

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Walk alongside Christ on the journey of his Passion and remember our brothers and sisters around the world who experience suffering and poverty each day.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy God, be with us now as we meditate on your Son's journey to Calvary. Remind us that still, in this present day, many of your children continue that walk to Calvary, carrying heavy, difficult crosses. May we be Simon to those whose burdens are too heavy to be borne alone. May we be Veronica to those who need the touch of love and comfort. And may we, struggling with our own crosses, always remember your promises of justice, mercy and peace. **Amen**



FIRST STATION

Jesus is condemned to death

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: *The governor said to them in reply, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They answered, "Barabbas! ... Let [Jesus] be crucified!" (Matthew 27:21-22)*

As we imagine this scene, perhaps we see chaos, mayhem, people pushing and pulling at each other, screaming and shouting. There is manipulation and bribery afoot; a good man is about to be killed as a public spectacle, and the laws of the land stand in silence. Perhaps this scene seems far removed—something we may glimpse in the news, something that happens in faraway countries under foreign governments. Perhaps, too, it is something we know well. Perhaps we've experienced this kind of injustice in our own lives.

If we hold in our hearts the story of Maria, a girl from Colombia who was forced to flee her home with her family, perhaps we can begin to understand this kind of injustice. The law of the land failed her, too. Conflict and violence threw her world upside down, and she, with her family, was forced to rebuild it.

We are called to live in solidarity as one global family, each of us made in the image and likeness of God. We are responsible for one another, for what happens to our neighbors next door and our neighbors overseas. Though we may not have experienced such personal upheaval, we are called to empathize with those who have. So then, do we stand silent in the crowd, or do we shout? And if we shout, what do we say?

All: Christ Jesus, you were condemned by those you had come to serve, by those you had come to love. In moments when I may be tempted to condemn those around me, fill my heart with compassion and understanding.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



SECOND STATION

Jesus carries the cross

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *And carrying the cross himself, he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull. (John 19:17)*

We all have our crosses to carry, those hidden battles we fight when we think no one is looking. How easy it is to become so focused on my battles, my problems, my cross that I forget to look at those around me. Rich or poor, shy or outgoing, near or far, doesn't it stand to reason that each of us fights our own hidden battles?

Jesus is given his cross and made to carry it, and so are we. But let us not do so alone. Let us help one another shoulder our burdens. Think of our brothers and sisters around the world who carry the crosses of hunger and poverty. How can we help them shoulder their burdens?

As we work with and for the poor, for those whose crosses are the heaviest, perhaps we will be surprised by what we find. Perhaps, if we truly seek the face of Christ among those who are poor, we will discover something new about ourselves, about what it means to be rich and poor, about what it means to pick up our crosses and follow in the way of Christ.

All: **Christ Jesus, our crosses are heavy and our bodies weak, but we want to follow you. Give us strength to continue. And although our burdens may be heavy, let us remember to stop and help those we encounter along the way.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



THIRD STATION

Jesus falls for the first time

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *I am troubled now. Yet what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour?" But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name. (John 12:27-28)*

How many of us know someone who has fallen—fallen on hard times, on difficulties in a relationship, on a moment of doubt and challenge? How many of us are experiencing a moment like this now? But these moments, these hardships, are never borne in vain. All things, if we allow them to, have the potential to conspire together for the greater glory of God.

Maria and her family certainly fell on hard times after being forced from their native land in Colombia. All seemed lost. Yet, they struggled back to their feet—and in so doing, discovered a new passion, an unknown skill. Now they are successful coffee farmers, and Maria is in school to further this new passion.

God does not will that we fall, but, when we inevitably do, we are each given that opportunity—that moment of choice—to stand back up, to look around and take stock of ourselves and our lives. Where is God at work, even in apparent darkness? We look to Jesus, who, though he fell, got up and kept walking. How can we help those we meet do the same? How can we, ourselves, continue on?

All: **Christ Jesus, you know that each of us falls, each of us fails, each of us gives in to temptation. Help us to remember that, with your grace, we have the opportunity to rise up stronger and wiser than before.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



FOURTH STATION

Jesus encounters his mother

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary ... "You yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."* (Luke 2:34-35)

What must Mary have been thinking, standing there in the midst of suffering, looking at her son? What pain must have been in her heart? What doubt? And yet we know that she followed Christ until the end and beyond, being present to his friends, comforting them in their fear, encouraging them as the young Church grew. Mary's desire to love and serve God overcame the suffering she encountered.

