

The Stations of the Cross for Chaplains

These Stations come out of my own twenty plus years as a chaplain in a variety of areas within the acute care hospital setting. It seems to me that the day to day ministry of chaplaincy is truly the Way of the Cross in modern dress. Inasmuch as we walk with the least of our brothers and sisters in the agonies of their lives, we walk the Stations with Jesus. My version of the traditional Stations of the Cross was written from this perspective. It is my hope that it speaks to each of my chaplain colleagues in a way that deepens and strengthens their ministries. Aware that many chaplains serve in other institutions, I have tried to make the prayers encompass those realities as well.

Originally written for the 2010 National Association of Catholic Chaplains' conference in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, the part now labeled Reflection was read by one reader, and the Prayer by a second person. I recommend that arrangement if the Stations are said communally. We used refrains from three pieces of music—those references are retained as suggestions for those who choose to use this communally. If your department shares morning prayer, it might be good to use just one Station each day, and have members of the department add their own reflections or prayers.

The Reflection pieces use the style of St. Ignatius which involves entering imaginatively into the setting with one's senses. Hopefully, those who pray the Stations will find themselves hearing the noise of the busy city and seeing the crowds of people passing by. For those who will use these Stations to pray individually I suggest lingering over the reflections and letting your own imagination become involved.

The Prayers also follow the Ignatian model of carrying on a conversation with Jesus. I invite you to move beyond what is written and engage in your own dialogue with Jesus. Traditionally, one would go from Station to Station, completing the whole circuit as a single prayer. You may find that is your preference, but I invite you to consider praying the Stations in a slightly different way. Find the Station or Stations that speak most directly to you in your ministry, and spend some time with that Station(s). Enter into the reflection and into dialogue with the participants. Spend some time in dialogue with Jesus about your own challenges, fears, and joys. You may find that you want to return to a single Station for a week or more before moving on to another one as your own life experience changes.

I. The First Station: Jesus Is Condemned to Death

Reflection: After a long night of pain and ridicule, judged first by the Sanhedrin and then by the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, Jesus is sentenced to death on the cross that very day. Exhausted, beaten, and losing blood from gashes on his back and the thorns in his head, Jesus says nothing. He is the suffering servant who “opens not his mouth”, but “takes upon himself the sins of many.” Just yesterday he was freely teaching in Jerusalem, but today he is in agony, going to his death.

Prayer: Jesus, how quickly life changes! How many times I have walked this road with you as I minister to men and women, and even children, whose lives have been changed in an instant. They have been victims of violence or trauma or tragic accident. I see them and their families in shock; I see them when their lives hang in the balance despite the best medical care we can give. When I see them, I see you, Jesus. In your mercy grant me the strength to walk with them that I may walk more closely with you.

Silence

Behold the Wood of the Cross by Dan Schutte

II. The Second Station: Jesus Carries His Cross

Reflection: Jesus receives the staggering weight of the rough-hewn cross without complaint. The day is stifling, and the road is dusty; flies are attracted to the open wounds on his back as the soldiers lead the little procession through the busy streets. Jesus is invisible to most of those who pass by. There is nothing in him to attract their gaze, and people scurry by, shielding their faces from the horror of it all.

Prayer: Jesus, forgive me! How often I turn away from those who carry the cross of poverty or mental illness or imprisonment. I, too, am busy with important matters, and they are invisible to me, even when they are right before me. I am called every day to minister to them, to see them for who they are as beloved children of God. I am called to see you, Jesus, carrying the cross of poverty, of dementia, of imprisonment. Lord Jesus, open my eyes and my heart to your presence before me.

Silence

Behold the Wood of the Cross by Dan Schutte

III. The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

Reflection: Jesus was a strong man. He had worked with wood, carrying it and forming it into useful things from his childhood; as a man he had walked the length and breadth of Israel for three years preaching and teaching. Yet he falls to his knees with the journey to Calvary hardly begun. His dignity is being shredded—he is no longer a person of strength; his vulnerability is there for all to see. He struggles mightily to regain his feet and stagger forward.

