

# THE WAY OF THE CROSS

As we trace Jesus' terrible journey, we should walk from room to room in our home or backyard. The steps we take are not taken alone. Two thousand years ago Jesus walked the path of betrayal, mocking and death upon a cross. He was tested and not found wanting. Nothing we can experience can exceed what he experienced. He walks with us and he asks us to walk with him.

## 1. JESUS IS JUDGED AND CONDEMNED TO DEATH

**Scripture reading** *Matthew 27: 1 and 2 and 15 to 26*

**Reflection** King Herod and the temple rulers agreed that Jesus should die. Caught in the middle was Pilate. His past record had serious errors. He didn't need this local squabble. The truth was, Jesus was innocent. But the crowd demanded a murderer instead of Jesus. Protect your power and influence. So Pilate played it safe.

Playing it safe sometimes works, but when we choose expediency we suffer shame and guilt. The blessing is that God is always there, to love and to forgive us.

**Prayer** *We pray for all political leaders, diplomats and government officials, that they may work for the common good and pursue peace and justice for all. For every occasion when people hurt others. For those in prison and those on trial in the courts. And we pray for ourselves, when we judge and condemn others. When we are judged and condemned. Help us to know the humility of Jesus. Lord, hear our prayer.*

## 2. JESUS IS MOCKED AND GIVEN THE CROSS

**Scripture reading** *Matthew 27: 27 to 31*

**Reflection** What a pathetic sight! Bruises all over his body, blood on his face from his crown of thorns. "Hail, King of the Jews" the soldiers yelled. Don't blame them. They were just doing their jobs. Today, this event would be revolting. But, like the soldiers, because of our ignorance or selfishness, we too mock his kingdom. Like the soldiers, we scourge him. Every time we hurt someone, every time we fail to help someone, we put a crown of thorns on his head. God is hurt.

**Prayer** *We pray for all who serve and protect; police, firefighters, paramedics, our armed forces. For all who hate and for all who are hated. For all who mock others and for all who are mocked. For all victims of violence and for those who are violent to others. For those who live under oppression of any kind. And we pray for ourselves, when we insult or hurt others; when we are hurt or humiliated; that we may not be indifferent to the hurt of others. Lord, hear our prayer.*

## 3. JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME

**Narration** *Not only did the soldiers mock Jesus, they painfully scourged his body. Then they thrust the weight of a rough wooden cross on his sagging shoulders. Step after step, he begins the tortuous journey along the cobbled streets of the holy city. Without warning, his knees buckle and he falls.*

**Reflection** Bloodied and exhausted, he lies there under the weight of a cross and the despair of what has happened. He was chastised so we might have peace. He was mocked so we might have hope. He was betrayed so we might be forgiven. On his back was laid all the fear, shame, guilt and sin of every one of us. He fell because its weight was overwhelming.

**Prayer** *We pray for those suffering from chronic pain. For those living with cancer, aids, Covid-19 and other diseases. For those who are physically or mentally exhausted. For those who are hungry, especially children in Canada. For those facing any kind of failure in their lives. For those who care for the sick, the weak and the frail elderly. For doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers. For caregivers of any kind, especially family and friends. And for ourselves, when we face sickness or disease, weakness, fatigue, chronic pain, social isolation; when we experience failure of any kind. Lord, hear our prayer.*

#### 4. SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS CARRY THE CROSS

**Scripture reading** *Mark 15: 21 and 22*

**Reflection** Simon was not a volunteer. He was called out of the crowd by a soldier - the only one to share the burden of the cross with Jesus. How often do we bear someone else's cross? Do we always wait to be asked? Or do we reach out the hand of love? Whenever we respond to a need with kindness, we make a difference to God. It is better to volunteer, but if we are drafted by God, we take up the cross of Jesus and carry it by doing his work in the world.

**Prayer** *We pray for the people of Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Afghanistan and others in conflict. For the people in every land who seek freedom, security and justice. For the millions of refugees in camps. For international understanding that fosters mutual respect. For all who are disadvantaged by colour, race, gender or religious beliefs. For the removal of all barriers of bias between people. And for ourselves, that we may be free from prejudice of any kind; that self-love may not hinder us from caring for and serving others. Lord, hear our prayer.*

#### 5. VERONICA WIPES THE BROW OF JESUS

**Narration** *The men who were his friends ran away in fear for their lives, but the women who believed in Jesus stayed with him. Loyalty and compassion triumphed over despair. Tradition says that the woman whom Jesus healed of a blood disease was named Veronica. Despite the danger to herself, she gently wipes the blood from his sweating face. No-one else seems to care. But she does.*

**Reflection** Exposure to cruelty tends to reveal the true measure of a person. The crowd revealed mostly cowardice, apathy or a 'let's party' attitude. But it can also bring out compassion and courage. Out of the crowd came one woman - Veronica. Never mind the soldiers. Never mind the crowd. Take a risk. Do something - for the Lord. Every day we have to make choices. Turn our backs on evil, or take the risk and respond in love. Choose.

