

# *Praying the Stations of the Cross with Pope Francis*

## **An Invitation from Pope Francis**

The stations of the cross invite us to enter more deeply into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. When we look to the cross we see God's desire: violence is not answered with violence, death is not answered with the language of death. As we reflect on the various events of the stations, we might well ask: Who am I? Who am I, before my Lord? before the suffering Jesus? Where is my heart? Which of these persons am I like? Let these questions remain with us throughout this Lent and Holy Week. Let us now walk together along the Way of the Cross with Jesus through his suffering, knowing that his death is not the end but through God's power he will be raised to new life.

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### **1. Pilate Condemns Jesus to Death**

Jesus does not enter Jerusalem to receive the honors reserved for earthly kings and powerful rulers but to be scourged, insulted and abused and to receive a crown of thorns, a staff and a purple robe. He enters to climb Calvary, carrying his burden of wood. He is abandoned and betrayed even by his own disciple and sold for next to nothing. He is judged by sinners, handed over by those in authority. In his obedience to the Father's will, we recognize our rebellion and disobedience. In contemplating him—sold, betrayed and crucified by his own people and loved ones—we regret our daily betrayals and our habitual infidelities.

*How am I like Pilate who in a difficult situation washed his hands and dodged his responsibility, allowing people to be condemned—or condemning them myself?*

### **2. Jesus Takes Up His Cross**

Jesus, in your face—struck, spat on and disfigured—we see all the brutality of our sins. In the cruelty of your passion, we see the cruelty of our hearts and of our actions. In your experience of being abandoned, we see all those who have been abandoned by their relatives and by society, left without care and solidarity. Your cross bears the suffering and the sin of humanity, including our own. Yet you accept all this with open arms, bearing on your shoulders our crosses and saying to us: “Have courage! You do not carry your cross alone! I carry it with you. I have overcome death and I have come to give you hope, to give you life.”

*How am I like that crowd which was not sure whether they were at a religious meeting, a trial or a circus, and then chose Barabbas?*

### **3. Jesus Falls the First Time**

God placed on Jesus' cross all the weight of our sins, all the injustices, all the bitterness of his betrayal, all the vanity of tyrants, all the arrogance of false friends. It was a heavy cross because it carried all the ugliness of evil. Yet the weight of his cross frees us of all our burdens. He continues to love even to the cross and teaches us to serve and to love. Do not be ashamed of his cross but embrace it, because you have understood that it is in giving ourselves, in emerging from ourselves that we have true joy and that, with his love, God conquered evil.

*How am I like the soldiers who strike the Lord, spit on him and insult him?*

### **4. Jesus Meets His Mother**

Let us fix our gaze of faith and of love on Jesus' mother, who gave him her love and his human flesh. Now, silent and attentive, she tries to understand what God asks of her. She shares in the pain of her son and accepts with him the Father's will, in that obedience that bears fruit and grants the true victory over evil and death. Like Mary, may we be touched by his love, that we may touch him in faith. Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him and to believe in his love, especially at times of trial, beneath the shadow of the cross, when our faith is called to mature.

*How am I like the mother of Jesus who suffers in silence?*

### **5. Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross**

The king whom we follow and who accompanies us is a king who loves even to the cross and who teaches us to serve and to love. And you are not ashamed of his cross and embrace it, because you have understood that it is in giving ourselves, in emerging from ourselves that we have true joy and that, with his love, God conquered evil. You carry the pilgrim cross through all the world to tell everyone that on the cross Jesus knocked down the wall of enmity that divides people and nations and brought reconciliation and peace.

*How am I like Simon, who was returning from work, weary, yet was good enough to help the Lord carry his cross?*

## **6. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus**

Jesus leaves his image, impressed upon her veil, which speaks to our heart and moves us to climb the hill of Calvary, to look upon the wood of the cross and to immerse ourselves in the eloquent silence of love. Let us allow ourselves to be reached by his look, which is directed not to our eyes but to our heart. His disfigured face resembles all those faces of men and women marred by a life which does not respect their dignity. No one can approach and touch the cross of Jesus without leaving something of himself or herself there, and without bringing something of the cross of Jesus into his or her own life.

