



Home in the Word

Way of the Cross

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Led By His Holiness Pope Francis

Colosseum - Rome, 14 April 2017

Introduction:

The hour has now come. Jesus' journey along the dusty roads of Galilee and Judea, an endless encounter with afflicted bodies and hearts, a journey driven by his urgent need to proclaim the Kingdom, ends here, today. On Golgotha. Today the cross bars the way. Jesus will go no further.

He can go no further!

Here the love of God reveals its full measure, measure beyond measure.

Today the love of the Father, who wills that all be saved in his Son, goes to the extreme, where

words fail, where we find ourselves bewildered, our piety overwhelmed by the superabundance of God's thoughts and plans.

On Golgotha, contrary to all appearances, what is at stake is life, and grace and peace. Here what counts is not the kingdom of evil, which we know all too well, but the triumph of love.

Beneath the cross, too, what is at stake is our world with all its failings and sufferings, its pleas and protests, all those cries that in our day rise up to God from lands of dire poverty and war, from boats teeming with migrants...

How many are the tears, how great is the misery in the chalice that the Son drinks for our sake.

How many are the tears, how great is the misery, yet none of this will be lost in the sea of time.

Instead it will be taken up by him, to be transfigured in the mystery of a love which vanquishes all evil.

Golgotha speaks to us of God's unshakeable fidelity to our humanity.

A birth takes place there!

We need the courage to say that all this is about the joy of the Gospel!

Unless we recognize this truth, we remain trapped in the toils of suffering and death. And we fail to let Christ's passion bear fruit in our lives.

Prayer:

Lord, our vision is dimmed. How can we walk this far with you?

“Mercy” is your name. But this name is madness.

May the old wineskins of our hearts burst asunder!

Brighten our vision with the good news of the Gospel, in the hour when we stand beneath the cross of your Son.

Then we will be able to celebrate “the breadth and length and height and depth” (Eph 3,18) of the love of Christ, with hearts comforted and flooded with light.

FIRST STATION

Jesus is condemned to death

From the Gospel according to Luke

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away to their council (22,66).

From the Gospel according to Mark

They all condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him: “Prophecy!” And the guards received him with blows (14,64-65).

Meditation:

The members of the Sanhedrin did not need a lengthy discussion to come to a decision. The matter had long been settled. Jesus must die!

These too were the thoughts of those who sought to hurl Jesus from the brow of the hill that day when, in the synagogue of Nazareth, he unrolled the scroll and applied to himself the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me... to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4,18-19).

When he healed the paralytic at the pool of Bethzatha and inaugurated the Sabbath of God, which brings freedom from every form of enslavement, the murmuring and threats against his life were already beginning to mount (cf. Jn 5,1-18).

At the very end of the road, as he went up to Jerusalem for the Passover, the trap was now inexorably set. He could no longer escape his enemies (cf. Jn 11,45-57).

But our recollection must go back even further. Starting in Bethlehem, at the very time of his birth, when Herod had decreed that he must die. The henchmen of the usurper king had put the children of Bethlehem to the sword. That time Jesus had fled their fury. But only for a while.

Already his life hung in the balance. In the sobbing of Rachel mourning her children who are no more, we hear a prophecy of the sorrow that Simeon will foretell to Mary (cf. Mt 2,16-18; Lk 2,34-35).

Payer:

Lord Jesus, beloved Son, you came to us, doing good in our midst and leading back to life all those who dwell in the shadow of death. You peer into the abyss of our hearts.

We claim to be on the side of good and to desire life. But we are sinners and accomplices of death.

We call ourselves your disciples, but we take paths that lead far from your thoughts, your justice and your mercy.

Do not abandon us to our violent ways.

Do not lose patience with us.

Deliver us from evil!

Pater noster (*Our Father...*)

“My people, what evil have I done to you?

How have I offended you? Answer me.

SECOND STATION

Jesus is denied by Peter

From the Gospel according to Luke

About an hour later, still another kept insisting: “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean”. But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are saying”. At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times”. And he went out and wept bitterly (22,59-62).

