

VIA CRUCIS

The Way of the Cross

Father Peter John Cameron, O.P.

The Way of the Cross is not only a great testimony to an inner depth and maturity, but it is in fact a school for interiority and consolation. It is also a school for the examination of conscience, for conversion, for inner transformation and compassion—not as sentimentality, as a mere feeling, but as a disturbing experience that knocks on the door of my heart, that obliges me to know myself and to become a better person.

Pope Benedict XVI

▪ FIRST STATION ▪

Jesus Is Condemned to Death

The Incarnate One stands alone before the petty power of the world to hear its judgment: “We condemn you.” The perfection of Jesus is the resplendence of the love he receives and returns to his Father. But the power of the world cannot bear to witness the silent perfection of its “prisoner” Jesus. For to recognize the source of Jesus’ perfection threatens the easy excuses we make for our rationalizations, our compromises, our lies. To be perfect as Jesus is perfect means murdering our murderous self-reliance and embracing the offer of the Father with Jesus’ own love. But such a cataclysmic turning away from self terrifies us. And so murderous self-reliance relies on murder. Terror turns to tyranny. Perfection will be condemned. It must be returned to the Father. The cross remains the way to the Father who perfects us. The only thing deserving of condemnation is any self-centered reluctance that keeps us from that path.

▪ SECOND STATION ▪

Jesus Bears His Cross

The masses thrill to see Jesus take up his cross because they know how terrified they are of their own. Yet, unlike the crowds, Jesus regards his cross as a gift, a privilege. The cross is an instrument of grace that gives Jesus the ability to show the depth of his love for his Father. Once Jesus laid hands on a blind man and asked him, “*Can you see anything?*” He replied, “*I can see people, but they look like trees walking.*” Now, because of the blindness of sin, we see a man strapped with a cross who looks like a tree walking to his death. As the soldiers lay the cross on Jesus’ shoulders, Jesus once again lays his hands on our blindness and begs us, “Even if you cannot see the meaning of what God offers you

moment by moment, take it up; bear it, so that in that struggle God can show you just how much he loves you.”



▪THIRD STATION▪

Jesus Falls the First Time

The seed, which is the Word of God, must first fall to the ground if it is to bear fruit. However, God’s Providence is at work in all of this. Not a single sparrow falls to the ground without the Father’s knowledge. And just as any decent human being would immediately pull from a cistern a son or an ox that had fallen in on the Sabbath, so too does the Father uplift his Son when he falls into the pit of human malice. And so does he strengthen us when we fall.

The fall of Jesus is not for naught if he finds us receptive of the divine grace it offers. *“But as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance.”* We persevere with the Word of God we embrace on the road to Calvary.

▪FOURTH STATION▪

Jesus Meets His Mother

How vital is this meeting on the road between Mother and Son. For it recalls that first meeting between Mary and Jesus...the meeting in Mary’s womb. The Holy Spirit asked for Mary’s consent, her obedience before acting. And Mary generously gave it, because she knew that this same Spirit who asked the impossible would also make possible in her life what she desired—but could never accomplish on her own—out of her love for God.

And now, at this silent annunciation, the same Spirit of God asks Mary’s Son to carry a cross...to carry her gift of human life to the top of a hill and to lay it down out of love for God and the brothers and sisters whom God has given him in Mary. The Blessed Mother stands before her Son to proclaim by her silent witness how good is the Father’s will...how powerful is his love to accomplish whatever he asks of his children...how the impossible gives birth to the possible.

▪FIFTH STATION▪

Jesus Is Helped by Simon

Jesus wants to invite Simon and us to share in the carrying of his cross in order to reveal to us the deepest meaning of human suffering. Through suffering we go beyond ourselves and come in contact with our transcendence. In this way, suffering remains an invitation to manifest our moral greatness. For suffering conceals a special power that draws a person interiorly close to Jesus Christ. Simon and we are offered that grace as we share in the suffering of Jesus. Therefore, to help Jesus carry his cross is a privilege that fulfills the directive of the Beatitudes. In the sincere gift of self that this carrying requires we come to know ourselves in all our dignity and to realize our God-given potential...our holiness.

