



*The
Way of the Cross*



The Way of the Cross

Reflections on
The Passion and Death
of
Our Lord Jesus Christ
by Thomas Wichert

Especially arranged for both
private and congregational use.

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THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Introductory Prayer

My people, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. I am always with you. You approach me now to pray, to reflect, to find meaning for your life from my experience with death. You do me honor.

My friends, fear not my agony . . . it will help you cope with yours. Pity not my hurting . . . I know that you hurt too. Mourn not my death . . . for it brings us all to life.

Let me call you "Everyone."

Prologue

Everyone, come with me across the valley to the Garden. Pray with me as I collect my thoughts and prepare myself for what will be a turning point in human history.

Please do not interpret my desire for your company as a sign of weakness. I want you to witness and share my agony so that when our walk along the way of the cross is completed, you will better comprehend the meaning of my victory. This victory is the basis of your hope in me.

To you, Father, I say firmly but with understandable apprehension, "Thy will be done!" I will drink this cup for Everyone in your name.

To you, Everyone, I say do not make promises of faithfulness to me just yet. Judas has his mind made up as he approaches with the crowd. Even Peter and the sons of Zebedee, my dear friends, are hasty to swear their fidelity and equally quick to bend with the pressure of the crowd. No, Everyone, walk thoughtfully along the way with me. Weigh carefully your decision. Then at the end of our walk, be prepared to pledge to me your fidelity and commitment to love. I promise you reason to hope.

Come now. It is time to go. Walk close to me.

I



*Jesus is Condemned
to Death by Pilate*



THE FIRST STATION

Jesus is Condemned to Death by Pilate

CHRIST:

Since we left the garden together last night, I have been accused by the scribes and elders, and I have been brought before the high priest. I have been mocked and spat upon by the soldiers. They want me to die. "What need have we of witnesses?" they asked.

Already I have been denied by my friends. Peter said, "I do not know the man!", while Judas called out weakly, "I have betrayed innocent blood."

I now stand before Pilate, governor from Rome, awaiting his sentence upon my life. "Are you the King of the Jews?" he asks. "Do you not hear the charges?" Too weak to decide for himself, he turns me over to the crowd. "Let him be crucified!" they cry. A judgment has been made. The stage is set for evil to run its course upon me, the Son of God made man.

EVERYONE:

We beg you, Lord Jesus, to forgive the careless judgments we have made in the courtrooms of our minds. Help us understand that while we are entitled to our opinions, the world is not always anxious for us to express them. The words of Scripture, "But Jesus remained silent," and "Judge not that you may not be judged," ring now in our ears. Following your example, we resolve never to betray innocent blood by our judgment of others.

II



*Jesus Accepts
His Cross*



THE SECOND STATION

Jesus Accepts His Cross

CHRIST:

Everyone, you have witnessed this mockery of justice incited by the leaders of the people. You have heard the verdict of "death by crucifixion" rendered by the crowd. Water does not easily wash away stains like these. Stripping and scourging and crowning with thorns do not make a true King less a king any more than they make a cross less a throne for the Savior of the world. Therefore, knowing what my destiny and purpose are, I willingly accept this cross as proof of my love for you. But as I do so, Everyone, I challenge you in turn to take up your cross daily and follow me.

EVERYONE:

We, too, have been mocked and spat upon, stripped and scourged, crowned and crucified in untold ways. We appreciate your anxiety because it is our anxiety. We feel your cries because they are our cries. We will take up our crosses and follow you. We ask only that you forgive us Lord for adding weight to the crosses of others by our willful or thoughtless behavior in our homes, in our work and in our play.

III



*Jesus Falls
the First Time*



THE THIRD STATION

Jesus Falls the First Time

CHRIST:

This crossbeam is so heavy and painful. Am I already so weak, or is this burden just too heavy for me to bear? As I stumble to the ground beneath its weight, my immediate urge is to call out to you, Everyone, for help. But let me not call you too quickly before I have tried and tested my own strength to bear my appointed cross.