Meditation:

Around a fire, in the courtyard of the Sanhedrin, Peter and a few others warmed themselves in those cold hours of the night, amid a flurry of people coming and going. Inside, Jesus’ fate is about to be decided as he confronts his accusers. They will ask for his death.

Like a swelling tide, hostility is increasing all about. Just as a wick takes flame, hatred flares up and spreads. Soon the screaming crowd will demand that Pilate pardon Barabbas and condemn Jesus.

It is hard to say you are the friend of someone condemned to death without a chill of fear.

Peter's intrepid fidelity fails before the suspicious question of the servant-girl who kept the gate of that place.

Avowing himself a disciple of the Galilean rabbi would mean putting fidelity to Jesus ahead of his own life! When this kind of courage is demanded, truth has a hard time finding witnesses... That is the way we are; many of us prefer lies to the truth. Peter is a man like us. Three times he betrays the Lord. Then he meets the gaze of Jesus. And his tears pour forth, bitter-sweet, like the water that cleanses a stain.

Soon, in a few days, around another fire, on the shore of the lake, Peter will acknowledge his risen Lord, who will entrust to him the care of his sheep. Peter will learn how boundless are the words of forgiveness that the Risen Lord pronounces over all our betrayals. And he will embrace a fidelity which, from that moment onwards, will allow him to accept his own death as an offering in union with the death of Christ.

Payer:

Lord, our God, you chose Peter, the disciple who denied you and accepted your forgiveness, to be charged with guiding your flock.

Fill our hearts with trust and joy in the knowledge that, in you, we can overcome the hurdles of fear and infidelity.

Taught by Peter, may all your disciples bear witness to your way of regarding our faults. May our moments of harshness and despair never render vain the resurrection of your Son!

Pater noster (*Our Father...*)

Christ, put to death for our sins,
Christ, risen for our life,
We beg you: have mercy on us.

THIRD STATION
Jesus and Pilate

From the Gospel according to Mark

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and the scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified (15,1.3.15)

From the Gospel according to Matthew

So when Pilate saw he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying: "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves!" (27,24).

From the book of the prophet Isaiah

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (53,6).

Meditation:

The Rome of Caesar Augustus, bearer of civilization, whose legions saw it as their mission to grant vanquished peoples the benefits of its just order.

Rome too was present at the passion of Jesus, in the person of Pilate, the representative of the Emperor, the guarantor of law and justice in a foreign land.

Yet the same Pilate who declares that he finds no fault in Jesus is the one who sanctions his death sentence. In the praetorium, where Jesus' trial takes place, the truth becomes all too clear. The justice of the pagans is no better than that of the Jewish Sanhedrin!

Jesus, the Just One who mysteriously takes upon himself the bloodthirsty thoughts of the human heart, reconciles both Jews and pagans. For the moment, he does this by making them equally complicit in his death. Yet the time is coming, and is already at hand, when this Just One will reconcile them in another way, through his cross and the forgiveness to be bestowed on all, Jews

and pagans alike, whereby both will be healed of their baseness and set free from their violent ways.

There is but one condition for receiving this gift. It is to acknowledge the innocence of the truly Innocent One, the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sin of the world. It is to renounce the inner presumption that murmurs: "I am innocent of the blood of that man". It is to declare ourselves guilty in the confidence that an infinite love embraces everyone, Jews and pagans alike, and that God calls all men and women to become his children.

Payer:

Lord our God, in looking upon Jesus, handed over and condemned to death, we can only attempt to excuse ourselves and accuse others. For all too long, Christians have laid the blame of your condemnation on the shoulders of your people Israel. For all too long, we have failed to realize the need to accept our own complicity in sin, so as to be saved by the blood of Jesus crucified.

Grant that we may acknowledge in your Son the Innocent One, the only innocent man in all of history. For he agreed to be "made sin for us" (cf. 2 Cor 5,21), so that through him

you might find us once more, restored to the innocence with which you created us and in which you make us your sons and daughters.

Pater noster (*Our Father...*)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

FOURTH STATION

Jesus, King of Glory

From the Gospel according to Mark

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace; and they called together the whole cohort. They clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (15,16-18).