The love of Jesus continues to draw good out of us by calling us to go the extra mile with him. With Simon, we take up Christ's cross so that Christ will take us up into his glory.

▪SIXTH STATION▪

Jesus and Veronica

Those who touch Jesus' face feel the Father's invitation to intimate, unending communion with him. That is what is communicated between Veronica and Jesus on the road that leads to the sacrifice of the face of Jesus at the Place of the Skull. In that tender exchange on the road, Veronica reaches out to all human suffering...she reaches out to the God of heaven imaged in the face of his Son. And Jesus responds to her merciful offer, which is at once a heartfelt appeal, by leaving the impression of his Holy Face on Veronica's cloth. That divine icon is a promise of unfailing comfort in trial, of friendship with God ever new in its intimacy and ardor, of the restoration and perfection of the divine image within us through the death of Jesus Christ.

Because of her encounter with Jesus Christ on the way of the cross, Veronica's cloth becomes an instrument of evangelization that unceasingly points to the true face of God by drawing us into the Paschal Mystery. The cloth of Veronica swaddles us in God's mercy.



■ SEVENTH STATION ■

Jesus Falls a Second Time

So many times in the Gospel we hear about those who, while in the grip of desperation, fall in supplication before Jesus. Their falling stands as an act of hope. The posture of falling can rekindle our hope and renew our trust. The burdens of viciousness conspire to crush us. When we have fallen beneath their weight, we have only to look up to see the mercy of Jesus. This second fall of Jesus is so much like the moment of his baptism when Jesus steps into the Jordan River to identify himself with all human sinfulness and need. As Jesus comes up out of the water, the Spirit falls upon him like a dove, and a voice falls from the heavens declaring: *"You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests."* Even as Jesus "rests" on the road under the weight of the cross, the Father's favor continues to rest upon him. And we are drawn into that favor, that intimate love, by our humble and suppliant hope in Jesus.



■ EIGHTH STATION ■

Jesus Speaks to the Women

There is a right time and a right reason for weeping. But Jesus prohibits weeping if it in any way impedes the understanding and operation of faith. The Lord has come to overturn the world's false standards and to perfect God's people through the Good News. In the life of faith, there is an appropriate time for weeping, namely, when we need to repent from our sins. After he denied Jesus three times, *Peter went out and wept bitterly*. Peter's tears open his eyes and his heart and his soul to the workings of faith and the wonder of God's will. *Blessed are you weeping; you shall laugh*.

Jesus weeps at the death of his friend Lazarus and over Jerusalem. The tears of Jesus sensitize our hearts and souls to the mystery of divine providence and our need for repentance. Jesus commands us not to weep tears that betray a lack of hope. For the Son of God will return with New Life to the women who will be the first messengers of Christ's Resurrection...and to us.

▪NINTH STATION▪

Jesus Falls a Third Time

Very often, it is only through the experience of extreme trials that we come to recognize in us God-given strength that we never thought we had. For that strength to become our own, we must become detached from all those things that keep us too much fixed on ourselves. The rich young man was so attached to his vast property that he could not accept the way that Jesus invited him to be a disciple: in poverty. We are told that *his face fell* and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Will we lower ourselves to be one with Jesus in his suffering? If we do so, then we can be certain that Jesus will give us the strength we need to rise above those unbearable moments of exhaustion and defeat in our own lives. And then, like the solitary leper of the ten who were healed, we will fall at the feet of Jesus and thank him.

▪TENTH STATION▪

Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

As naked as Jesus is to all the world as he stands stripped on Calvary, we in our sinfulness are even more naked before him: *No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.*

Jesus allows himself to be stripped so that in his naked death he might restore to us the innocence lost by Adam and Eve. *The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.* Only Jesus Christ in his nakedness can free us from the shame of our own.

