



Reflections on the Stations of the Cross

Alliance for Catholic Education



The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

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

Mark 15:12-14: [Pilate brought Jesus outside and said to the people], “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” “Crucify him!” they shouted. “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

Reflection: Jesus stands before Pilate, accused of crimes he hasn’t committed, and He Who is Without Sin mutely accepts the blame for the sin of all. Trust allows for this, Jesus’ full trust in God’s plan—the promise of resurrection and salvation. This was the light that led him through the darkness.

Prayer: Jesus, help us to see your acceptance of blame not as weakness or resignation, but as the ultimate example of self-sacrificing trust in God. Give us that same trust as teachers so that, when we see wrongs we did not perpetuate or messes we did not make, we step in to offer your healing, comfort, and hope.



The Second Station: Jesus is made to carry the cross

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

John 19:16-17: The soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

Reflection: Scholars generally agree that Jesus carried the horizontal beam of the cross, which weighed about 125 pounds. We can only imagine the pain he endured as he walked, the beam chafing his flesh-torn back. Steadfast acceptance of God’s will allowed him to put on foot in front of the other.

Prayer: Jesus, we avoid adversity. We fear humiliation and run from suffering. But you chose to take up the cross, a symbol of humiliation and suffering, and did so with steadfast acceptance. Teach us, we pray, to carry our burdens with the same grace, remembering that you will never leave or forsake us.



The Third Station: Jesus falls the first time

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Philippians 2:8: And being found in human form, Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Reflection: At the time of Jesus' death, crucifixion was the punishment reserved for the lowest of society's low, the prevailing method employed to publicly dishonor a person.

Jesus' brutal flogging was part of the practice and, as it sent his body into shock from pain and blood loss, the likely cause of his fall. Consider Christ's humility, then: "God Made Flesh" succumbed to the ultimate display of human denigration *and* assumed the physical vulnerabilities of the human body.

Prayer: Jesus, teach us your humility today. Fill us with your Spirit so that, in our schools and classrooms, we become conduits of your self-giving love. Through your example, may our weaknesses make us stronger, more accepting of the weaknesses of others, and increasingly humble.



The Fourth Station: Jesus meets his Blessed Mother

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Luke 2:34-35: Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, Jesus' 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."

Reflection: Face to face, Jesus and the Blessed Mother meet. Jesus is covered in blood, sweat, and spit, bent under the weight of the cross, subjected to angry shouts of hate. And Mary, experiencing every mother's worst nightmare that her child will suffer harm, feels the sword pierce her soul. Moving with fiercely protective love, she offers her son the little she can: the comfort of her presence.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for the gift of Mary, who models perfect love for us. In our love for you, make us fiercely protective of you. And help us remember that when we are present to those who are hungry, tired, and sad, those who are difficult, stubborn, and forgetful, we are loving you.



The Fifth Station: Simon helps Jesus carry his cross

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Luke 23:26: As they led him 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.

Reflection: Simon from Cyrene is pressed into service “on his way in from the country”; it’s an unexpected detour from his plan for the day. Scripture doesn’t tell us why he is appointed for the task or how he reacts. The point, it seems, is simply what he does. He serves a man in the hour of his greatest need. Here we remember that, as with Simon, our acts of service—expected or not, appointed or not, eagerly shared or not—carry great weight in the kingdom of God.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for this tiny glimpse of Simon from Cyrene, who shows us the cosmic impact of service. Please give us the eyes to see when, where, and who we can serve, and the strength to step into that call even when it causes a detour. Show us, too, how to let others help us. By your Spirit, help us to share our service generously and accept it from others graciously.



The Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

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Matthew 10:40,42: He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Reflection: As Jesus stumbles down the road to Golgotha, Veronica takes her veil to gently wipe the sweat and blood from his face. In return, Jesus leaves the imprint of his image on the cloth. “He who receives me receives the one who sent me.” Jesus meets her kindness with kindness, blessing her with the imprinted veil, a lasting reminder of God With Us.

Prayer: Jesus, through the example of Veronica, open our eyes to the suffering many of our students endure. By your Spirit, help us comfort them in your name, reminding us that in every such action, you are with us.



The Seventh Station: Jesus falls the second time

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

Psalm 22:6-7: But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

Reflection: Earlier in the Gospels, we see images of Jesus as the center of attention: some ascended trees to see him; others reached out simply to touch his garments; still others dismantled a roof to lower their sick friend down to Jesus. Jesus had once been surrounded with love and acclaim; now he is rejected and scorned.

Prayer: Jesus, give us the grace to identify with those who are rejected. Inspire in us compassion for the student who is cast aside and the colleague who is marginalized. May our love of you become a force that heals and unifies.



The Eighth Station: Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem

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Luke 23:27-28 [As Jesus walked toward Golgotha], a large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him; and he turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me...for behold, the days are coming...”

Reflection: A crush of people surrounds Jesus as he drags his cross through the streets—jeering, cheering, yelling people, and grief-stricken, too. Encountering the women, he turns to them and shares a hope-filled message: this is not the end of the story. Those who judge Christ worthy of death will, in the end, meet the judgment of God. There is hope.

Prayer: Jesus, God of both justice and mercy, thank you for the hope you embodied and shared with your heartbroken followers, even on the way to the cross. Keep us mindful—and ready communicators—of your promises.



