

INTRODUCTION

Dangers and abuses are pandemic in every age, but it is healthy to be aware of the particular challenges of our current time. This way we will know what kind of lifeline to look for. And Christianity is unique in offering hope and a positive response to every evil there is, including sin and death.

The cross is our answer to fear. And to every loss. By turning curses into crosses we enter into the Christian victory over sin, death, and all their causes and consequences.

Christians are not different in what we suffer, only in the way we suffer. We have a different focus. Christians see everything as an opportunity to grow in union with God through faith, hope, and love, which we recognize as the goal and fulfillment of life itself. For us, crucifixion is inseparable from resurrection, temporary pain from eternal ecstasy. That is the specific and unique key to the way Christians respond to suffering.

As a practical suggestion, when making the Stations of the Cross, we should “see how the divinity hides itself” (Saint Ignatius). God does not treat his sons and daughters on earth like privileged children. Instead, God keeps us in solidarity with the human race, as Jesus chose to be. That is the key to the incarnation of Jesus and to its continuance in us.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself... taking the form of a slave....And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ■ PHILIPPIANS 2:5–8

As we contemplate the fourteen moments of Christ’s Way of the Cross, we will see how the principles above offer hope and a positive response to the particular challenges of our time.

THE FIRST STATION

Jesus Is Condemned to Death

RESPONSE to FALSEHOOD

LEADER The First Station: Jesus is Condemned to death. *[pause]*

When he was judged, Jesus confronted the reality of the falsehood and deceit that prevail in our world. He was condemned by people who chose to believe lies over obvious truth.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER Isn't this a characteristic of our times? Political commentaries reek of lies, spin, and overt hatred. Advertisements manipulate rather than inform. News channels show slant, not sincerity. People are excluded by gossip, fired, even condemned to death unjustly. This is a blight in our time.

How did Jesus respond to falsehood? Specifically, to the lies that sent him to death?

[pause]

Jesus spoke truth to the Sanhedrin and Pilate. But he didn't argue where it was useless. He accepted falsehood as a fact but with confidence the truth would prevail. He said, "For

this I came into the world,” not to prevent people from lying, but “to testify to the truth” (John 18:37). That is the Christian response to falsehood.

It is enough. We can live in peace with that.

READER “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops” (Matthew 10:25–27).

[pause for silent prayer]

ALL Lord, when lies and chosen ignorance distress me, let your response to unjust condemnation remind me to simply bear witness to the truth. Amen.

THE SECOND STATION

Jesus Takes Up His Cross

RESPONSE *to the* CONSEQUENCES *of* SIN *in* OUR TIME

LEADER The Second Station: Jesus Takes Up his Cross. *[pause]*

Christians believe we have a call from God to “take up our cross” (see Matthew 16:24). This means bearing with redemptive love those consequences of the sins of our time that happen to fall on our shoulders.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER Are we not overwhelmed almost daily by the suffering caused in our world by sin? Violence, poverty, private crime, and public corruption—we face these every day. Is our only reaction anger and frustration? Or can we accept what we cannot change, as Jesus accepted the cross?

[pause]

For Christians, everything is beneficial. We just need to turn curses into crosses by adding in meaning through faith, prom-

ise through hope, and value through love. We know, as Jesus did, that the cross we are carrying can give life—to us and to the world.

READER Jesus said, “You have pain now; but... your hearts will rejoice.... In me you can have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”... Father... as you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world... so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 16:22–33, 17:18, 22).

[pause for silent prayer]

ALL Lord, when I am faced with pain and distress, open my heart to its meaning through faith, its promise through hope, and its value through love. Amen.

THE THIRD STATION

Jesus Falls the First Time

RESPONSE *to* DISILLUSIONMENT

LEADER The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time. *[pause]*

There is nothing lower than corruption in high places.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER Jesus falls. And he was God. How do we feel when those we looked up to and followed as the best and brightest, fall into temptation and sin?

[pause]

Jesus couldn't sin, but he could fail. When he fell under the cross, his human weakness hid his divinity. We have to remember that divine humans can still be weak, and sinful humans can still be divine. No one is purely good or purely bad. So we keep following leaders who limp, as long as they are leading in the right direction.

READER “Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers... I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me” (Luke 22:31–32, 34).

[pause for silent prayer]

ALL Lord, let me show equal compassion for saints and sinners.
Amen.

THE FOURTH STATION

Jesus Meets His Blessed Mother

RESPONSE *to* SORROWING PARENTS

LEADER The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets his Blessed Mother. *[pause]*
Who can imagine how parents suffer with their children?
We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER When Jesus saw his mother, there was no reproach in her eyes. She understood why he had to suffer. But through her he also saw the eyes of other mothers asking his Father, “Why?” “Why did my child die, end up in jail, become addicted to drugs, leave the Church, suffer a heartbreaking divorce? Why? Where were you, God?”
What would your answer be?

[pause]

To overwhelming grief there is no answer but silence and shared tears. But we need to know God shares them. God takes responsibility for making people free, knowing that inevitably some would misuse freedom to bring suffering on

themselves and others. And when they do, we see how God feels about it in the passion of his Son. Looking into his eyes, Mary saw the pain Jesus felt for all parents' pain. And we see the pain God feels for ours.

READER Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed, so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:34–35).

[pause for silent prayer]

ALL Lord, it is only by your gifts of faith, hope, and love that Mary could accept your pain and hers. I too have these gifts. Help me to use them to find solace for myself and others. Amen.