**Prayer** *We pray with thanks for those who see with God's eyes and see beauty and love where others see only ugliness and squalor. For those who feel unattractive to themselves and others. For all those who make others feel disliked or rejected. For those who reach out to others with acceptance and affection. And we pray for ourselves, that we may see beauty where God sees beauty, that our hearts may be open to compassion, our minds to console, our voices to comfort, our hands to serve and heal. Lord, hear our prayer.*

#### 6. JESUS FALLS FOR A SECOND TIME

**Narration** *Each step makes the heavy beam fall like a sledgehammer on his aching back. His ears are bombarded by the laughter and insults of the crowd who, like angry bees, push and jostle him. He goes down again, this time face forward, cracking his elbows and knees on the stone walkway. He has fallen for the second time.*

**Reflection** They hailed him as a king. Now he is despised and rejected, a pitiful excuse for a human being. A common criminal, carrying his cross. The paradox is striking. The Centurion's power and the utter degradation of one powerless man. Our hearts know the truth. It is our weakness he carries, our sins he bears, our burdens, yours and mine. His aching muscles are ours. His battered bones are ours.

**Prayer** *We pray that mercy will always temper justice. For those imprisoned seeking release or pardon. For parole boards and those responsible for official mercy. For those who suffer from stress and mental and spiritual illness. For those who suffer with Alzheimer's and their families and friends. And we pray for ourselves, that we may openly and honestly seek forgiveness from those whom we have hurt and sincerely forgive those who have hurt us. That we see the pain in others and reach out to them in love. Lord, hear our prayer.*

## 7. JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

**Scripture reading** *Luke 23: 27 to 31*

**Reflection** Two groups of women followed Jesus on this day; first, the faithful followers. He didn't talk to them. He just looked at them with love. But others, excited by what was happening, meant well, but they were merely spectators who hadn't taken his teachings to heart. Jesus tells them not to weep for him but for themselves and their children. How often are we like the women of Jerusalem? Lacking true caring for those who are wounded in body, mind or spirit?

**Prayer** *We pray for women everywhere, that they may be treated as equals. For those who watch their loved ones go to war. For those who grieve their loved ones killed or wounded as a result of violence, that peace may replace conflict. In penitence and sorrow for each time right is overcome by might; when the powerful are given respect while the disadvantaged remain powerless; when the poor are ignored or oppressed. For the liberation of all persons. And we pray for ourselves, that the Holy Spirit will give us the mind of Jesus so that we will actively care for all those in need and respect the dignity of every human being. Lord, hear our prayer.*

## 8. JESUS FALLS FOR THE THIRD TIME

**Narration** *With Simon helping, the grim parade reaches the old quarry where the Romans hold crucifixions. Each breath is a struggle ... each step a stumble ... each muscle shrieks pain ... his foot catches a cobblestone ... his wobbling knees explode ... he collapses in a heap. Jesus falls a third time.*

**Reflection** He lies on the cold ground, not guilty of anything but love. When you love someone, you give of yourself, so there should be less of yourself than there was at the start. Yet you feel more. You feel you really are the person you were meant to be. In the prostrate form of Jesus, we see the greatest love the world has ever known. Love for you, love for me, love for all of us together by name. He lies there, battered and bleeding ... for us.

**Prayer** *We pray for those who experience moral weakness. For those whose faith is filled with doubts. For those who have given up hope. For those who have reached the limit of their physical, mental and spiritual strength. For those who counsel the despairing or suicidal. For those who offer comfort to the dying or bereaved. For chaplains who minister to those in hospitals or prisons. And we pray for ourselves, when we experience spiritual failure; when everything seems hopeless; that we may have the patience and resolve that Jesus had on his long, painful march to death. Lord, hear our prayer.*

## 9. JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

**Scripture readings** *John 19: 17 and 18 and Mark 15: 23 and 24*

**Reflection** The soldiers did not waste anything, so they threw dice to divide his clothes. Finally Jesus had absolutely nothing. Yet his loss gave us new life. By his death, he conquered death. By his love, he defeated hate. By forgiving his executioners, he destroyed guilt and shame. To live for yourself alone is hardly worth living. But if you live with Jesus, you are fully and freely alive, as you were meant to be.

