

Stations of the Cross for Families and Marriages

Introduction

The particular needs of marriages and families prompted and largely influenced this reflection on the Stations of the Cross from for your Marriage by the USCCB. Its purpose is to encourage all to reflect on Jesus' passion in the context of family life, whether those families are immediate or extended, near or far, known or unknown. As St. John Paul II told us, the family is the building block of society, and so in this meditation, we pray for all families in light of the Way of the Cross.

Let us pray: Lord, you raised up the family to new dignity through the bond of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. We pray now for all families, especially those who might be experiencing difficulties of any kind, that the grace brought about by your suffering might give them consolation and new life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
(*Genuflect*) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

John 19:10-16

So Pilate said to him, “Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?” Jesus answered [him], “You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. For this reason the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin.” Consequently, Pilate tried to release him; but the Jews cried out, “If you release him, you are not a Friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.”

When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus out and seated him on the judge’s bench in the place called Stone Pavement, in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon. And he said to the Jews, “Behold, your king!” They cried out, “Take him away, take him away! Crucify

him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your king?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

Reflection: Doing the right thing is not always easy or clear. There are outside pressures and clamoring voices seeking our approval. It is often easier to go with what our culture says—buy a fancier house, car, or big screen TV. Spread gossip, tell those white lies, and hurl insults, big and small, at family, friends, and strangers. It seems a lot harder to make prayer a daily habit, practice tithing, come to worship God every week and on special holy days, remain open to children, practice charity in our families and relationships, and to keep God as our top priority.

Pilate also found it hard to go against the crowd, against the voices of the chief priests, and he ultimately succumbed to their wishes. We strive to do otherwise, and the promise of our faith gives us the courage to be countercultural in our daily decisions. We do so because we trust that living as God asks us, instead of as the world tells us, will

bring us greater peace and joy in our relationships, marriages, and families than we could ever find otherwise.

Let us pray: Almighty God, help us to trust in your divine plan for us and to accept what you will in our lives. Instead of heeding our culture and world, we wish to turn to you in a spirit of prayerful listening. You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Second Station: Jesus Takes Up His Cross

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

(Genuflect) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Mark 8:34-36

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the

gospel will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”

Reflection: It really comes down to a question of goals. What are our goals for our families and lives? Do we want to become famous, be admired and revered, wield great power and influence, accumulate untold wealth? What about helping each other grow in holiness? Challenging each other to more loving relationships? Bearing wrongs patiently and modeling forgiveness? What about helping each other get to heaven? How different would our lives be if these were our goals? As we follow Jesus, taking up our cross as he accepts his, we know that this is not the end; rather, this is the way that leads to eternal life.

Let us pray: Jesus, we want to follow you with all our hearts, but we are sometimes afraid of what our crosses will be. Instill in us a stout heart, that we would willingly accept a sharing in your mission. We give our lives to you in humble service, knowing that you will lead us to eternal life. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

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

(Genuflect) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Isaiah 53: 2b-5

He had no majestic bearing to catch our eye,
no beauty to draw us to him.

He was spurned and avoided by men,
a man of suffering, knowing pain,

Like one from whom you turn your face,
spurned, and we held him in no esteem.

Yet it was our pain that he bore,
our sufferings he endured.

We thought of him as stricken,
struck down by God and afflicted,

But he was pierced for our sins,
crushed for our iniquity.

He bore the punishment that makes us whole,
by his wounds we were healed.

Reflection: Inherently, living as families means that there will be conflict. We are a group of imperfect, sinful people with various personalities who live

together and try to make it work. There is, at the same time, inherent nobility in this effort because it speaks of our love and commitment to one another. How do we press on after knocking each other down or stumbling ourselves? This is the grace of Christ's sacrifice—he has taken all our sins upon his shoulders. In his humanity, he even buckled under the weight of our sins. We can take solace, then, that Jesus knew our weakness, experienced its consequences, and still provided us a model of perseverance and a way to true freedom. Drawing our strength from God's grace, we stand up together and continue along the way.

Let us pray: Lord, when we fall and fail, help us not to become too discouraged but instead to trust in your forgiveness and recommit ourselves to living well. Make us cognizant of the ways in which we cause others to stumble so that we would root out the source of such behavior in our lives. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

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

(Genuflect) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Luke 2:34-35

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Reflection: Motherhood is one of life's most sacred callings. A mother carries a growing child for many months and nurtures the baby from her own body during and often after the pregnancy. A mother truly shares in the activity of the divine, creating and sustaining human life. Yet today, motherhood is often not a title of honor or distinction, instead dismissed as something secondary or burdensome. Could we all do something more to honor all the mothers in our lives?