How appropriate, then, that we are invited to consider the life of Hongkham, a mother in Laos who makes sacrifices for her children. Here, too, we see a woman motivated by the suffering of her family to act for the greater good. Not only does her love of cooking mean the difference between hunger and full bellies for her family, it also means children from the wider community won't go to bed hungry, either.

How do we respond to the suffering of others, whether in our immediate family or in our global one? Let us look to Mary and the example she sets for us as she meets Christ carrying the cross.

All: **Christ Jesus, in the person of your Blessed Mother, we have an example of courage, perseverance and faith. No stranger to suffering herself, Mary desired to be with those in need. Strengthen us as we try to follow her example.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



FIFTH STATION

Simon helps Jesus carry the cross

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country ... to carry his cross. (Mark 15:21)*

Even Jesus needed help, and he wasn't too proud to accept it.

Human beings are social beings: We are called to live in community. By being together, by helping one another, we become the best versions of ourselves. We build a better planet. We bring about the reign of God.

It's exciting to be a part of God's plan, to be out serving and caring for the poor and vulnerable. But let us never forget that we, too, are poor and vulnerable in our own ways—and often those we serve end up serving us. Let us never be too proud to accept what others give. Let us remind ourselves that there is much to be learned from each person we encounter.

Calling to mind Hongkham from Laos, we see a woman who was in need of help—her family was going hungry, and she needed food. But in seeking that help, she wound up feeding an entire school full of children—and kept them coming back to further their education.

Perhaps our prayer should be one of humility: both to give and receive help, free of pride, for we never know where God might be at work.

All: **Christ Jesus, you are God. How awesome it is to think that the God of the universe accepted the help of a simple human like me, and continues to desire my help in bringing about the Kingdom of God. Teach me humility that I may serve you worthily.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



SIXTH STATION

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 8:48)*

It's tempting for us to remove the humanity from this station, to view it in terms of great marble statues and stained glass. But what Veronica did was hardly clean or simple. Here is a woman who quite literally pushes herself—her own body—into the heart of suffering and struggle, into a rowdy crowd that can hardly afford her safety. This is a woman who threw cultural norms and taboos aside and took action.

This is a woman who touched poverty in its rawest form. And for what? Jesus' face was bruised and bloodied; a little cloth wasn't going to change that. He was on his way to die, anyway—why waste the time and resources to touch him?

We, too, may be tempted to think like this when faced with the overwhelming challenge of global poverty, of human suffering. But we must never underestimate the value of simply being present to another human being, to one who shares in the sacredness and dignity of being made in the image and likeness of God.

The Catholic community in the United States has been present through Catholic Relief Services in countries ravaged by conflict like Rwanda, Colombia and the Central African Republic. What does it mean to stick by a community for the long haul, continuing our commitment to be with those who suffer even when hope seems all but lost? Is this what Veronica did for Jesus? Is this what Jesus asks of us?

All: **Christ Jesus, help us to remember that nothing we do for the sake of love is done in vain. May we, like Veronica, have the strength to reach out to those on the margins—to those whom society has forgotten—and show them love.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



SEVENTH STATION

Jesus falls a second time

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone. (John 8:7)*

There is a great temptation to ignore the poor of our world by assuming that their plight is of their own creation. Some may reason that poverty comes from laziness, ignorance or a failure to seize opportunities. But this is an easy way out. We assign blame to someone else to escape culpability. We distance ourselves from a situation we think is remote from our own. We block ourselves off from the real struggles, personal histories and present-day challenges of the individuals and communities that we encounter.

We see that someone has fallen, and we forget that we, too, can just as easily trip and find ourselves face-down in the dirt.

In Rwanda, we meet Odette, who, even before her daughter is born, began to plan for her child's health. She knows how easily a child can fall into sickness, poor nutrition or worse. And she knows that what she wants for her daughter is more: opportunity to thrive and grow.

As we reflect on this story, we would do well to reflect on all mothers and children who so easily fall into poverty, hardship, impossible situations. What is our responsibility to these families? How do we uphold our commitment by ensuring that those who fall are helped back up and empowered to continue along?

