

The number of stations has varied immensely from as few as 5 to 36 but the traditional number was set by Clement XII in 1731. Nine of which are referred to in the Bible and five, based on popular devotion and legend. With the rise of ecumenicalism, the Anglican liturgy has included 15 stations and includes Jesus resurrection from the dead, especially if used at times other than Lent and Passiontide. All these 15 stations are based on biblical readings and are called the Way of the Cross.

The first is "Jesus in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane"

The second: "Jesus is betrayed by Judas"

The third: "Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin"

The fourth: "Peter denies Jesus"

The fifth: "Jesus is judged by Pilate"

The sixth: "Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns"

The seventh: "Jesus carries his cross"

The eighth: "Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross"

The ninth: "Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem"

The tenth: "Jesus is crucified"

The eleventh: "Jesus promises the kingdom to the penitent thief"

The twelfth: "Jesus on the cross with his mother and his friend"

The thirteenth: "Jesus dies on the cross"

The fourteenth: "Jesus is laid in the tomb"

The fifteenth: "Jesus is risen from the dead"

Each of the traditional 14 stations are usually displayed in churches, especially catholic churches, and are a constant and permanent reminder that Jesus faced all the dramas of human life. They each recall a time when Jesus stopped including the three times he fell. The fact that these three are recorded are an encouragement to us when we fall or feel that we can't carry on. We can take comfort from knowing that Jesus understands and is with us every time we fall. Moving from one station to the next, we accompany Jesus on his short journey from the palace of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem to his death on the cross and tomb.



THE 1ST STATION: JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

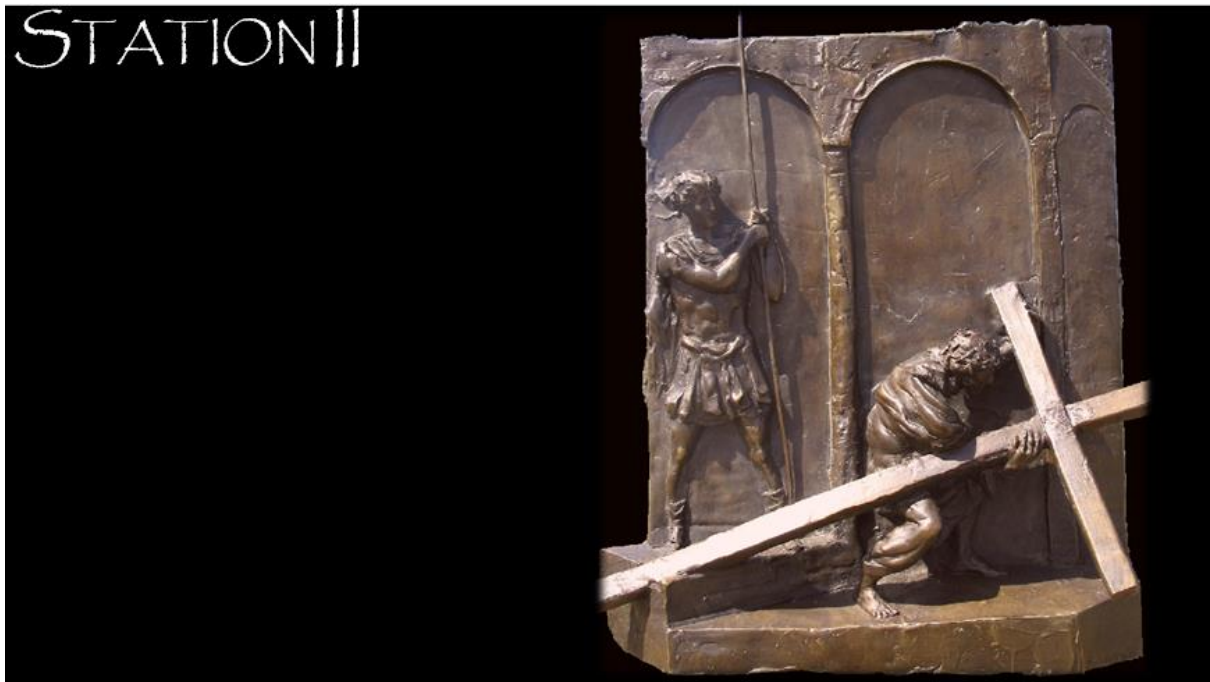
“Now Jesus stood before the governor...Pilate said to him, ‘Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?’ But Jesus gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed...when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood...’”¹

Jesus is not the first person to be wrongly accused and condemned unjustly. His trial was a travesty of justice. Pilate didn't think he was guilty yet he washed his hands of the whole affair as if he was afraid to face the truth or perhaps he was afraid of those who accused Jesus. Determined to keep the peace at all costs, he condemned an innocent man. He lacked the courage of his convictions. Despite this, Pilate was part of God's overall plan of salvation for everyone. We all benefit from God's plan of salvation through Christ because Pilate sentenced Jesus.