From the book of the prophet Isaiah

He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity, as one from whom others hide their faces. He was despised and we held him of no account. Yet he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. And we accounted him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted (53,2-4).

Meditation:

The banality of evil. How many men, women and even children are victims of violence, abuse, torture and murder, in every time and place.

Jesus does not seek shelter in his divinity. He becomes part of the awful flood of sorrows that man inflicts upon man. He knows the abandonment of the downtrodden and those utterly forsaken.

Can the sufferings of yet one more innocent person really help us?

Jesus is one of us, but first he is the beloved Son of the Father, who comes to fulfil all righteousness by his obedience.

Suddenly the tables are turned. The scorn and contempt of Jesus' torturers reveal to us – in an absolutely paradoxical way – the unfathomable truth of his unique kingship, revealed as a love that seeks only the will of his Father and his desire that all should be saved. “You do not ask for sacrifice and offerings... Instead, here am I. In the scroll of the book it stands written that I should do your will” (Ps 40,7-9).

That is the message of this hour of Good Friday. There is but one glory in this world and in the next: the glory of knowing and doing the Father's will. None of us can aim for a greater dignity than that of being a son or daughter in

the Son who became obedient for us, even unto death on a cross.

Payer:

Lord our God, on this holy day that brings your revelation to fulfilment, we ask you to tear down every idol in us and in our world. You know the sway they have over our minds and our hearts. Tear down in us every deceitful illusion of success and of glory.

Tear down in us the images we constantly make for ourselves of a God of our own liking, a distant God, so unlike the face revealed in the covenant and shown today in Jesus. A God beyond our every hope and expectation. For we confess that in Jesus we see “the radiance of your glory” (cf. Heb 1,3).

Grant that we may enter into the eternal joy that leads us to acclaim Jesus, robed in purple and crowned with thorns, as the king of glory. For it is of him that the Psalm sings: “O gates, lift high your heads; grow higher, ancient doors. Let him enter, the king of glory” (24,9).

Pater noster (Our Father...)

O gates, lift high your heads,
Grow higher, ancient doors.
Let him enter, the King of glory.

FIFTH STATION

Jesus carries his cross

From the Book of Lamentations

Look and see, all you who pass by, if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger (1,12).

From Psalm 146

He is happy who is helped by Jacob's God, whose hope is in the Lord his God... It is he who sets prisoners free... who raises up those who are bowed down... The Lord protects the stranger and upholds the widow and the orphan (vv. 5.7.8.9).

Meditation:

Along the rocky way to Golgotha, Jesus did not carry the cross like a trophy! He was completely unlike the heroes of our imagination who triumph over their evil foes.

Step after step, ever more slowly, he went his way, his body weighed down, his flesh bruised and his legs faltering beneath the wood of the cross.

Generation after generation, the Church has meditated on this way, interspersed with obstacles and falls.

Jesus falls, he gets up, then falls again. He resumes his gruelling journey, most likely under the lashings of his military escort, for that is how the condemned of this world are treated and mistreated.

He, who raised the sick from their beds, healed the crippled woman, raised the daughter of Jairus from her deathbed, made the lame walk, now lies sprawled in the dust.

The Most High has fallen to the ground.

Let us fix our gaze on Jesus. Through him, the Most High teaches us that he is at the same time – incredible as it is – the most lowly, ever ready to come down to us, and to descend even lower if necessary, so that no one will be lost in the depths of his or her misery.

Payer:

Lord our God, you descend into the depths of our night, setting no limits to your abasement, for that is how you come down to the earth, so often thankless and at times devastated, of our lives.

Grant that your Church may testify that the Most High and the Most Lowly are, in you, a single face. May she bring to all who have been brought low the good news of the Gospel: that there can be no fall untouched by

your mercy; no loss or abyss so deep that you cannot find one who has gone astray.

Pater noster (*Our Father...*)

Behold, Lord, I come to do your will.

SIXTH STATION

Jesus and Simon of Cyrene

From the Gospel according to Luke

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus (23,26).

From the Gospel according to Matthew

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? When was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? When was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” (25,37-39).