After all, Mary was Jesus' mother, and she infuses the title with nobility and purpose. She bore the weight of her son inside her womb and experienced the even heavier weight of seeing her child suffer at the hands of others. Instead of shying away from this suffering, she walked with Jesus every step of the way. Her obedience to God's call to motherhood was not without pain and hardship, yet it provides a witness for all mothers of every age. She shows us that a mother's love and steadfastness is a source of strength for a child, notably for one experiencing a time of trial.

Let us pray: Mother Mary, we ask your intercession on behalf of all mothers. Help them to know of your witness, concern, and love for them and the daily labors in which they partake. May you be a beacon of hope and light to all mothers who must endure the suffering of their children.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

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

(*Genuflect*) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Mark 15:20-22

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to crucify him.

They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

They brought him to the place of Golgotha (which is translated Place of the Skull).

Reflection: It is fitting for us that Simon was a father. He likely aspired to be a good one, providing moral instruction to his children, passing on the deposit of faith, and acting as a pillar of strength and protection. Perhaps Alexander and Rufus were with him that day and saw their father pressed into service to help Jesus carry the cross. Would they not have been scared as they saw their father led away and given the burden of a condemned man?

Fathers have such an important role in the lives of their families and children. Too often, we have witnessed or even experienced the consequences of a father who has failed or abandoned his family. Our hope is that fathers would recommit themselves to their promises and responsibilities, helping shoulder the burdens of family living. We also trust that, no matter what the conduct of our earthly fathers, we have a Father in heaven who will never abandon us, turn away from us, or leave us to carry our crosses alone.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of all our fathers. Though they are not perfect, they do reflect, to various degrees, the love that you as our Father in heaven have for us. Embolden all the fathers in the world and remind them of their sacred mission towards their children. May they become more like you with each passing day. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

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

(*Genuflect*) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Matthew 25:37-40

“Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

Reflection: Veronica’s courageous action enlivens us to be people and families of compassion. When a child or parent is sick, the whole family suffers and sacrifices until the person is well. So, too, in our human family—when another is suffering, we are called to suffer with and sacrifice for the other until all are well. Reaching beyond our own families is difficult, but we must accept our place and role within the Body of Christ and the entire human

family and extend our hands and hearts to those in need. As we perform these spiritual and corporal works of mercy, as we truly wipe the face of the stranger among us, we realize that we gaze upon the true image of Jesus.

Let us pray: Jesus, Veronica's hands were hands of compassion to you in your time of great need. She took such a risk in coming to your aid, but she shows us how fruitful such an action can be. Help our families and each of us to recognize others in need and to reach out to them. May Veronica's love live on in our actions each day. You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
(*Genuflect*) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Psalm 22:15-18a

Like water my life drains away;
all my bones grow soft.
My heart has become like wax,
it melts away within me.
As dry as a potsherd is my throat;
my tongue cleaves to my palate;
you lay me in the dust of death.
Dogs surround me;
a pack of evildoers closes in on me.
They have pierced my hands and my feet
I can count all my bones.

Reflection: Selfishness is the enemy of lasting relationships. It lays traps for others, takes advantage of the weakest among us, and drains the life from others and, ironically, from ourselves. To be selfish, to look out primarily for number one, seems like the easier option and the way to ensuring our happiness, but we know otherwise. Nevertheless, we sometimes give into our selfish tendencies, and then we fall.

Jesus is again our model and our hope. He picks himself up after stumbling and continues his journey. His sacrifice is the ultimate example of

selflessness as he truly and freely lays down his life for us. That kind of selflessness transforms the world, and it is what we strive for in our families, marriages, and relationships.

Let us pray: O Spirit of God, no doubt you accompanied Jesus along his walk to Golgotha, providing him strength as he fell repeatedly. Come to us, Holy Spirit, as we continue to stumble and fall in our selfish ways. Give us the ability to eschew our self-centeredness and instead to help others when they are falling. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

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

(Genuflect) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Luke 23:27-31

A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him.

Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’ At that time people will say to the mountains, ‘Fall upon us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ For if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?”