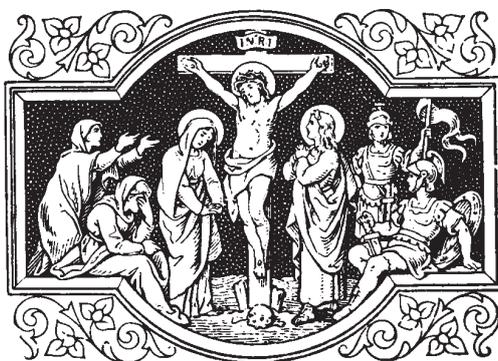
The robbers who preyed on the man going from Jerusalem to Jericho *stripped him, beat him, and then went off leaving him half-dead.* Christ allows himself to be stripped so that we, like the Good Samaritan, will regard him in his plight and respond with compassion...a compassion that merits us a sharing in the glory of the Resurrection which strips us of our nakedness as Christ *clothes us with power from on high.*

▪ELEVENTH STATION▪

Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

In the piercing of the body of Jesus, *he has opened up for us a new and living path through the veil (the "veil" meaning his flesh).* Jesus is nailed and pierced so that we might enter upon the path opened by his wounds. Christ *heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.* And he does so by allowing his own heart to be broken. Just as the Good Samaritan poured oil and wine over

the beaten man's wounds, and lifted him up onto his own animal, so does Christ Jesus anoint our wounds with the wine of his blood that pours from his pierced body. So, too, does Christ lift us up to be one with his pierced body on the cross. *He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*



■ TWELFTH STATION ■

Jesus Dies on the Cross

This gruesome death is for us. So, then, how can we console Jesus on the cross? We console Jesus on the cross by professing our love for him, and by declaring how much we need this crucifying work of his love to save us from ourselves. When we confront the crucifixion of Jesus Christ with such a heartfelt confession, then the Son of God knows that his death was not for nothing. Our profession of love at the cross proclaims that Jesus did not die in vain.

Jesus dies, and by his dying death itself is transformed. The obedience of Jesus transforms the curse of death into a blessing. Yet, with the death of Jesus, God doesn't take away death. Rather, the Father uses the death of his Son as the pattern by which he calls all his children to himself. For he knows that it is only the prospect of death in our life that purifies our priorities and that rescues us from all the compromise and false gods which clutter our lives. The words of Saint Francis of Assisi remain very poignant: "It is you who have crucified Jesus and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins." Only death liberates us from such devilish delight.

Jesus dies so that we can live for God until our death.

■ THIRTEENTH STATION ■

Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

After the horror of the crucifixion, the body of Christ descends from the cross. As at that moment on Mount Tabor, once again his body is transfigured. But now it is not white, but bright with blood—redder than the work of any butcher.

Like the royal official in the Gospel, we stand before the cross as he once stood before the Lord pleading: *“Sir, come down before my child dies.”* Jesus has promised: *“No one who comes will I ever reject, because it is not to do my own will that I have come down from heaven, but to do the will of him who sent me.”* But, unlike the official, our plea is not for another, but for ourselves. And we, like him, can return home putting our trust in the word of Jesus. Jesus’ promise is fulfilled: The adopted sons and daughters of the Father will live... because the Son of God himself has died for us. We will live because the Living Bread has come down from heaven.

■FOURTEENTH STATION■

Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

Before the tomb of Christ we wait in a kind of Eucharistic adoration with the heartfelt desire to enter into his saving death. To do so, we must roll back the stone that closes off our heart. We must remove from the deep recesses of our heart all those things that make our heart a stinking tomb: *Nothing that enters a man from outside can make him impure; that which comes out of him, and only that, constitutes impurity.... Wicked designs come from the deep recesses of the heart: acts of fornication, theft, murder, adulterous conduct, greed, maliciousness, deceit, sensuality, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, an obtuse spirit. All these evils come from within and render a man impure.*

And in our vigilant adoration, the Person of Christ comes to us in the personal hell of our own making to speak now from the other side of the tomb the same words that he once spoke to his deceased friend Lazarus: *“Come forth!”* By these words, Christ leads us forth from the tomb of our sinfulness so that he can enter into our hearts with his New Life.

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