Meditation:

Jesus stumbles along the way, his back crushed beneath the weight of the cross. Yet he must not stop but keep going, for Golgotha, the sinister “Place of the Skull” outside the walls of the city, is the destination of the band of soldiers who urge him on.

A strong-armed man passes by at that moment. He appears to have nothing to do with what is happening. He is returning home, completely unaware of the events surrounding the rabbi Jesus, when the guards force him to carry the cross.

What could he have known about that convict driven by the guards to his execution? What could he have known about the one whose appearance was “so marred, beyond human semblance”, like the suffering servant of Isaiah? We are told nothing of his surprise, and perhaps his initial refusal, or of the pity that he felt. The Gospel simply mentions his name: Simon of Cyrene. Yet the Gospel has kept alive the name of this Libyan and his simple gesture of help, to teach us that, in easing the pain of someone condemned to death, Simon eased the pain of Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus, who crossed Simon’s path in the form of a slave, for our sake, for his sake, for the salvation of the world. Without his even knowing it.

Payer:

Lord our God, you have revealed to us that in each of the poor, the naked, the imprisoned, the thirsty, it is you who stand before us, it is you whom we welcome, visit, clothe and give to drink. “I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Mt 35-36). The mystery of your encounter with our humanity! No one is excluded from this encounter, if he or she chooses to show compassion.

We present to you, as a holy offering, all those acts of kindness, of acceptance, of commitment, that are carried out daily in this world. Deign to acknowledge them as the truth of our humanity, which speaks louder than all acts of rejection and hatred. Deign to bless the men and woman of compassion who give you glory, even if they do not yet know your name.

Pater noster (*Our Father...*)

Christ, put to death for our sins,
Christ, risen for our life,
We beg you, have mercy on us.

SEVENTH STATION

Jesus and the Daughters of Jerusalem

From the Gospel according to Luke

A number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children... For if they do this when the

wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”
(23,27-28.31)

Meditation:

The tears that Jesus entrusts to the daughters of Jerusalem as an act of compassion, these tears of women are always present in this world.

They fall silently down their cheeks. And undoubtedly, even more often, they fall unseen in the heart, like the tears of blood spoken of by Catherine of Siena.

Not that women alone should weep, as if it were their lot to grieve, passive and helpless, as part of a history that men alone are called to write.

Their grief embraces all those tears shed quietly and without fanfare in a world where there is much to weep for. Tears of terror-stricken children and of those wounded on battlefields crying out for a mother, the tears of the sick and dying, alone on the threshold of the unknown. Tears of dismay falling on the face of this world, which was created on the first day for tears of joy, in the shared rejoicing of man and woman.

Etty Hillesum, that courageous woman of Israel who remained undaunted amid the firestorm of Nazi persecution, defended to the last the goodness of life. She whispers to us the secret that she grasped at the end of her road: that there are tears crying out for consolation on God's

own face, as he weeps for the misery of his children. Amid the hell in which the world had been plunged, she dared to say to God in her prayer: "I will try to help you!" What courage, at once so womanly and so divine!

Payer:

Lord our God, God of tenderness and pity, God of utter love and faithfulness, teach us in happy times not to scorn the tears of the poor who cry to you and seek our help. Teach us not to pass them by with indifference. Teach us to have the courage to weep with them. Teach us also, in the night of our own sufferings, of our loneliness and disappointments, to hear the word of grace that you spoke to us on the mountain: "Blessed are those who weep, for they will be comforted" (Mt 5,4)

Pater noster (*Our Father...*)

Christ, put to death for our sins,
Christ, risen for our life,
We beg you, have mercy on us.

EIGHTH STATION

Jesus is stripped of his garments

From the Gospel according to John

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier (19,23).

From the book of Job

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there” (1,21).

Meditation:

Jesus’ disgraced body is stripped. Exposed to the derision and contempt of all eyes. His body, broken and covered with welts, readied for the ultimate punishment of crucifixion. Humanly, what could any of us do but lower our eyes in order not to add to his disgrace?

