

# DIOCESAN LITURGICAL COMMISSION NEWSLETTER

## Lent 2014

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## STATIONS OF THE CROSS



With its 14 “stations”, the Way of the Cross unites the life of Jesus with the lives of Christians. Representing events from

Jesus’ passion and death, the Stations of the Cross devotion is almost synonymous with Lent, Holy Week, and Good Friday in particular, although we are encouraged to pray through the Stations of the Cross at any time.

This newsletter offers some reflection on the history and practice of the Stations of the Cross, but more importantly, encourages us in our diocese to deepen our appreciation for this important devotion. Praying the Stations of the Cross is a *powerful way to contemplate, and enter into, the mystery of Jesus’ gift of himself to us. It takes the reflection on the passion out of my head, and makes it an imaginative exercise. It involves my senses, my experience and my emotions. To the extent I come to experience the love of Jesus for me, to that extent the gratitude I feel will be deep. Deep gratitude leads to real*

*generosity and a desire to love as I have been loved (cf Creighton University Online Ministries:*

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/stations-why.html>)

## Scriptural Background

*After the psalms had been sung they went out to the Mount of Olives (Mk 14:26)*

The life of Jesus was intimately connected with the Spirit. In Luke’s Gospel (cf Lk 4:1) the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert, and in concert with the Spirit’s promptings, Jesus walks the way to Calvary (cf Lk 12:49-50).

The Gospel writers recount this unspeakably hard and painful last stage of Jesus’ journey through which the Son of God and the Son of Man walked for love of the Father and love for humanity. *Each step of Jesus is one step closer to the accomplishment of the plan of salvation: to the hour of universal forgiveness (cf. Lk 23:34), the pierced Heart – the opening of an inextinguishable fountain of grace - (cf. Jn 19:34), the immolation of the true Paschal Lamb, of whom not one bone will be broken (cf. Jn 19:36), the gift of the Mother (cf. Jn 19:26-27) and of the Spirit (cf. Mt 27:50). Every new suffering of Jesus is a seed of future joy for humanity, every jeer, a promise of glory. Along that way of suffering, Jesus’ every meeting - with friends, with enemies, with the indifferent -*

*is a chance for one final lesson, one last look, one supreme offer of reconciliation and peace.*

([http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/documents/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_via-crucis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/documents/ns_lit_doc_via-crucis_en.html))

## HISTORY



From the earliest days, followers of Jesus told the story of his passion, death and resurrection. We are aware, of course, of the early reference in

Scripture to the encounter of the two disciples with Jesus on the **road to Emmaus** when they talked about **all that had happened in Jerusalem**. Following 250 years of Christian persecution by authorities, Emperor Constantine legalized Christian worship in the Roman Empire (A.D. 313). The earliest historical records are the many references regarding those who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and were openly able to walk the footsteps of Jesus on Good Friday. On the site where Jesus' tomb was believed to have been located, Constantine erected the **Church of the Holy Sepulcher** in 335.

Soon after, pilgrims made their way to this holy site. Early pilgrims journeyed the "way of the cross" in reverse of what we see today, beginning at Mount Calvary, and proceeding to Pilate's house. Eventually a

fixed route from the ruins of the Fortress Antonia (Pilate's house) to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, through Jerusalem's Old City, gained acceptance as the **way** Jesus journeyed to his death. This route, we now call the *Via Dolorosa* or "Sorrowful Way". .

([http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/stations\\_of\\_the\\_cross\\_date\\_back\\_to\\_the\\_fourth\\_century/](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/stations_of_the_cross_date_back_to_the_fourth_century/))

In 1342 the Franciscan Order was given custody of the Holy Sites along the "way". Their presence helped to ensure the safety of pilgrims who had endured years of perilous travel during the crusades.

Besides its roots in the experience of the pilgrims to the Holy Land, the Stations of the Cross grew out of medieval devotion to the passion of Jesus. Dire conditions in Medieval Europe (wars, prolonged economic hardship, famine and plagues), following the collapse of the Roman Empire, produced overwhelming fear and anxiety in the population. These "realities" made Christians more focused on the humanity of Jesus and details of his life. The faithful

sought the help of Jesus Christ with a special focus on the *incarnate* Jesus.

The Church today reminds us that such devotions play a critical role in encountering the person of Jesus. In contemplating the mystery of

Popular piety should be permeated by: a **biblical spirit**, since it is impossible to imagine a Christian prayer without direct or indirect reference to Sacred Scripture; a **liturgical spirit** if it is to dispose properly for or echo the mysteries celebrated in the liturgical actions; an **ecumenical spirit** in consideration of the sensibilities and traditions of other Christians without, however, being restricted by inappropriate inhibitions.

-- *Directory for Popular Piety and Devotions*

Christ's Passion we can perceive Christ's boundless love and the extent of his solidarity with human suffering: Jesus

*betrayed and abandoned, scourged and crowned with thorns, crucified between thieves, taken down from the cross and buried in the earth, and mourned by his friends and disciples. (cf Directory of Popular Piety and the Liturgy no.79, 2001).*

### **STATIONS OF THE CROSS, DEVOTIONS & POPULAR PIETY**

Reflecting upon devotional practice in general, Pope Paul VI reminded us in his Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (nos. 100 & 101) that popular piety *manifests a thirst for God which only the poor and the simple can know and that it makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief.*

The devotion and practice of the Way of the Cross continues to inspire Christians, drawing them more deeply into the mysteries of our faith. Contemplating Jesus' Passion and Death, particularly during Lent, parishes often offer the devotional practice of the "Stations".