Lord, thank you that we are part of your loving plan even when, like Pilate, we are afraid to face the truth or lack the courage of our convictions. When we feel unjustly treated, help us remember that you didn't condemn those who treated you so unjustly. Amen.

¹ Matt. 27:11-24

STATION II



THE 2ND STATION: JESUS TAKES HIS CROSS

“So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.”²

How humiliating it must have been for Jesus to be forced to carry the heavy weight of the cross, the instrument on which he would die. How did he remain calm at the injustice of it all? How did he keep hatred from welling up in his heart? Jesus had told his disciples that they must take up their cross and follow him. This teaching makes life seem harsh and grim. Yet it should be balanced by the promise of Jesus of the abundant life and joy he offers all who follow him.

Lord, help us to remember when we go through a difficult time that our life is a precious gift from you and that you long to give us abundant life. Be with us when we are burdened beyond our strength or worn down by exhaustion and care. Give us the strength to carry on just when we need it. Amen.

² John 19: 16-17

STATION III



THE 3RD STATION: JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

This station serves to remind us that Jesus shared our frailty. Often we are ashamed when we fall or fail in anything. Yet we should look honestly at ourselves and not be ashamed of failing or to blame others as the cause of our failure. We are imperfect, fallible human beings who fumble our way around and keel over from time to time.

Lord, may your great love for us give us strength to rise when we fall and keep us from the tyranny of perfectionism. Help us not to dwell on the misery of the present moment but remember the abundant life and joy you offer. Amen.

STATION IV



THE 4TH STATION: JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER

This station, though not mentioned in the Bible, reminds us that Jesus is every child who dies prematurely and Mary is every parent grieving for their child. Mary was there at the very beginning of Jesus' life. Then she seems to fade into the background yet the bond between mother and child is deep. For a child to die before their parents seems to contradict the natural order of things. The words of the Latin hymn, the *Sabat Mater*, highlight Mary's state: "At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful mother weeping, close to Jesus at the last..."

Lord, when life seems to contradict the natural order of things, help us to remember that you understand and share our pain. Amen.

STATION V



THE 5TH STATION: SIMON HELPS JESUS CARRY HIS CROSS

“As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.”³

This meeting is in stark contrast to the previous tender one between Jesus and his mother in that this meeting is between two strangers. Jesus had told his disciples that each must carry his own cross yet now he finds that he can no longer carry his own. He needs help. Maybe the soldiers are impatient at the slow progress Jesus is making. They want to hurry things up and get their gruesome task over with as soon as possible so they compel a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, to help Jesus. Perhaps Simon was reluctant to help but he had no choice. He got caught up in the drama whether he wanted to or not. This station shows that God, who is always ready to help us, sometimes might need our help.

Lord, may whatever cross we have to bear lead us to a new intimacy and closeness with you. Amen.

³ Matt. 27:32.

STATION VI



THE 6TH STATION: A WOMAN WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

This station, like the fourth station where Jesus meets his mother, is not referred to in the Bible. It comes from a thirteenth century legend about a woman who takes pity on Jesus. As he makes his way to the cross, she wipes his face and the image of his face is left imprinted on the cloth. Her name "Veronica" means "the true image".

According to this story, Jesus found among the crowd of hostile faces one that was not hostile but that gazed on him with pity and so to her he gave an image of his face. We do not know what Jesus looked like but we do know that, in Jesus, God became flesh and blood, like us, and had a human face. When we think of this woman we can admire her lack of fear at being identified with Jesus, not worrying what the crowd of people around her at the time may have thought of her.

Lord, may we, too, not fear to be identified with you. May our lives be imprinted with your true image so that people see your image in us. Amen.

STATION VII



THE 7TH STATION: JESUS FALLS A SECOND TIME

Despite Simon's help, it seems that Jesus is utterly exhausted and drained of all strength, so he falls a second time. This station might serve to remind us that it is wrong to think of those who keep falling as failures, to think less of those who are weak, whom we consider to be a burden. It may help us when we think of this station that Jesus shared our weakness so that we might share his strength; and that paradoxically, our strength is made perfect in weakness.

Lord, the utter lack of strength that threw you to the ground shows the strength of your love for us. Help us to remember that you ultimately triumphed over tragedy and that your greatest act of love was shown in lovelessness and in unlovely surroundings.

Amen.

STATION VIII



THE 8TH STATION: JESUS SPEAKS TO THE WOMEN

“A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children...’”⁴

According to Luke’s Gospel, the only people Jesus speaks to on his way to the Cross are these women. This station shows Jesus’ compassion for others. Despite his own acute suffering and the knowledge of the ghastly death he was about to face, feels deeply for these women and the pain they will suffer when Jerusalem is destroyed.