Yet the spirit comes to aid us amid our dismay and bewilderment. He teaches us to understand God’s language, the language of *kénosis*, the abasement that leads God to come to us wherever we find ourselves. The Orthodox theologian Christos Yannaras tells us of this language that God speaks: “the language of *kénosis*: the child Jesus lying naked in the manger; naked in the river as he receives baptism like a slave; hanging on the tree of the cross, naked, like a common criminal. In all this, he showed his love for us”.

When we enter into this mystery of grace, we can once more open our eyes and gaze on the broken body of Jesus. Then we glimpse what our eyes cannot see: that his nakedness radiates the same splendour that brightened his garments at the moment of the Transfiguration.

Light that dispels all darkness.

The irresistible light of love to the end.

Payer:

Lord our God, we set before your eyes the immense throngs of men and women who are victims of torture, the appalling mass of mangled bodies, buffeted by blows and trembling with fear, awaiting death in grim basements and cells.

We beg you, hear their cry.

In the face of evil we are speechless and helpless.

Yet you know what we do not. You can find a way through the chaos and bleakness of evil. Even now, in the passion of your beloved Son, you can bring the light of the resurrection.

Pater noster (*Our Father...*)

Christ, put to death for our sins,

Christ, risen for our life,

We beg you, have mercy on us.

NINTH STATION

Jesus is crucified

From the Gospel according to Luke

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the crim-

inals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (23,33-34).

From the book of the prophet Isaiah

Upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed (53,5).

Meditation:

Truly God is where he shouldn't be!

The beloved Son, the Holy One of God, is now a body exposed on a cross of shame, abandoned to disgrace, between two criminals. A man of sorrows from whom one turns away; even as we turn away from so many scarred men and women we meet along the way.

The Word of God, in whom all things were created, is no more than a mute and suffering mass of flesh. All our human cruelty raged against him and triumphed. Truly, God is where he shouldn't be. Yet, at the same time, he is exactly where we need him to be!

He came to share his life with us. “Take!” So he kept saying, as he offered healing to the sick, forgiveness to wayward hearts and his body at the Passover meal.

Yet he ended up in our hands, in that realm of death and violence that never ceases to shock

us when we see it in the world all around us. It lurks in our own hearts as well. The monks killed in Tibhirine were well aware of this; to their prayer: “Disarm them!”, they added the petition: “and disarm us!”

The tender love of God had to visit this hell of ours. It was the only way to free us from evil. Jesus had to bring God’s infinite tenderness to the very heart of the world’s sin.

Only thus, by directly encountering God’s life, would death turn back in its tracks and fall, like a foe who, finding one stronger than himself, takes flight and disappears.

Payer:

Lord our God, receive our silent praise.

Like the kings who remained speechless before the Servant proclaimed in Isaiah’s prophecy (cf. 52,15), we remain silent and amazed before the Lamb slain for our life and for the life of the world.

We confess that by your wounds we have been healed. “What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord” (Ps 116,12.17).

Pater noster (Our Father...)

Christ, put to death for our sins,
Christ, risen for our life,
We beg you, have mercy on us.

TENTH STATION

The crucified Jesus is mocked

From the Gospel according to Luke

The leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” (23,35-39).

“If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread... If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: [his angels] will bear you up” (4,3.9-11).

Meditation:

Couldn't Jesus have come down from the cross? We hardly dare ask this question: doesn't the Gospel put it on the lips of the godless?

Yet it continues to haunt us, for we are still part of the world of temptation that Jesus confronted during his forty days in the wilderness, the prelude and inauguration of his ministry. “If you

are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread; hurl yourself from the height of the Temple, for God watches over his friends". Yet to the extent that we, who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, follow in his footsteps, the taunts of the evil one have no grip on us; they are powerless, their deceit is evident.

Only then do we discover the peremptory force of those words, "Was it not necessary...?" (Lk 24,26), that Jesus spoke patiently yet firmly to his disciples on the way to Emmaus.

"It was necessary" that Christ should accept this obedience and this powerlessness, in order to come to us in the powerlessness brought on by our disobedience.

