen.

Leader: We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

All: Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.



Now
the Lord
is the Spirit,
and where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is freedom.

And all of us, with unveiled faces,
seeing the glory of the Lord

as though
reflected
in a mirror,
are being
transformed into
the same image
from one
degree of glory
to another;
for this comes
from the Lord,
the Spirit.

(2 Cor 3:17-18)