EVERYONE:

Lord, we see you stand again and move forward to your Calvary. We sense the challenge of your example to help ourselves, to push beyond, to extend our endurance. Perhaps we run too quickly from our pain, call too desperately for help, depend too easily upon another before we have tried our best. Through your fall you have told us that self-help, guided by your example and supported by your grace, is our first source of strength.

IV



*Jesus Meets
His Mother*



THE FOURTH STATION

Jesus Meets His Mother

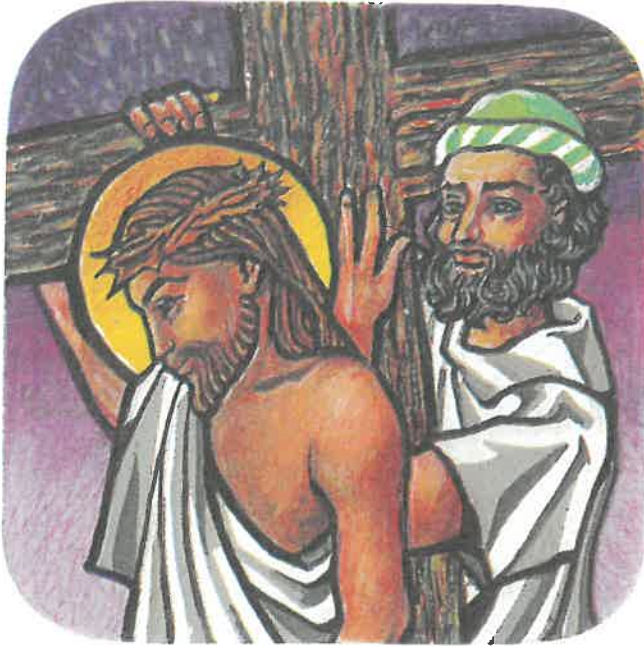
CHRIST:

As I make my way along the road, I notice your faces, Everyone, telling me your inner story, even as you react to mine. On some faces I read pity and anger; on others blank stares of disbelief. Some eyes seem dull and uncaring, while others appear nervous and turn away as if afraid to look at me. Many are the faces I see along this road — as many are the stories they tell. Then I see my mother, one among you, yet special beyond all. Our glances meet and blend; we have no need for words.

EVERYONE:

Jesus, Savior and brother, we are grateful for the caring look you give to each of us, no matter who we are or what we have done. But that reverent glance you gave your mother carried a special message for us. In that moment, it became clear that your commandment to "Honor your father and your mother!" is not for young children alone. It is surely for adults as well, who see their parents growing old, deserving honor, and needing care. Even as we are busy carrying our own crosses in life, we, like you, will care for them and do them honor.

V



*Simon Helps
Carry the Cross*



THE FIFTH STATION

Simon Helps Carry the Cross

CHRIST:

In the confusion, Simon of Cyrene appears at my side, as if to represent you, Everyone. He reaches out to assist me with my burden. I do not have the energy to talk with you, Simon. However, I do wonder what is going on in your mind as we struggle together with this cross. Are you doing this willingly or only because you were forced? Are you angry or embarrassed? Do you find my burden heavy or light? Are you more concerned with what the crowds are thinking or are you filled with concern for me? I know that you were just a passerby, perhaps totally unaware of what was taking place. Whatever your answer to my questions, please know that I am grateful for what you have done for me.

EVERYONE:

Lord Jesus, each of us is thrown into unexpected situations in life. Knowing what to do, how to react, and when to become involved is most difficult. We pray now for your guidance through the Holy Spirit and the courage to do your will. Then, Lord, when we do respond in actual life situations, let us never look back with doubt. Let us rest in the comfort that we have sought to do your holy will.