Prayer: Jesus, it is hard for me to see you fall. I need for you to be strong, to hide your human frailties. Forgive me, for I pride myself on my strength, on my intelligence, on my ability to do things well, and I hide from my own vulnerabilities. I like to be with the patients and clients who are strong, and dread being with those whose weakness reminds me of my own. So often I can be disdainful when people fall beneath the invisible burdens they carry. Your cross was visible, but so many people carry burdens unseen. Help me, Lord Jesus, to see you in those who fall; in those who are not compliant; in those who cannot stand alone.

Silence

Behold the Wood of the Cross

IV. The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

Reflection: Jesus had been abandoned by his followers and denied by Peter. He was alone even as the crowds milled around him in the crowded streets. In the midst of that searing loneliness Jesus felt Mary's presence even before he saw her. Jesus was continually prodded by the soldiers, and could do no more than acknowledge her presence with his eyes as they passed. How deeply Mary felt the pain of her son's journey to Calvary. How she suffered to see Jesus abused and on his way to death. She was powerless to change the course of events, she could only be there. There was only a moment of seeing one another, of deep recognition, of shared faith that never wavered even in this absolute darkness. Mary's presence was all she had to give.

Prayer: Jesus, how powerful was the simple presence of your mother on that terrible journey to Calvary. She was present in total simplicity, utterly open to you in mind and heart. Her humanity carried within it tangible evidence of the compassionate Presence of

the Father. I am overwhelmed when I realize that this is the ministry to which you have called me, and all of us who are called chaplain. It is a ministry of total simplicity and radical openness to you and to the Father. The presence I am called to bring to the sickroom, to the prison, to hospice and nursing homes, is not only my own, but also yours, Lord Jesus. Mother Mary, help me to be present to those whom I meet, as you were present to your beloved son.

Silence

Behold the Wood of the Cross by Dan Schutte

V. The Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

Reflection: Jesus is weak from loss of blood, and he staggers beneath the weight of the cross. Anxious to keep the group moving and not lose time, the soldiers press Simon of Cyrene into service helping bear the cross of Jesus. Simon had been travelling for long hours to Jerusalem, and was hurrying into the city when he was stopped by the soldiers. Simon was young and strong, and clearly not a local citizen which meant he was unlikely to have powerful friends in Jerusalem. The soldiers wanted no trouble over this; they only wanted to get this job over with, and it was clear that Jesus would never manage the journey on his own.

Prayer: Jesus, I want to think that Simon's strong hands relieved your burden, and that he did so without complaint. If I could choose a role in this horrific journey, it would be Simon's. I want to "fix" things to know I've made a difference. How difficult it is, Lord, to be powerless at the bedside of a dying child or beside a young parent paralyzed in an accident, or sitting with an elderly gentleman who has lost himself in the fog of Alzheimer's dementia, or counseling a repeat offender. But I know that it is not about "fixing"; I know that Simon didn't fix anything. Rather, Lord Jesus, he was incredibly blessed to be called to walk with you; to know an intimacy that few have known. I don't know how Simon's life was changed, but I am beginning to see how you are changing my life through this ministry. Lord Jesus, help me to see who it is that I am truly walking with.

Silence

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VI. The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Reflection: The road is narrow here and the group of prisoners passes closely in front of the houses pressing the crowd up against the walls. Quickly Veronica steps out from her doorway and wipes the bloody face of Jesus. Jesus looks up at her with wordless thanks as she melts back into the doorway away from the soldiers. She watches from there as Jesus disappears around the corner. It is only after they have gone that Veronica glances down at her cloth and sees the suffering face of Jesus imprinted there.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, a simple woman acting impulsively represents all of us reaching out in compassion to the suffering around us. Yet how often I have let those moments pass me by; how quickly the moment is gone. What Veronica did was both daring and risky, but she dared to take that risk. Your face, O Lord, was disfigured beyond recognition when she reached out to you. Our ministry is to the marginalized, the disfigured in mind and body. Help me, Lord Jesus, to see you there. Even more, give me strength to tend to you in them when I cannot see you.