All: **Christ Jesus, You meet me where I am in my life with an outstretched hand rather than a thrown stone. Help me to do the same for those around me. Teach me what it means to love my neighbor as myself.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



EIGHTH STATION

Jesus consoles the women of Jerusalem

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children ..."* (Luke 23:28)

Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus deeply involved with the concerns of individual people. He doesn't simply go to political or religious leaders to learn about what the people are thinking; he goes right to the source, the people themselves. And here, even at the end of his earthly mission, we see Jesus attentive to the needs of specific individuals, sharing his own hurts and joys with them, and listening to theirs.

We, too, must remember to act in this way. Surely, we can call to mind images of individuals and communities from seemingly distant lands and unknown situations: lives lived in Rwanda, Colombia, Honduras and more. Are we really the experts, qualified to instruct these communities on how to live their lives, address their problems? How difficult it is to understand their daily joys and suffering! And yet, as we engage in global solidarity and reach out to those who are poorest and most vulnerable, we must try to understand—by listening.

Catholic social teaching calls us to engage in subsidiarity, which means working with individuals and communities that are nearest to a problem to devise a solution. How easy it is to propose solutions for others' problems; how much harder it is to enter into constructive dialogue for the betterment of all.

All: **Christ Jesus, you always invite; you never impose. You always seek to engage people in ways that are meaningful; you never try to pressure or manipulate. Guide us in our efforts, that we may truly serve the needs of the poor and not simply the needs of ourselves.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



NINTH STATION

Jesus falls for a third time

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *But his father ordered his servants, "Quickly, bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet." (Luke 15:22)*

Sometimes it may feel as though we've fallen one too many times. We can't possibly get up again. God must be done with us—how can we be forgiven once more? We keep falling, keep failing, and we're weighed down by shame and guilt. No one can love us enough to enable us to go on.

But God is not done with us; God never tires of forgiving, of showing us mercy! Failure should not keep us down. When it comes to mercy, as in the story of the Prodigal Son, we have only to ask. God does not want us to wallow in guilt—no, God tells us we're forgiven and invites us to get up and do God's work. As sons and daughters of God, it is our responsibility to accept that forgiveness, accept that new opportunity, and then to be about the business of justice, mercy and peace; the business of building the Kingdom of God.

We have much to learn, perhaps, from young Mayra of Honduras. Certainly, she faced frustrations—she "fell"—in her school work. But when given the opportunity to get back up and begin anew, she seized it. Now, as a successful student, she looks for ways to help her peers improve. What can we take from this story—especially as we, ourselves, struggle back to our feet after our own falls?

All: **Christ Jesus, we may stumble, we may fall; help us remember that what is most important is to get back up and start again.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



TENTH STATION

Jesus is stripped of his garments

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *For creation awaits with eager expectation ... in hope that [it] would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:19-21)*

When we think of those goods the poor are stripped of daily, there are probably several key items that come to mind: food, water and shelter, to name a few. We so often see countries rich in resources and yet the people of those countries are in poverty. How do we ensure that the wonders of the natural world are used in a sustainable, equitable way? Giving a man a fish, as the old adage goes, only solves the problem for the day.

Pope Francis says it best in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*: "We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

The environment and the people that inhabit it are interconnected; all of God's good creation is one. God calls us to be stewards of the resources which we have been given, to look out for one another by sharing and collaborating, rather than grabbing up everything we can get now and worrying about others later. After all, teaching a man to fish will be of little value if we've left him a polluted pond.

All: **Christ Jesus, all life comes from you. You have created a natural world with wondrous resources and beautiful sights. May we truly value that which you have made, and in turn be good stewards of your gifts for the common good of all.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



ELEVENTH STATION

Jesus is nailed to the cross

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)*

We've all been there—stuck in a seemingly impossible situation, weighed down, perhaps, by financial burdens, family obligations and the opinions of others. We've all been nailed to the cross. And often it feels as though we've come to the end; we can't move, can't maneuver our way out of this bleak situation. We have been left alone to flounder.

This is a part of the human experience that all of us go through, regardless of our wealth, our nationality or our past experiences. Jesus knows this, and never gives up on us. Even the thief with whom he was crucified was given the opportunity to be made better.

And if Jesus offers us these second, third or hundredth chances, what then should we offer to our neighbors? We think of Vaviroa and her family in Madagascar. Here is a capable woman, a successful farmer. And yet, circumstances outside of her control—a cyclone!—destroy her farm. All she needs is a helping hand, a handful of seeds, to avoid the cross of hunger. It is not for us to judge, to lecture or to withhold; it is for us to help.