We now begin to understand that "only a God who suffers can save", as Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a few months before his execution. In experiencing the power of evil to the full, he could sum up, in this simple and overwhelming truth, the profession of the Christian faith.

Payer:

Lord our God, who will set us free from the snares of worldly power? Who will free us from the tyranny of lies, which make us exalt the powerful and seek our own empty glory?

You alone can convert our hearts.

You alone can make us love the paths of humility.

You alone, who showed us that there is no victory if not in love, and that all else is but chaff scattered by the wind, a mirage which vanishes in the face of your truth.

We ask you, Lord, to dispel the untruths that seek to reign in our hearts and in our world.

Make us walk in your ways, so that the world may recognize the power of the cross.

Pater noster (*Our Father...*)

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

ELEVENTH STATION

Jesus and his Mother

From the Gospel according to John

Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalen. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother: "Woman, here is your son". Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother". And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home (19,25-27).

Meditation:

Mary too has reached the end of the journey. She has come to the day that the elderly Simeon had foretold. When he took the baby in his trembling arms, his thanksgiving gave way to mysterious words that wove together tragedy and hope, sorrow and salvation.

“This child”, he said, “is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed, so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Lk 2,34-35).

The visit of the angel had already made Mary’s heart thrill to the incredible news that God had chosen her life to bring about the new things promised to Israel: “what no eye has seen nor ear heard” (1 Cor 2,9; cf. Is 64,3). She had consented to that divine plan that would soon involve her flesh and then accompanied her Son, the fruit of her womb, along unforeseen paths.

During the uneventful days of Nazareth, and then during Jesus’ public life, when room needed to be made for another family, the family of the disciples, the strangers whom Jesus had made his brothers, sisters, mothers, she had treasured all these things in her heart. She had entrusted them to the great patience of her faith.

Today is the day of fulfilment. The sword that pierced her Son's side pierces her own heart. Mary too plunges into that bottomless trust whereby Jesus lives to the full his obedience to the Father. Standing there, she does not desert him. Stabat Mater. In the darkness, but with certainty, she knows that God keeps his promises. In the darkness, but with certainty, she knows that Jesus is both the promise and its fulfilment.

Payer:

Mary, Mother of God and woman of our race, as a mother you give us birth in him to whom you gave birth: sustain us in faith at the hour of darkness and teach us to hope against all hope.

Preserve the entire Church in fidelity and watchfulness, in imitation of your own fidelity, humbly docile to God's thoughts, which lead us where we would not go, that unite us, beyond anything we might imagine, to the work of salvation.

Pater noster (*Our Father...*) Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope.

TWELFTH STATION

Jesus dies on the cross

From the Gospel according to John

Jesus said, "I am thirsty". A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished". Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit... When the soldiers came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth" (19,28-30.33-35).

Meditation:

All is now fulfilled. Jesus' work is now complete. He had come forth from the Father on a mission of mercy. That mission was accomplished with a fidelity that led to the utmost bounds of love. All is ended. Jesus commends his spirit into the hands of the Father.

Everything seems to fall into the deadly silence that now descends on Golgotha and the three crosses that stand there. At the close of this day of the Passion, anyone passing that way could only think of the defeat of Jesus, the collapse of the hope that had heartened so many, comforted

the poor, lifted up the lowly and enabled the disciples to glimpse that the time had come when God would fulfil the promises proclaimed by the prophets. Now all that seemed lost, shattered, in ruins.

Yet amid that disappointment, the evangelist John has us fix our gaze on a minute detail, which he solemnly describes. Water and blood come forth from the side of Jesus on the cross. What wonder! The wound opened by the soldier's lance brings forth a flow of water and blood that speaks to us of life and birth.

The message is quite restrained, yet it speaks eloquently to hearts that remember. From Jesus' body comes forth the flood of water that the prophet had seen issuing from the Temple. A flood that swells and becomes a mighty river, whose waters restore and make fruitful all that they touch in their course. Did not Jesus one day speak of his body as the new Temple? The "blood of the covenant" accompanies that water. Did not Jesus speak of his flesh and blood as the food of eternal life?