**Prayer** *We pray for all who are exposed to ridicule, shame or humiliation. For battered women and children. For women who are raped and children who are victims of violence and sexual abuse. For those who degrade and humiliate others by their words or actions. For those who exploit others racially, mentally, intellectually, socially. And we pray for ourselves, when we feel ashamed, guilty or abused by race, gender, colour, social or mental status, that we may live with healing and freedom. Lord, hear our prayer.*

## 10. JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

**Scripture reading** *Mark 15: 25 to 32*

**Reflection** “Father, forgive them.” These words promise us the grace for which this tragic scheme is the price tag. The soldiers hammering in the nails. “Father, forgive them.” The crowd that yelled “Crucify him!” - his reply - “Father, forgive them.” Crucifixion is not pretty, yet in this act of love and obedience we see the beauty of what God is like and what we could be like. Every time we turn away from God we are there at the cross, and Jesus says “Father, forgive them.”

**Prayer** *In awe and gratitude, we stand before the cross. God loved the world so much that he gave up his son to suffering and death. So we pray for those who destroy that which is good, true and sacred. For those who suppress the Good News of Jesus crucified. For those who are persecuted for their faith and for their persecutors. And we pray for ourselves, when we are called to stand up for our faith; that we follow the way of the cross in our lives so that sin and suffering can be broken on the rock of love Lord, hear our prayer.*

## 11. JESUS GREETES HIS MOTHER

**Scripture reading** *John 19: 25 to 27*

**Reflection** There were three Marys at the foot of the cross ... Mary his friend ... Mary his aunt ... and Mary his mother. Shock and sorrow were tearing them apart. For Mary his mother, there he was, nailed on the cross, his suffering wracking her body with sobs. In compassion, he asks one of his disciples to take care of her. So we must all care for our brothers and sisters, from the starving children in Africa to the homeless man sleeping on a grate in Toronto. All have real needs of body, mind and spirit.

**Prayer** *We give thanks for the love of Mary, the mother of Jesus. We pray for our own mothers, fathers and grandparents, and we name them now in our minds and hearts. For the love and joy they have given us, and in sorrow for the ways we hurt them. For those still living and those who have died and are at rest. For the children for whom we are parents, that they may grow in wisdom and stature and in favour with God, themselves and others. And we pray for ourselves, that we may experience the love of Jesus and Mary in all our relationships. Lord, hear our prayer.*

## 12. JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

**Scripture reading** *Matthew 27: 45 to 51*

**Reflection** All of them say “It is finished.” The soldiers, the chief priests, Pilate, the crowd. The disciples. But they were all wrong. These words of Jesus on the cross mean “It is accomplished.” Everything needed for our salvation is in place. So Jesus cried, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. IT IS FINISHED.”

**Prayer** *We pray for the dying, particularly those dying from COVID-19, in their last hours, in gratitude because through Jesus no-one need ever die alone or without hope. For those who care for the dying, families, friends, doctors, nurses and other caregivers. For hospices and those who minister in them. For those who have never met Jesus and need our prayers and witness. And we pray for ourselves, that we may truly know Jesus and share his love, his risen and eternal life. Lord, hear our prayer.*

### 13. JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

**Scripture reading** *John 19: 31 to 34*

**Reflection** Jesus hangs lifeless on the cross. Two men, Joseph and Nicodemus, whose love wins out over fear, take his body down from the cross, anoint it and wrap it in a cloth. But even in death, Jesus stands for justice and the homeland of love. And surely we believe that the cry for justice will not be stilled. That Jesus is Lord. That justice must prevail. And that we must work to make it happen.

**Prayer** *We pray for the dead, especially those we have known and loved. We remember them in our hearts and minds. We give thanks for all who have helped to make us better persons. We pray for those who mourn, especially those whose grief has disrupted their lives or left them lonely, and for all those who care for the bereaved. And we pray for ourselves, that we will not forget that Jesus gave his life for us; that by his Spirit we may be strengthened to give ourselves in caring for others. Lord, hear our prayer.*

### 14. JESUS IS BURIED IN THE TOMB

**Scripture reading** *Mark 15: 42b to 47*

**Reflection** They laid to rest The Light of the World. But his light was not extinguished. There was still God's promise, and on the third day he rose from the dead. The Light is the resurrected Jesus, a light which the darkness does not like, can never understand and is never able to put out. If we believe only in a buried Jesus, there is no light for us, just the darkness of our own selfish spirits. If we believe in a resurrected Jesus, the light shines even when we reject him, because he still forgives and loves us.

**Prayer** *Lord, by your death you have reconciled us to you. When we pity ourselves and think we make great sacrifices for others; when our patience wears thin and we are ready to give up; when we get angry and wish to retaliate against our enemies; when we suffer pain of body, anguish of the mind and despair of the spirit; when we are afraid to stand for that which is honourable and true; strengthen us with the courage you showed on the way to your cross. Lord, hear our prayer.*

