

To those at the foot of the cross, this must have been the bleakest hour. How would they manage? Why should they even bother? What had it all been for? The Mystery of the Cross.

All **Lord, we know your death was not the end, but the means by which we can reach our end—our goal. You died before us to show us that obedience to the Father’s will and dying to ourselves is the way to Life.**

As those we love reach the end of their lives on earth, grant that they may soon join you in perfect peace and happiness and grant us the consolation which comes from faith and trust in Your mercy.

CONCLUSION

Leader “Come to me all you who are overburdened, and I will give you rest.”

The disciples had accompanied Jesus throughout his ministry, and now they contemplate his death.

We, like them, are sometimes overwhelmed by feelings of futility and powerlessness. Yet, in the power and hope of the cross and resurrection, we can face life in the sure confidence that the Lord walks with us, as we walk with him.

All **My Lord, my God, my all—the sadness and shame I feel as I have tried to imagine some of what you suffered for me, is softened by a gratitude I can never express, an unfaltering hope in your infinite mercy and an immovable trust in your undying love.**

Possess me, Lord; flood the darkness of my sinful being with the light of your grace until there is nothing in my thoughts, words or deeds which can ever offend or disappoint you again.

Lord, with the words “Your will be done” - I willingly accept my cross, trusting that your love means I shall never be left to carry it alone. Amen.

Stations of the Cross

First Station—Jesus is condemned to Death

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader “Crucify him! Crucify him.” Why? What harm has this man done?”

Lord Jesus, it is hard for us to imagine the anguish of your loved ones at your condemnation. But what about today, when we hold a grudge...? “Crucify him!” When we judge others...? “Crucify him!” **Forgive us, Jesus.**

All **Lord, teach me not to judge nor harbour any unkind thoughts towards others. I can understand so little and my judgement will almost always be biased by motives of jealousy, greed or pride. Help me, instead to recognise my own faults by allowing me to see myself as others see me, and—especially—as You see me—and then grant me the strength to replace my shortcomings with meekness and generosity of spirit.**

Second Station—The Cross is Laid on Jesus

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader Jesus said: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.”

To deny ourselves is to disown ourselves as the centre of our existence.

No matter how blessed we are in this life, we all have our crosses to bear. Nobody lives a life completely unmarked by pain or tribulation or sorrow or hardship—in mind or body. There is no escape from the cross. And Christ—fully human—bore the burden of His cross physically for all to see; to show that there is nothing He asks us to endure which He has not endured before us.

All **Lord, teach me that to fight against accepting my cross adds immensely to its weight. Show me how to lighten its load by accepting that it is the will of the Father that my life should have hardships, for it is in the darkness of sorrow and pain that I seek most fervently the light of truth, and in the chill of loneliness and despair that I struggle to draw close to the warm flame of your love for us.**

Third Station—Jesus Falls the First Time

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader “I tell you...there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.”

Throughout his life on earth, Our Lord tirelessly forgave sins, cured disease and disability—which had often plagued the sufferers all their lives. As we repeatedly stumble and fall from the same weaknesses we may have had for years, may we learn the lesson that God will never abandon us—unless we resolutely abandon Him.

All **Lord, when you fell under the weight of your cross which bore my sins, you got up again and carried on—unswerving in your obedience to the Father.**

Teach me to fix my sights on you, to persevere when I fall away from grace again and again. Let me draw from the mercy you show me, the strength to defeat my weaknesses.

Fourth Station - Jesus meets his Mother

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “He is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed—and a sword will pierce your soul too...”

Can there be any more agonising pain than seeing the humiliation and indescribable suffering of the one you love most deeply, while being powerless to help?

All **Mary, Mother of God and our mother, too, help me to accept with serenity the hardships and struggles I must witness in the lives of those I care for and love.**

Teach me to identify wisely when practical help is needed, when silent support is needed and when my involvement would mean unwelcome interference.

Thirteenth Station—Jesus is taken down from the Cross

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader When they came to Jesus they found that he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. This is the evidence of one who saw it.

Again our thoughts turn to the beloved disciple John, to Mary and the other women who loved Jesus. What was there to say? What words of consolation could they offer one another as they tenderly took the bruised, lifeless corpse down from the cross? Mary, there to the end, bravely hugs the marble-cold body of her Son to herself, as her friends gently prise Him from her arms. It is over; He is gone. A sword pierced her soul.

All **Lord, sometimes it is hard, sometimes impossible, to see why things happen. Tragic, heart-breaking things happen to good people, to children, to the vulnerable—and the world asks “why”?**

Help us to learn how to accept what we don’t understand and to trust, to be still and know that God is always near.

Banish the pride which dictates to us that we have a right to know every thing. Console us in our grief and save us from despair.

Fourteenth Station—Jesus is laid in the Tomb

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean shroud and put it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a large stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away.

Joseph of Arimathaea was described as a prominent member of the Council, a virtuous and upright man who had not agreed with what the others had planned and carried out. His voice was a lone voice, drowned out by the noisy majority. Still he made his views known and having failed to prevent the atrocity, bravely went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He then carefully wrapped the body, and laid it in a new tomb which he had prepared for his own use.