Payer:

Lord Jesus, during these sacred days of the Paschal mystery, renew within us the joy of our baptism.

As we contemplate the water and the blood flowing from your side, teach us to recognize the wellspring of our new life, the love on which your Church is built, and the hope for which you have chosen us and sent us forth to share with the world.

Here is the wellspring of life that bathes the entire universe, welling up from Christ's wounded side. May our baptism be our only glory, as we give you thanks full of wonder.

Pater noster (*Our Father...*)

The Lamb that was slain
is worthy to receive power and wealth,
and wisdom and might,
and honour, glory and blessing,
for ever and ever.

THIRTEENTH STATION

Jesus is taken down from the cross

From the Gospel according to Luke

Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever been laid (23,53).

Meditation:

Signs of loving care and honour for the defiled and broken body of Jesus. A few men and

women gather at the foot of the cross. Joseph, a native of Arimathea, “a good and righteous man” (Lk 23,50) who, Saint Luke tells us, asked Pilate for the body. Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus by night, so Saint John adds. And some women, faithful to the end, who look on.

The Church’s contemplation of this scene has also included the Virgin Mary, who was surely present for this moment.

Mary, Mother of mercy, takes in her arms the body born of her flesh, which she has accompanied, lovingly and quietly, all through the years, like every mother who cares for her children.

Now the body she holds has expanded to the measure of her grief, to the measure of the new creation born of the passion of love that pierced the hearts of Son and Mother alike.

In the great silence that fell after the shouting of the soldiers, the insults of the passers-by and the commotion of the crucifixion, there are only signs of love and care, reverent caresses. Joseph lowers the body, which falls into his arms. He wraps it in a sheet, sets it in a newly-hewn tomb in the garden nearby.

Jesus is taken from the hands of his killers. Now, in death, he is once again in hands that treat him with tenderness and compassion.

The violence of murderous men has receded into the distance. Gentleness has returned to the place of execution.

The gentleness of God and those who are his own, those meek hearts that Jesus promised would one day inherit the earth. The primordial gentleness of creation, and of the man and woman made in the image of God. The gentleness of the end time, when every tear shall be wiped away and the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, for all flesh shall come to the knowledge of God (cf. Is 11,6.9).

Hymn to Mary (Hail Mary...)

O Mary, weep no more: your Son, our Lord, has fallen asleep in peace.

His Father, in glory, opens before him the gates of life!

O Mary, rejoice: the Risen Jesus has conquered death!

Pater noster (Our Father...)

I will lie down in your peace, Lord, and sleep comes at once.

I will arise, for you are my strength.

FOURTEENTH STATION

Jesus is laid in the tomb and the women

From the Gospel according to Luke

The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how the body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments (23,55-56).

Meditation:

The women have departed. The one whom they had accompanied with constant care along the roads of Galilee is no more. This evening he leaves them alone, in the company only of their thoughts of the tomb and the shroud in which he lies. A scant yet precious recollection of those excitement-filled days now past. Solitude and silence. The Sabbath draws near, bidding Israel to rest from work, even as God did when his work of creation was finished, brought to completion with his blessing.

Today has to do with another kind of fulfillment, at present hidden and inscrutable. A Shabbat in which to rest quietly, with hearts recollected and minds burdened by grief. But also, for the women, a day to prepare the ointments and spices with which they will pay their last respects to the Lord's body on the morrow, at daybreak.

Are they preparing simply to embalm their hope? What if God has prepared, in response to their act of devotion, something that they can-

not possibly foresee, imagine or anticipate? The finding of an empty tomb, the message that he is no longer there, for he has shattered the doors of death...

Payer:

Lord our God, graciously look upon and bless all that women everywhere do to revere weak and vulnerable bodies, surrounding them with kindness and respect.

Grant too that we, who have accompanied you along this path of love to the very end, together with the women of the Gospel, may remain in expectant prayer. For we know that our prayers will be answered by the resurrection of Jesus, which your Church now prepares to celebrate in the joy of Easter night.

Pater noster (Our Father...)

To him be glory and power for ever and ever!
Amen!

***(Meditations by Anne-Marie Pelletier,
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