Lord, don’t let our personal agony get in the way of feeling compassion towards others and identifying with them in their pain. May we remember the Biblical injunction to “weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice”. Help us to see all people, no matter what we may feel about them from your loving perspective. Amen.

⁴ Luke 23:27-28

STATION IX



THE 9TH STATION: JESUS FALLS THE THIRD TIME

Jesus collapses, utterly crushed. When Jesus falls a third time, he seems to be saying that there will be times when we collapse, utterly crushed despite the help of others. It's as if all the sufferings of this life are suddenly compressed into a single moment weighing us down, and making us feel that life is more than we can bear. Lord, you suffered every kind of pain and injustice so that we could know that you identify with us in everything that life throws at us. When I am down, let me hear you say: "Keep going, I know how hard it is to rise?" Amen.

STATION X



THE 10TH STATION: JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

“Then the soldiers took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters...and mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ They spat on him, and...struck him. After mocking him, they stripped him...”⁵

It seems that every indignity Jesus suffered brought fresh humiliation. His love caused him to face the humiliation of dying naked on the Cross and to suffer the humiliation of the violence of those who mocked him. Luke records in his gospel account that Jesus asked God to forgive those who had abused him because they didn’t realise what they were doing.

Lord, look upon us with mercy and pity when we feel humiliated and suffer indignity. When we seem to give everything and receive nothing, help us to remember that you gave everything and received nothing. Amen.

⁵ Matt. 27:27-31

STATION XI



THE 11TH STATION: JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

“When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus”⁶

This station reminds me of the words of Graham Kendrick’s song: “Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered.” Pope Benedict said: “Let us nail ourselves to him, resisting the temptation to stand apart...”⁷ Jesus arms, the arms of God, are stretched out on the cross, open for everyone, as if embracing us with the length, breadth, height and depth of God’s love, which has no boundaries.

Lord, your arms stretched out on the cross remind us of the length, breadth, height and depth of God’s love. It is hard to ignore such love. Teach us to keep focused on this great love when we find it hard to love others. Amen.

⁶ Luke 23:33

⁷ Stations of the Cross by Timothy Radcliffe, page 54

STATION XII



THE 12TH STATION: JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

The Gospel narratives describe Jesus' death differently. Matthew and Mark focus on a man who endures abandonment not just by his disciples but by God as well. Jesus cries out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." In Luke's account, Jesus entrusts himself to God when he says, as he dies, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."⁸ [Luke also records the words of Jesus to one of the criminals crucified with him that today he would be with him in paradise. This criminal had acknowledged his own guilt and Jesus' innocence.] John's account records Jesus' final words: "... 'It is finished.'"⁹ Jesus' mission is accomplished. John had recorded earlier Jesus' words that "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit". Now Jesus' death will bear much fruit.

Lord, thank you that just as death did not put an end to Jesus' relationship with you so our death does not put an end to our relationship with you. Amen.

⁸ Luke 23:46

⁹ John 19:30

STATION XIII



THE 13TH STATION: JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

Jesus is lowered to the ground into the arms of his mother who held him as a baby. Now he is a dead weight, too heavy for Mary to hold on her own. In this last embrace, Mary sees all the wounds inflicted on her son. Parents, like Mary, often carry the burdens of their children's disappointments whether disappointed in love, failed careers, unrealised hopes. It is the weight of love. Mary now holds her dead child tenderly even though he is past all feeling.

Lord, you entered the darkest, bleakest place of all. Be with those who feel they have entered into a dark, bleak place, who suffer and die with no one to embrace them or mourn them. Amen.

STATION XIV



THE 14TH STATION: JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

“Now there was a garden...and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because ... the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.”¹⁰ At his death, Jesus is wrapped in his burial clothes as he was wrapped in swaddling clothes by his mother at his birth. Now, instead of rejoicing at his birth, she weeps at his death. When Jesus came into the world angels sang; now, as he leaves it, there is only silence. Ambrose of Milan wrote: “Surely it is time now for us to make our contribution of silence...”¹¹

Most of us live and die knowing and being known by only a few, our lives having only a small sphere of influence yet, despite this, we are vitally important to God. These Stations of the Cross serve to remind us of this forcefully and that the injustice and suffering of the world does not defeat God. That, with God, there is no dead-end, that God is in every aspect of life and death and is never defeated.

Lord, as we have travelled the way of the cross, let our desire to know and love you light up the darkness of the world. Amen.

¹⁰ John 19:41-42

¹¹ Stations of the Cross by Timothy Radcliffe, page 66-67