The callousness of the soldiers defies belief as they share out Our Lord's clothes; showing more interest in throwing dice for them, than in the man who was about to die the most agonising death - out of love for them.
Killing some time—as they killed their Saviour.

All **Beloved Lord, I know that I am always naked before you. Nothing I do escapes your notice; I need never bother to offer excuses or explanations for anything I do—or don't do. You see me as I am, and you see the potential you created in me. Please clear my mind of trivia and help me to become the person you want me to be, rather than a worthless shell wrapped in earthly trappings.**

Eleventh Station—Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do".
For all the pain we have caused Him, still his love makes excuses for us.

The cross on which Christ hung is the most powerful image in the history of the world. The simplicity of two pieces of wood belying the complexity of its meaning for us. To gaze on it is to see the pain, the burdens, the rejection, the injustice which Our Lord bore for love of us; it's to see the ultimate sacrifice; it's to see the Way, the Truth—and the hope of glorious, eternal life.

But to earn a share in Christ's glory we must also endure a share of His suffering. We who are the cause of it.

All **Lord, teach us to be brave; to accept without complaint the pains and hardships which may come our way. Not to question why, but to say always: Let your will, not mine, be done. To accept your will is to receive your grace.**

Twelfth Station—Jesus Dies on the Cross

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader It is all over. There must be some relief as the agony stops, the taunts die away; the body of Our Lord feels, sees, hears no more as His life drains away with His blood. The Son of God has accomplished His Father's will.

Fifth Station—The Cross is laid upon Simon of Cyrene

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country...
"Simon, are you asleep? Had you not the strength to keep awake one hour?"

The two Simons: one a stranger who probably knew nothing of Jesus; the other, one of Our Lord's closest and most ardent friends. The stranger shouldered some of the weight of Christ's cross; the friend didn't recognise the burden that needed to be shared.

All **Lord, it isn't always easy to see where help is needed. Teach me that to concentrate on my own problems is to close my eyes to the often greater burdens of family, friends—and strangers. May I learn to be less self-absorbed; let me see how I may lighten the load of others—and thereby shoulder a tiny part of the weight of your cross.**

Sixth Station—Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader The soldiers twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on Jesus' head, and dressed him in a purple robe. They came up to him and said, "Hail, king of the Jews!" and they slapped him in the face...Jesus then came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said: "Behold the man."

What moved Veronica to come forward from the surging masses and risk rough treatment from the brutal soldiers trying to control the frenzied crowd?: Was it pure compassion at the sight of the bleeding, bruised face of Jesus? Or did she see something of the Chosen One in this scourged and bloodied figure? Did she feel the desperate need to make contact with the man whose touch had healed so many?

All **Lord, teach me that even when I feel afraid and helpless to ease the burdens of others, the smallest gesture can mean a lot. Sometimes just a smile or a kind word or a touch of the hand can make a difference. May I treat kindly everyone I meet—not just the attractive and appealing people who are easy to be near.**

All Lord, there will be times when I will have to stand up against the majority and speak out against the popular principles of society. It might not be easy to stand out from the crowd, it may make no difference to anyone, but may I never deny what I have learned to be true from trying to follow your teaching, and your Way of the Cross.

Seventh Station—Jesus falls for the Second Time

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him..."This son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found."

Christ the man, exhausted and aching in every limb and sinew, falls a second time, but again gets up and struggles on.

To fall is human; to get up again we need divine help.

God will always welcome back the sinner who, having fallen, overcomes his pride, recognises his total dependence on his Creator and reaches out for the help and strength of forgiveness.

All Lord, take my hand in yours, help me up. I know that if I manage even one small faltering step towards you, in your great love you will come out to meet me.

Eighth Station— Jesus meets the Women of Jerusalem

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children."

How hard it must have been to look on the flogged and bleeding figure of Jesus as He struggled under the weight of his cross, and not weep. Yet our Lord was not moved by self-pity, but pity for the suffering destined for His people; pity for the suffering a person would inflict on another.

All Lord, teach us to turn our tears of self-pity into tears of shame for the agony we have caused you; lead us to make positive changes in ourselves to remove those things which hurt you, so that our tears may be turned to joy as we feel your presence in our souls and in our lives.

Ninth Station—Jesus falls for the Third Time

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader Then Peter, approaching asked Jesus, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

At the third fall surely it is nearly all over. Surely Our Lord cannot drag himself up again. And yet he does. Do we? As we repeatedly fall, aren't we ready to give up? Utterly defeated, dejected and despairing of ourselves and our right to any forgiveness at all. Yet Jesus taught us that there is no end to the Father's mercy as long as we keep on trying, keep on turning to Him for help.

When Christ created His Church, He left us what we need to be saved: "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven."

All Lord, teach us to respect and rejoice in the sacraments you left your Church—the continuous opportunities of forgiveness and spiritual nourishment. May we never become complacent or cavalier in our attitude to the means of our salvation, but gain an ever greater understanding of your boundless mercy.

Tenth Station—Jesus is stripped of his Garments

Leader We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:
All **because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader The soldiers took Jesus' clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamless, so they said to one another, "instead of tearing it, let's throw dice to decide who is to have it."

The final indignity—to stand naked before a jeering rabble. Stared at by eyes that were too blind to see the Truth.