The Ninth Station: Jesus falls the third time

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Psalm 22:14: I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.

Reflection: As he nears his place of execution, a third and final fall begs the question: Why would Jesus get up? Why would he summon his last ounce of energy to deliver himself to the pain of the cross? Falling three times; getting up three times. Dying on the cross; rising from the grave. Christ shows us that he can transform weakness, failings, and death into the glory of self-gift.

Prayer: Jesus, give us eyes of faith. Allow us to see light where there appears only darkness, and life where we can only sense death. When our energy flags, inspire in us the confidence to get up, and continue our journey toward home.



The Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

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Mark 15:19 : Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. They stripped off his clothes and began to mock him, saying: "All hail, King of the Jews."

Reflection: Though artists through the centuries have depicted it otherwise, crucified people in Jesus' time were stripped of all of their clothes. It was one more step in the process of ultimate humiliation. Imagine the embarrassment of being so exposed. When we or our students are subjected to humiliation, we can be confident of this: Jesus knows how we feel.

Prayer: Jesus our Wounded Healer, thank you for so fully embracing the human experience. May we ever be grateful for all you endured on our behalf. And may we pay it forward, dedicating our energy no matter the cost to protecting the dignity of our students.



The Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

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

John 17:19: Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others--one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

Reflection: Keeping in mind that the word excruciating literally means “out of the cross,” we reflect on Jesus and the excruciating pain he suffered as soldiers pounded thick nails through his hands and feet. As he completely surrendered any natural human desire to protect himself, Christ bore this pain – *our* pain – as a supreme sign of his overwhelming love for God’s people.

Prayer: Jesus, on the cross you embraced the pain of generations of sinful men and women. As teachers who often see pain and suffering behind the eyes of our students, we pray that you will guide us by your example of profound empathy. Teach us to share the pain of our students, and to be for them signs of your love in their lives.



The Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross

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John 19:28-29: Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted

it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Reflection: Not long before his death, Jesus was transfigured before his disciples, confirming his identity as God’s Son. But now he is horrifyingly dead, the victim of the most gruesome assassination; surely his disciples were confused. Surely some doubted who Jesus really was. No wonder they fled the scene. Jesus’ closest friends affirm for us that doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is part of it.

Prayer: Jesus, we cannot reason our way into understanding that which is by definition unreasonable—death, cruelty, injustice happen in our schools and across the world. Guard us from confusion, doubt and fear, we pray, and give us the faith we need to accept your mystery.



The Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

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

John 19:33-34: When the soldiers came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out.

Reflection: Jesus is dead. His body hangs on the cross, limp and lifeless, until at last it is taken down and placed in the lap of his mother. Mary can do absolutely nothing to change the events of this day, but in her helplessness, she does not withdraw in defeat. She clings to her son. By her example, may we learn to do the same.

Prayer: Jesus, as teachers we sometimes face challenges that leave us at a loss. We worry that it's beyond our power to make a difference for our students. Show us the example of your Blessed Mother, and teach us that when we can think of nothing else to do, we can hold fast to you, and you will always lead us forward.



The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is placed in the tomb

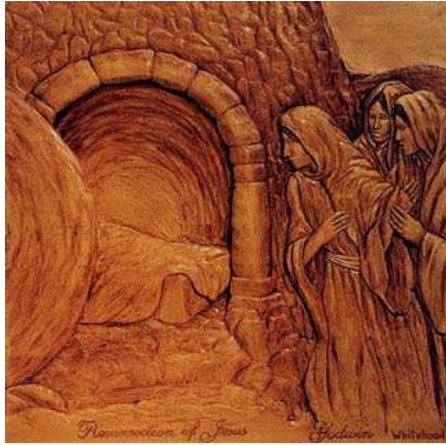
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John 19:38-41 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish

burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Reflection: Death without burial was the intended end for the crucified criminal, clinching his worthlessness as a human being. Joseph of Arimathea, then, shows courage in approaching Pilate for permission to bury Jesus. He shows tenderness in preparing Jesus' body with aloe, myrrh, and linens. And he shows respect in laying Jesus to rest quickly, as was the Jewish custom. This man about whom we know so little teaches us so much about being devoted to Jesus.

Prayer: Jesus, by your Spirit may we, like Joseph, show our devotion to you through courage, respect and tenderness. And may we, like Joseph, teach our students to do the same. Kindle in our hearts fervent devotion to you.



The Fifteenth Station: The Resurrection

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1 Corinthians 15:4: Christ was raised on the third day.

Reflection: All of our crosses, our pain, our sin, are healed, forgiven and transformed. Christ is risen! Although his risen body bears the marks of his suffering, his pain is gone. Mourning turns into dancing, grief turns into joy, despair turns to hope and fear turns to love. The eternal dance of new life begins anew.

Prayer: Jesus, teach us to celebrate your resurrection in all that we do. Thank you for bearing the weight of the world on your body and being, and for teaching us by example that in all things we will overcome – even in death. Help us take that message to heart and proclaim it to our colleagues, our students and our families, not just at Easter, but the whole year through.



Reflections written by ACE Advocates for Catholic Schools. Edited and compiled by Ann Berends. Photos of Stations 1-14 from University of Notre Dame's outdoor Stations (Ann Berends). Station 15 photo: Bob Whitehead wood carving (www.whiteheadcarvings.com)