THE SIXTH STATION

Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

VI



Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus



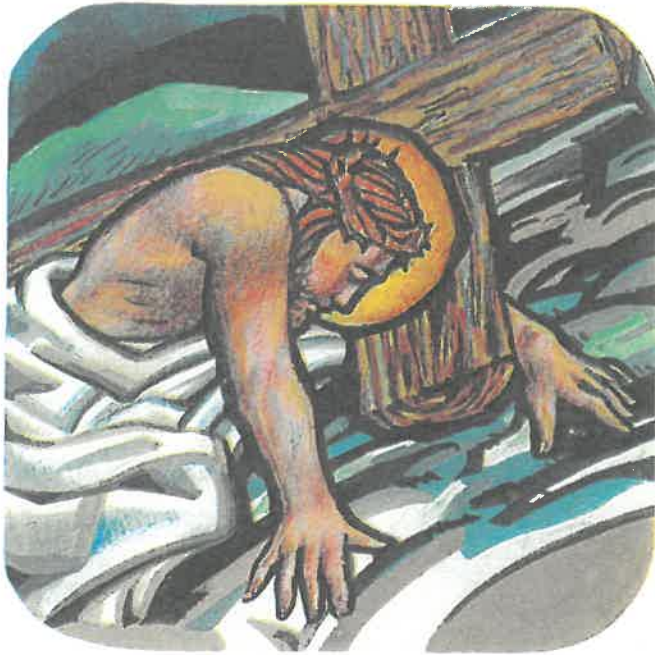
CHRIST:

Veronica, you extend your veil to refresh me. I welcome your gesture of care. It is by such actions that I know mine and mine know me—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, making peace, wiping the face of the weary. It may challenge your faith as you gaze upon me now, Everyone. But I invite you to come to me, all you who labor and are burdened. I promise that I will, in turn, refresh you. I am your faithful Lord. I keep my promises.

EVERYONE:

Your invitation, Lord Jesus, includes each of us. As we struggle with the crosses of life, our worries and cares, our doubts and fears, our uncertainties and limitations hide within our souls. You invite us to come to you and you heal us, comfort us, and refresh us without exposing our inner struggles. You also invite us to join you in your comforting mission. "Do unto others as you would have them do for you!" We, like Veronica, accept your invitation, aware that we do not have to look far to find the weary, the burdened, the poor and the lonely. They are everywhere. They are always with us.

VII



*Jesus Falls
the Second Time*



THE SEVENTH STATION

Jesus Falls the Second Time

CHRIST:

Since my first fall, Everyone, I have met you in the company of my mother, Simon, and Veronica, who have supported and comforted me. In spite of your refreshing care, I stumble and fall again. I am not ashamed to tell you that I hurt. Physically I am near exhaustion. Psychologically I am humiliated. Emotionally I am drained. More and more my tormentors wear me down. But, I must stand again and press on. I must bring forgiveness to all.

EVERYONE:

Jesus, reconciling Lord, your endurance along the way of the cross demonstrates your tireless love for both saints and sinners. You invite us to share in your healing and forgiving grace. You make it possible for us to stand up and approach you with dignity and say, "Lord, we're sorry!" Knowing this, we ask your forgiveness for our sins of commission and omission. With new understanding we dare to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us!"

VIII



*Jesus Speaks
to the Women*



THE EIGHTH STATION

Jesus Speaks to the Women

CHRIST:

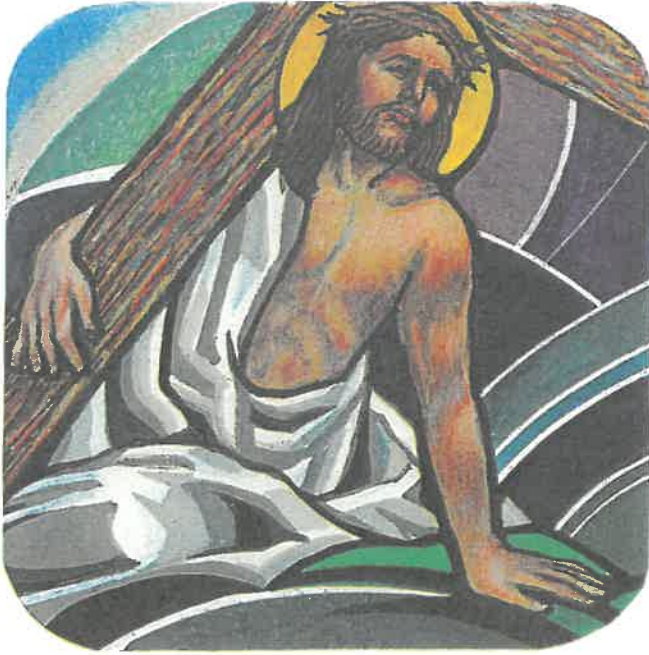
Women of Jerusalem, I see you weeping. Let me pause for a moment to acknowledge your concern for me. Please tell me that your tears stem not from guilt. Guilt is neither a virtue nor a gift of the Spirit of God. Rather, assure me that they are tears of compassion, sorrow, and repentance. Weep, too, for your children tugging at your skirts and struggling in your arms. They are shaken and confused by my pain. Tell them as they grow what my suffering means. Tell them that they were there when I was crucified. Assure them, though, that when their time comes for tears, I will be there with them. Now, however, I must move on.

EVERYONE:

How kind of you, Lord Jesus, to pause to talk to us. How often we say to one another, "I don't have the time!" We say to our children when they ask, to the needy when they beg, to neighbors when they seek our help, "I don't have time." Yet, time is really all we have. We cannot make it or demand it. Time is your gift, Lord, but we can waste it. When it is past, we cannot replace it. So, before we move on, Christ Jesus, help us embrace time and share it with others in your love.

THE NINTH STATION
Jesus Falls the Third Time

IX



*Jesus Falls
the Third Time*



CHRIST:

For the third time, I fall to the ground. My sweat and blood and tears blend with the dust of the earth. The weight and oppression are unbearable. An inner temptation urges me to give up, to lie here and welcome death as blessed relief. But to do so would leave all my striving incomplete and unfulfilled. I am so close to my goal — so near to my Calvary. Please lift me up, my friends. Stay close to me, Everyone. Support me carefully to Golgotha where my death will lead to resurrection and victory over sin.

EVERYONE:

It is time, Suffering Servant of God, for us to refresh our memories. In the garden you urged us not to make hasty promises. However, now that we have walked prayerfully with you along the way, we sense that the moment of decision is near. We, like you, are faced with the choice of giving up or going on. "Come follow me" you faintly call. There is no longer an option to be lukewarm. Hot or cold, for you or against you — we must choose now. Relying on your grace, we accept your call for help and choose to follow wherever you may lead.

THE TENTH STATION

Jesus is Stripped of His Clothing

X



*Jesus is Stripped
of His Clothing*



CHRIST:

Golgotha is my place. Now is my time. It is a comfort to have you at my side. They wish to strip me now, strip me of everything I possess. Do not stop them. I endure this stripping that I may experience in my flesh and share in my soul what the sick feel when they are stripped of health, what the sorrowing endure when they lose joy, what the separated experience when their unions rupture, what widows and widowers suffer when loving companionship vanishes. I want to be with the young when life begins to test them and with the aged as their strength fades. Like all who suffer, I could now ask, "Why?" But I won't.

EVERYONE:

Gentle Jesus, you have brought us face to face with the mystery of life's suffering. With sensitivity, you show your love for all who suffer. Humbly, you ask us not to question, "Why?" It is not for us to rob this mystery of its secret. Just forgive our lack of understanding.

XI



*Jesus is Nailed
to the Cross*



THE ELEVENTH STATION

Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

CHRIST:

As I am nailed to the cross, the nails piercing my feet and hands become my only means of support. Your hands, my friends, reach out to help me in this final hour. If you, Everyone, wish to extend your helping hands to me, lend them to others. "What you do to the least of them," I tell you, "that you do unto me." Remember these words! Soon, my Father's hands will welcome me. Into His hands I will commend my spirit. I will not, however, forget you. I will not abandon you. I will return to you.