Silence

Crucem Tuam by Jacques Berthier

VII. The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time

Reflection: The weight of the cross, the uneven pavement, and the soldiers who hurry him along bring Jesus to his knees again. The soldiers are angry that their little procession has once again come to a halt. They have no compassion for Jesus; they are doing a job, however unpleasant, and they are anxious to get it over with. The soldiers and the people who pass by in the crowded streets have their own worries and needs; they don't recognize Jesus as the one who cured the sick and taught in the Temple—all of that is gone now. He is just a weak human being who falls beneath the weight he is carrying.

Prayer: Jesus, this Station brings me face to face with those who are addicted to drugs and alcohol. They, too, fall beneath the weight of their addiction, and my heart hardens against them. All too often I see their weakness, but don't see the burdens they bear. I see their weakness, but I fail to see your face in them. I want to pass by quickly to get on

to other duties, to other people more like me. It is not hard to pass by; it is hard to stop. Lord Jesus, help me to see your face in those who fall.

Silence

Crucem Tuam by Jacques Berthier

VIII. The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Reflection: The little band of prisoners and guards halts momentarily at the gate in the city wall. The guards know that sometimes a last minute reprieve is granted there, so they stop briefly. Here the women of Jerusalem stand waiting, weeping, and hoping that Jesus will be released. He has been tortured for hours now, and even with Simon's help has fallen again just before reaching the gate. But it is Jesus who looks on them with compassion and warns them, "Weep not for me, but for yourselves and your children"; even in his own agony Jesus cares for the calamities that will befall them all in the near future.

Prayer: Jesus, I have been blessed in my ministry to see glimpses of you in others who have been given the grace to look beyond themselves. They have the courage to continue to care for others even as they themselves are suffering. I, too, have known your grace within calling me to strength I didn't know was there. You have called me to minister to others despite my own doubts and fears, my own stress and physical pain. Help me, Lord Jesus, to walk this Station with you in my daily ministry.

Silence

Crucem Tuam by Jacques Berthier

IX. The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time

Reflection: The path to the place of execution is steep, and Jesus is unable to bear the added stress. He falls a third time. He is roughly hauled to his feet and dragged the remaining distance to the top of the hill. He is spent, but even more intense agony awaits him now. The crowds along the nearby road pay little attention; they are caught up in all the important things they need to accomplish that day.

Prayer: Jesus, when I see you fall once again my heart is rent with grief. I know, as you did, what is still to come. Yet how difficult it is for me to see you in those around me who fall again and again. Ministry to them is hard. I find myself giving up on them—the repeat offenders and those who are often disparaged as “frequent flyers.” Like the soldiers, I am annoyed that they have fallen again. Such people are dismissed as “non-compliant”; they seem beneath our compassion. Forgive me, Lord, that I do not see you there; help me, Lord, that I may see you there.

Silence

Crucem Tuam by Jacques Berthier

X. The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Clothes

Reflection: This is the final indignity. The seamless tunic, lovingly woven for him by his mother, is rudely yanked off of Jesus, pulling open the wounds on his back. Despite the bloodstains, the soldiers covet the tunic and cast lots to see who will get it. Jesus now stands naked and bloody before the crowds passing by. Stripping Jesus was a deliberate way of shaming him, of taking the last shred of his humanity—“as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.”

Prayer: Jesus, this Station is particularly difficult; my guilt holds me here. Incontinence and dementia can deprive the elderly of their dignity; the mentally ill are seen as somehow less than human. Prisoners become numbers, often rejected by society when they are released. Shame afflicts their families as well. How difficult it is to see you in them, Lord. How difficult to see you standing naked there bearing their shame. Lord, have mercy—grant that I may see.

Silence

Adoramus Te Christe by Marty Haugen

XI. the Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Reflection: Jesus is stretched out on the rough wood of the cross. His head rests on the crown of thorns which digs deeper into his skull. His arms held tight against the crossbar, the blows of the hammer ring on the nails as they are driven into Jesus’ wrists; his feet

are nailed to the vertical length of the cross. Blood streams from these fresh wounds as Jesus' body is wracked with unimaginable pain.