Reflection: Jesus heard the cry from the women of Jerusalem, and not only did he know their pain then, he knew of the pain that women would suffer in the millennia to come. We see all too often how society still disrespects women through various forms of abuse and objectification. Jesus knew as well the atrocities that the children of our world would have to face. As enlightened as we sometimes consider ourselves, how often do we still reject our most vulnerable: the unborn, poor, orphaned, or unwanted children of our world? How dry the wood has become in our time.

As people of faith and of conscience, we join Jesus in combating such things in our society. Even in his

own moment of profound suffering, Jesus reaches out to the women and children of his day. We likewise continue to affirm the inherent dignity and beauty of women and their children, especially those who are in harm's way.

Let us pray: Loving God, bless all vulnerable women and children in our world today. Help them to know of their dignity and worth, even when at times people tell them otherwise. Make us, in instances and situations where we operate from positions of influence, firm in our resolve to defend the most at-risk in our society. We recognize this as our duty and your will. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time

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

(Genuflect) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Isaiah 50:6-7

I gave my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who tore out my beard;
My face I did not hide
from insults and spitting.
The Lord GOD is my help,
therefore I am not disgraced;
Therefore I have set my face like flint,
knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

Reflection: Our human weakness is a reality we are constantly fighting. We try to stay up later at night or do more at work. We do everything we can to stay young and reduce signs of aging. Our weakness, and our eventual bodily death, is a source of great concern for most of us. However, the grace of God gives us hope. Though we are finite in many ways, God is infinite and an inexhaustible source of love and strength. Our lives of faith help us to accept that grace from God, to transcend our human weakness and strive for lasting things. We live in hope that after the final time we fall, the moment of death, God will raise us up to new and eternal life. Surely, this hope kept

Jesus going towards Calvary after he fell again, and it sustains our efforts as well.

Let us pray: Jesus, you knew and felt the limitations of being human—the tiredness, the sickness, and even the sting of death. Yet, you rose above such limitations and provided a model for us by which to live, that of a person accepting his or her limitations while utilizing the grace of God to move beyond them. We have faith that you will indeed raise the righteous on the last day, helping us once and for all to leave behind our human weakness and the consequences of our sin. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
(*Genuflect*) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

John 19:23-24

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. So they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be,” in order that the passage of scripture might be fulfilled that says:

“They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots.”

This is what the soldiers did.

Reflection: Crucifixion was not just about pain and torture—it was also about humiliation. We hear of Jesus being stripped of his garments, garments that perhaps his mother had made and that were one of his only remaining possessions in the world. He was standing without any clothes for the entire crowd to see. The soldiers tried to take his dignity, take away everything that he could give to anyone else. But Jesus still had love to give, still had forgiveness to offer, still had his willingness to sacrifice himself, and so he did just that. He accepted the humiliation

of nakedness willingly and then proceeded to lay down his life for us all.

This all begs the question for us—if we were stripped of everything...our titles, money, possessions, accomplishments, even the very clothes off our back, would we still be able to give without counting the cost, to love one another unconditionally? The task seems impossible, but there is a certain freedom in being able to say, “Take what you will, but you cannot take away my love. That is mine to give, and I give it freely.”

Let us pray: O God, it is startling, even scary, to think of ourselves without anything but ourselves, without material goods or worldly accolades. We wonder if we could still love if we lost all of this. Most of us will never be called to such radical witness, but we see from what Christ has shown us that our ability to love, forgive, and transform hearts is in none of these temporary things. Remind us again that our true power comes from the divine life that lives in each of us as your created sons and daughters. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

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

(Genuflect) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Isaiah 53:11-12

Because of his anguish he shall see the light;
because of his knowledge he shall be content;
My servant, the just one, shall justify the many,
their iniquity he shall bear.

Therefore I will give him his portion among the many,

and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty,

Because he surrendered himself to death,

was counted among the transgressors,

Bore the sins of many,

and interceded for the transgressors.

Reflection: Finally, the reality of our sins takes tangible form. The little hurts, the lies, the cheating, the laying blame, the insults, and the insecurities—all are there in those nails. They bring pain and suffering as we nail Jesus to the cross. Yet, if he

cries out, he cries out not in protest but in willing acceptance. His sacrifice is a profound one, as he freely gives of his life and receives the nails we intend for each other or even ourselves. May this image of our sin spur us to conversion, and may we always be filled with gratitude when we consider Jesus' gift.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, it is difficult to imagine the pain that accompanies being nailed to a cross. Ponder it too long and we shudder. You also trembled at such realities as you prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, but we see you now bravely and lovingly facing your self-willed destiny. May we repent of the nails we intend through our sinfulness and sit in humble gratitude of your sacrifice. You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

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

(Genuflect) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Matthew 27:39-50

Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, and come down from the cross!” Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” The revolutionaries who were crucified with him also kept abusing him in the same way.