*How am I like Veronica who reaches out to others to lessen their suffering?*

## **7. Jesus Falls the Second Time**

Jesus never ceased being meek, good, full of love, close to the little ones, close to the poor. However, he had the strength to take all our sins upon himself, all of them. Many times, when we examine our conscience, we find some sins there that are truly bad! But he carries them. He came for this: to forgive, to make peace in the world, but first in the heart. Perhaps each one of us feels troubled in our heart, perhaps experiences darkness or feels a little sad over a fault. He has come to take away all of this. He gives us peace, he forgives everything.

*How can I rise from my faults and sins and help others to carry their burdens?*

## **8. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem**

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the culmination of the way he lived his entire life. Moved by his example, we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep. Arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world. But we do so not from a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings us joy and gives meaning to our lives.

*How am I like those fearless women, and like the mother of Jesus, who were not afraid to accompany Jesus all the way to the end, with love and tenderness?*

## **9. Jesus Falls the Third Time**

Jesus, with his cross, walks with us and takes upon himself our fears, our problems and our sufferings, even those which are deepest and most painful. With the cross, Jesus unites himself to the silence of the victims of violence, those who can no longer cry out, especially the innocent and the defenseless. With the cross, he is united to families in trouble and those who mourn the tragic loss of their children. With him, evil, suffering and death do not have the last word, because he gives us hope and life. He has transformed the cross from being an instrument of hate, defeat and death to being a sign of love, victory, triumph and life.

*Do I remember Jesus only when something goes wrong and I am in need, or is mine a constant relation, a deep friendship, even when it means following him on the way of the cross?*

## **10. Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments**

Jesus, at the moment of his ultimate self-sacrifice on the cross, sought to keep nothing for himself. In his body—stripped bare, pierced and lacerated—we see the bodies of our brothers and sisters left by the wayside, disfigured by our negligence and indifference. Jesus attains complete humiliation through “death on the cross.” He calls us to leave behind our fleeting illusions and to turn to what is essential, to renounce our insatiable cravings, to abandon our endless yearning for things we will never have. We do well to leave such things behind, in order to discover true peace, joy and the luminous meaning of life.

*How am I like the soldiers who find entertainment in humiliating Jesus?*

## **11. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross**

Jesus bodily suffering includes being crowned with thorns and clothed in purple, mocked and mercilessly nailed to the cross. Crucifixion was the worst form of death, that reserved for slaves and criminals. Jesus was considered a prophet but he died like a criminal. Yet his tortured body expresses a sovereign majesty. It is as if it let a restrained but powerful energy within it shine through, as if to say: “Have faith, do not lose hope; the power of the love of God, the power of the Risen One overcomes all things.” We thus find ourselves before the mystery of God’s love for us, which gives us hope and courage.

*How am I like those who despaired and fled when they saw Jesus suffering and did not understand the true meaning of his death?*

## **12. Jesus Dies on the Cross**

Jesus appears on the cross as a defeated man: he suffers, is betrayed, reviled and finally dies. On the cross, he feels the whole weight of evil, and with the force of God's love he conquers it and finally defeats it with his resurrection. Indeed, he allows evil to be unleashed on him and takes it upon himself in order to conquer it. At the foot of the cross, Mary, together with the disciple of love, witnessed the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus. This supreme expression of mercy towards those who crucified him show us the point to which the mercy of God can reach. His mercy knows no bounds and extends to everyone, without exception.

*How am I like those who walked by the cross and mocked Jesus?*

## **13. Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross**

Death affects us all, and it questions us in a profound way, especially when it touches us closely, or when it takes the defenseless in such a way that it seems "scandalous." If it is understood as the end of everything, death frightens us, terrifies us, becomes a threat that shatters every dream, every promise. It severs every relationship and interrupts every journey. If my life has been a journey with the Lord, a journey of trust in his immense mercy, I will be prepared to accept the final moment of my earthly life as the definitive, confident abandonment into his welcoming hands.

*How am I like Joseph, the hidden disciple, who lovingly carries the body of Jesus to give it a proper burial?*

## **14. Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb**

Jesus laid in the tomb shares with all of humanity in the tragedy of death. Death affects us all, and it questions us in a profound way, especially when it touches us closely. It is a silence which speaks and expresses love as solidarity with those who have always been neglected, whom the Son of God reaches, filling the emptiness that only the infinite mercy of God the Father can fill. The apparent victory of evil vanishes before the empty tomb and before the certainty of the resurrection because nothing can defeat, obscure or weaken the love of God.

*How am I like the two grieving Marys who remained at the tomb, weeping and praying?*