EVERYONE:

In this final moment we pledge our fidelity to you, Son of God made man. To tell you that we believe is easy. To prove our belief is hard. As you leave us, we thank you for commending us to the care of each other. Our mutual love will prove our love for you.

XII



*Jesus Dies
Upon the Cross*



THE TWELFTH STATION

Jesus Dies Upon the Cross

CHRIST:

As I hang suspended between heaven and earth, my mind and vision clear for one final look at my creation. I see you, Mother. I love you with a special love. I see you, John. Please care for my mother. I see you, crucified thieves and cruel soldiers. I see you, weeping friends and faithful followers. I see you, Everyone, and I love you with an everlasting love. Remember me. Remember that I love you even unto my death upon the cross.

EVERYONE:

Forgive us our trespasses, Jesus of Nazareth. You are King of all creation and truly Son of God. As you hang before us in the silence of death, our minds also clear. We see a sudden light upon the cross and sense its deepest meaning. It is not a silent symbol hung for centuries in loving memory. It is life-giving to us who have walked the way of the cross. It is a throne of strength, not a glorification of weakness. It is a sign of love and a font of grace. It is redeeming sacrament.

XIII



*Jesus is Taken
Down From the Cross*



THE THIRTEENTH STATION

Jesus is Taken Down From the Cross

CHRIST:

Resting in my mother's arms, I wonder what you, Everyone, are thinking. I suspect that you are confused. You have high expectations of me because I frequently made promises along the way. You want to hope in me, but I am dead. You call me "Savior" and so I am. Yet, you are uncertain. Faith and doubt struggle within you. Hope encourages your believing, then fades as doubt returns. Even your love fears that my death will be just a memory. In the end, Everyone, you will come to know that your wondering is not in vain.

EVERYONE:

Mary, allow us to lift Jesus from your aching arms and bear him to a resting place. We are unsure of what the death of your son means. We see its meaning vaguely. Faith still wrestles with doubt. Hope still challenges despair. Love still suffers from sin. Mary, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

THE FOURTEENTH STATION

Jesus is Placed in the Tomb

XIV



*Jesus is Placed
in the Tomb*



CHRIST:

At last my place of rest is reached. You have kindly wrapped my body with a shroud and placed it in the tomb of Joseph. Pilate is assured that I am dead. The chief priests and Pharisees are nervous about my promise: "After three days, I shall rise again." Guards are sent to insure against any fraud by you, my friends. As you secure the tomb with stone and seals, do not bury your hopes in my grave.

EVERYONE:

We have come to a moment when time meets eternity. Past, present and future blend together. The past records memories of your passion and death. The present gives opportunities for loving and serving in your Church. The future promises a fuller life for having walked with you along the way of the cross. Now, Lord, we actively await the fulfillment of your promise with undying hope.

CHRIST:

Everyone, our walk along the way of the cross is ended. We have experienced anew the memory of my death for your salvation.

I understand fully that death does violence to life. It is feared and hated. It tears love apart, arouses anger and grief, floods you with a sense of loss that seems so final. Even scripture says that if my death is final and I am not risen, my life is a hoax, my preaching is a fraud, and your faith is in vain.

But I am risen! My Resurrection, Everyone, is the fulfillment of my promise, the heart of my message, and the substance of your hope. I am alive! Soldiers and angels, women and men, doubting Thomases and disciples along the road proclaim the Good News that I am risen and with you. Victory over death and sin is mine and it is yours, my friends.

Understand clearly my dying and my rising. I did not die and rise only to die again. I am risen. I am on the other side of death. I am filled with new life to share with you. I hold you in the palm of my hand and lead you gently home.

CHRIST:

Father in Heaven, when I was in the midst of my agony, I prayed, "If it be your will, let this cup pass." As I died upon the cross, it seemed that you did not hear my prayer. When I rose from the dead, I realized that you answered my prayer far beyond the limits of my request. It is best, Father, that our prayer be simply, "Thy will be done." I ask you, Everyone, before you take your leave, to pray with me the prayer I taught you.

EVERYONE:

"Our Father . . ."