From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o’clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Some of the bystanders who heard it said, “This one is calling for Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge; he soaked it in wine, and putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink. But the rest said, “Wait, let us see if

Elijah comes to save him.” But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit.

Reflection: *(If possible, kneel for a moment of silence.)* Look at the cross as it holds the bruised and bleeding body of our Lord and Savior. How is it that this instrument of torture and shame could bring about our salvation, our lasting hope? It is because of the power of God’s transformative grace. It transforms our lives of sin into lives of holiness, our feuding families into models of sacred family life, our selfish tendencies into acts of selflessness, and our confused sadness into everlasting joy. We cling to Jesus’ death on the cross, this ultimate example of unconditional love, as our refuge in a world full of broken relationships, broken homes, and broken-down people. Christ’s sacrifice is so powerful that it overcomes all of these and ushers in opportunities for peace, for reconciliation, for lasting joy. Truly, by his holy cross, Jesus has redeemed the world.

Let us pray: Father, we gaze upon the body of your Son, and we slowly begin to realize the enormity of your love for us, that you would send him for this

purpose of saving us from our sins. We marvel as well at his willing acceptance. We hope that this realization and knowledge never leaves us and that we would apply it to how we live and love in our families, marriages, and relationships. May we remember that unconditional love is the only thing that has ever changed and will continue to change the world for the good. We pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in unity with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

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

(Genuflect) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Mark 15:43-45

Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the council, who was himself awaiting the kingdom of God, came and courageously went to Pilate and

asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was amazed that he was already dead. He summoned the centurion and asked him if Jesus had already died. And when he learned of it from the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.

Reflection: Joseph of Arimathea meets Pontius Pilate. Courage meets cowardice. Joseph understands the responsibility and potential cost of discipleship, including going to bury the body of the Lord. Pilate allows it, probably happy to be rid of the problem of Jesus of Nazareth.

What are the costs of discipleship for us today? They are likely much less than what disciples in the early Church faced, and yet, would we be willing to die for our faith? What about being mocked, ridiculed, and scorned? Are these too much to ask, or are our faith and our salvation the most valuable gifts we have? Our families are to be witnesses as well, models of discipleship and of God's love existing in the world. Our goal is to be evermore like Joseph of Arimathea, people who are disciples despite the risks, disciples because we know of the rewards promised to and won for us.

Let us pray: Spirit of God, you infuse us with your gift of courage. Reawaken this and your other gifts in us that we might live more fully the call to discipleship. Be as tongues of fire to lead us on our way. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pause for 8 seconds of silence.

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
(*Genuflect*) Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Luke 23:53-56

After [Joseph] had taken the body down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried. It was the day of preparation, and the sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come from Galilee with him followed behind, and when they had seen the tomb and the way in which his body was laid in it, they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils.

Reflection: Regardless of our age, state, or position, death comes into our lives, often abruptly and as an unwelcome visitor. All of our families experience death, sometimes in a grandparent who has lived to a ripe, old age but sometimes in a child who never had a chance at living a full life. No matter when it comes, death is never easy. It is precisely at these times that relationships and families have the potential to be such a blessing. Our bonds with those who remain bring us a measure of consolation. Finally, as we know for Jesus and for ourselves, death is not the final answer. We are a people of hope, hope in the resurrection and eternal life. As we live our lives and deal with the reality of death, may we keep Christ's life, death, and resurrection firmly in mind as the source of our salvation.

Let us pray: Jesus, how saddened your friends and family must have felt as they laid your body in the tomb, unsure if you would fulfill your prophecy of rising on the third day. Deaths amongst our families and friends are also moments of sadness and doubt for us. During those moments, remind us that you

have overcome death and lead our loved ones and us to new life. You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we have walked with you this Way of the Cross and, in a special way, kept our families, marriages, and relationships in mind. We know that you call us individually and collectively to greater union with you in our way of life. Bless us with the grace to follow you on this pathway of our salvation. We pray all these things in your most holy name. Amen.

+ May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.