In concert with Church teaching, parishes, when preparing for devotional practice, ought be familiar with *Directory on Popular Piety and Devotion* (2001). Acknowledging the central role of the liturgy, this document also reminds the faithful that the spiritual life is also nourished by the pious

practices of Christian people. This notwithstanding, the *Directory* provides some specific considerations for the practice of the Stations of the Cross.

Examining no. 133 of the *Directory* we are reminded that the Way of the Cross is multi-layered: *the idea of life being a journey or pilgrimage; as a passage from earthly exile to our true home in Heaven; the deep desire to be conformed to the Passion of Christ; the demands of following Christ, which imply that his disciples must follow behind the Master, daily carrying their own crosses.*

In paragraph no. 134 we see that the *traditional 14 stations may be retained as the typical form*, but there are many different options provided, including the Way of the Cross prepared by Pope John Paul II (1991) which is more reflective of the events of Christ's Passion as related in the Gospels. We see this reinforced in the *Directory* (no.135) when it says, *It is always preferable to choose texts resonant with the biblical narrative and*

*written in a clear simple style.*

While we may have not always considered this, *hymns, silence, procession and reflective pauses wisely integrated in a balanced manner, contribute significantly to*

#### **Stations of the Cross**

Pope John Paul II, Good Friday, 1991  
Roman Colosseum

1. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
2. Jesus, Betrayed by Judas, Arrested
3. Jesus Condemned by Sanhedrin
4. Jesus Denied by Peter
5. Jesus Judged by Pilate
6. Jesus Scourged and Crowned with Thorns
7. Jesus Bears the Cross
8. Jesus Helped by Simon the Cyrenian to Carry the Cross
9. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem
10. Jesus is Crucified
11. Jesus Promises His Kingdom to Good Thief
12. Jesus Speaks to His Mother and Disciple
13. Jesus Dies on the Cross
14. Jesus is Placed in Tomb

*obtaining the spiritual fruits of the pious exercise (no.135)*

Recognizing, of course, that the Way of the Cross is intimately connected with the Passion of Christ, this devotion must be seen in the context of the Passion, Death **and Resurrection** of Christ. We are reminded of the *expectation of the resurrection in faith and hope; following the example of the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem which ends . . . with a commemoration of the Lord's resurrection. (No. 134)*

### **HOW TO PRAY THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS**

The Way of the Cross helps the faithful make, in spirit, a pilgrimage to the chief scenes of Christ's suffering and death. Focusing on every station, with certain prayers at each, we are invited to devoutly meditate on these various events of Jesus' journey. This public prayer and meditation is enhanced when music is integrally woven into this liturgical devotion. While the *Stabat Mater* is commonly used, we are encouraged to use a wide repertoire of hymns (cf Text Insert on this page). Hymns chosen should speak about the life of Jesus, what it means to be a disciple, or what faith involves.

In reading the descriptions of each station, proclaiming scripture readings as part of the devotion, as well as offering prayer/meditations on each station, it is helpful to have more than one voice speaking. In this way we demonstrate that each station has three dimensions: the

Word of God, the meditation, and the prayer of those who are assembled.

### **Hymn Suggestions for Stations of the Cross from CBWIII**

#### ***Beginning of Stations***

Take Up Your Cross (353)  
When Jesus Comes to Be Baptized (350)  
Come and Journey with a Saviour (476)  
We Walk By Faith (495)  
No Greater Love (599)

***Between Stations:*** Choose one or two hymns, using the refrain, one verse, and again the refrain, or simply the refrain

Be With Me, Lord (357)  
Have Mercy On Me (364, 1-10)  
Behold the Wood (379)  
The Lord Jesus Christ (436)  
Eye Has Not Seen (482, 1-4)  
Acclamations for Stations of Cross (355/356)  
Jesus, Remember Me (380)  
O Lord, Hear My Prayer (491)  
Salvator Mundi (370 *Taize*)

#### ***Following the dismissal***

Great God of Mercy (361)  
Jesus, Lord (365)  
O Cross of Christ (368)  
Tree of Life (373)  
The Lord is Now Exalted (377)  
When I Behold the Wondrous Cross (382)  
O Jesus, Lord, Increase Our Faith (411)  
Only This I Want (516)  
Lift High the Cross (435)

**Baptism and Stations of Cross:** When we do pray the Stations of the Cross, we can also connect them with the baptismal character of Lent if we place the stations themselves in the context of the whole paschal mystery. In Baptism we are plunged into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, and our baptismal commitment includes a willingness to give our life for others as Jesus did. Recalling his passion and death can remind us that we, too, may be called to suffer in order to be faithful to the call of God. (cf [www.catholiclife.org](http://www.catholiclife.org))  
*When Jesus comes to be baptized, He leaves the hidden years behind, the years of safety and of peace, to bear the sins of humankind (#350, CBWIII)*