Prayer: Jesus, the crucifix has been such a constant in my life that I don't see it, don't see the agony. Like the people on the road to Jerusalem, I pass by without even noticing. But how much more you are there, in agony, in the men, women and children that I minister to each day. Their agonies, too, threaten to become so commonplace that I hardly see them. Families and other loved ones suffer as their lives are also disrupted and changed. Sometimes it is easy to be with them, but other times, Lord, their needs may overwhelm me or may be unknown to me, and I pull away from them. I don't see you there, suffering; I don't see the crosses that give them agony. Lord Jesus, help me to see.

Silence

Adoramus Te Christe by Marty Haugen

XII. The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Reflection: The cross is raised up and dropped into the hole prepared for it. Jesus' body strains against the nails and is jarred sharply by the drop. He is mocked by those who pass by; only the apostle John and a small band of women dare to stand close to comfort him. One of the other prisoners speaks from his cross: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." In response, Jesus assures him, "This day you will be with me in paradise." Yet Jesus shares the fears and darkness that haunt humanity as he says, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Then in total surrender to the Father, he says, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Shortly afterwards Jesus speaks his last words, "It is finished," and dies.

Prayer: Faith and doubt struggle in me and in those whose journeys I share. Jesus, even as I contemplate your final moments, I am grateful that you know the place of darkness that death represents for all of us. I have seen death many times, in many circumstances. I have spent many hours waiting at bedsides as death came slowly; I have been caught up in the chaos of someone who arrives in the ER at death's door. I have seen grief, and carried my own grief. How much I need to see you there, Lord, to take comfort in your words—"you shall be with me in paradise"—"into your hands I commend my spirit"—"it is finished." Help me, Lord, to hear you.

Silence

Adoramus Te Christe by Marty Haugen

XIII. The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

Reflection: The lifeless body of Jesus is taken down with care by those who love him. Gently the crown of thorns is removed; it leaves deep wounds that detail every thorn on the flesh of Jesus' head. Weeping, Mary cradles his head in her lap for the last time. The wrappings are laid out and Jesus' body is hurriedly wrapped in the traditional fashion. Jesus' agony seemed as if it would never end; these moments fly by in a blur. His loved ones are stunned, groping to take in the reality that Jesus has died.

Prayer: Jesus, I too, have felt the weight of a dead body in my arms. I know the heaviness of the inescapable change that is death. I have journeyed with those in stunned disbelief at the loss of a loved one; and I have walked with those filled with relief and its companion, guilt, when one who has suffered long has finally died. You have called me to a ministry that lives in this place of mystery. Lord, your face and your suffering are ever before me when I stand at the door of death—help me to stand there with your children despite my own fears and doubts.

Silence

Adoramus Te Christe by Marty Haugen

XIV. The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Placed in the Tomb

Reflection: There is little time, for the city gates will close at sundown. Jesus' body is carried by his friends to a new tomb hewn out of the rock only a short distance away. There is scarcely time to wrap the body, and no time for the customary anointing with precious spices. Jesus' friends carry out their task with great love, and grieving hearts. The events of the day have left them stunned, and they have only begun to grasp the reality and the tragedy of what has happened. Jesus was the center of their worlds; his being gave meaning and purpose to their lives. Now in a few short hours all of that was changed forever.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, even now as I contemplate this Station, my heart is heavy. In this ministry you have given me I have spent many hours and days walking with the bereaved. This Station speaks to me in the depths of my heart. I know what it is to grieve, and what

it is to walk with those who are stunned by grief, to walk with those whose lives have been shattered by the unexpected loss of a loved one. In the midst of all that, Lord, it is sometimes difficult to remember that you are here too. This Station is the end of your human life among us, but, unlike your loved ones so long ago, I know what will come. This Station gives me strength to wait and hope to sustain me when doubts and fears assail me. Help me, Lord Jesus, to come here often to wait in the darkness by your side; to wait in hope for the promise of the Father.

Silence

Adoramus Te Christe by Marty Haugen

Concluding Song: Glory In the Cross by Dan Schutte