Prayerfully considering Vaviroa's story, we ask: what can we do to help others come down from the crosses of hunger, homelessness or sickness?

All: **Christ Jesus, you are always willing to give us another chance to better ourselves and those around us. May we follow your example and never cease to help others come down from the crosses that bind them.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



TWELFTH STATION

Jesus dies on the cross

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Matthew 27:46)

(All kneel together for a reflective pause, and then rise.)

By human standards, the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus is the ultimate failure. Members of the Jewish community had waited so long for the Messiah, had put their faith and hope in a man they believed had come to liberate them, and he died a horrific death. It was a devastating, final moment, and so many of Jesus' friends had already fled the scene, abandoning hope in a better future.

It's a good thing the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus are not to be judged by human standards.

Rather, what we see as failure, God transforms into victory. Where we see nothing but hopelessness and devastation, God is at work in surprising and spectacular ways. When we think of the hardships so many in our world face, we might easily grow discouraged; but our God offers us hope, and wants all of us to work together to build a world of peace and justice.

How does this perspective of Easter inspire our own work in seemingly hopeless, failed situations? How does God want us to look upon problems like poverty, natural disasters and environmental decay—by human standards, or something more hopeful?

All: **Christ Jesus, even in the most devastating failures, you show us the importance of hope. May we have the courage to work patiently and tirelessly with those in need, always keeping our sights on you.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



THIRTEENTH STATION

Jesus' body is taken down from the cross

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." (Luke 22:19)*

As we contemplate Jesus' broken body, we are reminded of his full humanity. He had a body, just as we do, that needed sustenance and exercise, that could be bruised and battered, and through which he experienced the world around him. This is a common experience of humanity—that of the body—and it reminds us of our shared dignity as unique creations of God. It reminds us of our call to solidarity because, drawing on our own bodily experience of creation, we can understand and appreciate that of another, no matter where—or when—he or she may live.

Through his example, Jesus challenges us to examine the real bodily needs of those around us, the "neighbors" we pass on city streets and in crowded shopping centers.

We are reminded of the Eucharist, the Communion through which we, the Church, share in Jesus' body and blood, in yet another common experience with our brothers and sisters no matter when or where they live. We are called to encounter a God who emptied himself in becoming man, and who calls us to do the same. In experiencing the Eucharist, we receive an opportunity to put our own needs aside and replace them with another's—with our neighbor's—needs, as God did. So, we empty ourselves of what it means to be me and better understand what it means to be another.

All: **Christ Jesus, you offer us yourself in the Eucharist and invite us to offer ourselves to you and to your global family. May we learn to put the needs of others ahead of our own so we can better love our neighbor.**

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...



FOURTEENTH STATION

Jesus' body is placed in a tomb

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

All: **Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Leader: *Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into His glory?*
(Luke 24:26)

We know how the story ends. We know that after a mere 3 days, God's victory shines forth; Christ triumphs over sin, evil and death. And yet how long were those 3 days for the men and women who lived through them? They didn't have the knowledge that we do: They didn't know that the story would end in triumph. For them, the story had already ended, and it had all been for nothing.

As Christians, we know that God wins the day, but that doesn't always make it easier for us in our daily struggles. How many of us are currently living in our own "3 days"—a dark period with seemingly no end in sight? How many of us are quick to throw in the towel, to say that our efforts to make the world a better place, to bring about mercy, justice and peace are in vain and hopeless?

The mystery of our faith says that Christ wins; darkness ends. The seeds we plant today will bear fruit tomorrow. Our efforts to love are never wasted. Bishop Kenneth Untener's famous prayer reminds us, "We are prophets of a future not our own."

All: **Christ Jesus, as we contemplate all that remains to be done to build a just and loving world, remind us that "[our work] may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest."***

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be to the Father...

CLOSING PRAYER

Christ Jesus, *we have walked the way of the cross with you. We have seen your sorrows and sufferings and have experienced the hope and joy that a single moment of love can give. We know that although Mayra and Vaviroa live in foreign countries, they are a part of our global family. We know that even though Laos and Colombia may seem far away, there, too, live our brothers and sisters. All over our world, you are at work. And you call us to work as well, alongside those who are poorest and most vulnerable. As we continue our Lenten journey, we ask that you bless our efforts to love and serve one another.* **Amen**

*usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers/archbishop_romero_prayer.cfm

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