

# Stations of the Cross

by Fr Derek Powney  
in conjunction with  
Aid to the Church in Need



Sculpture of Christ at the foot of the Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon or the Blessed Virgin Mary of Harissa, 25 km from Beirut and 550 m above the coast of Lebanon. © Ismael Martínez Sánchez/ACN



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# Introduction: THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

There is evidence from as early as the third century of the practice of the Eastern Church going to Jerusalem in Holy Week “to walk the way of the Cross”.

At some point the Stations came to be mounted in churches, removing the need to travel to Jerusalem, and the practice became part of the devotion of the Western Church. The number of Stations has varied with time, but it settled at fourteen in the nineteenth century.

Each Station concludes with a verse and response, following the prayer.

**V We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.**

**R Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.**

To understand the events recorded in the gospels it is important to look at the political situation at the time they describe. The Romans came as conquerors, and this was resented by the Jews for more than the obvious reason – how could God’s chosen people be conquered?

The Romans failed to understand the centuries-long attachment of Jews to the one God – the book of Maccabees best records their refusal to give way. The Passover provided a yearly flashpoint because it brought the deliverance of the Jewish people from the past into the present.

In addition to all this is the character of Pilate. He had married a lady of greater wealth and position than himself. Although Procurator was an important position, few Romans would have wanted it – a backwater of the empire where the people seemed always to be on the edge of revolt and are noted for being fanatical about such trivia as which god to worship. Pilate has already caused a riot by ordering his legions to carry their standards into the Temple. Pilate is very conscious of being on probation.

For their part, the chief priests know that Pilate has in his possession the robes of the High Priest, without which the Passover cannot be celebrated.

So each side is dependent on the other. Into that deadlock came Jesus.

**“Pour forth we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of the Lord was made known by an angel may, by his passion and cross, be brought to the glory of the resurrection.”**



# 1st Station: JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH



***We pray together:***  
**Our Father, who art in heaven,**  
**hallowed be thy name.**  
**Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be**  
**done, on earth as it is in heaven.**  
**Give us this day our daily bread,**  
**and lead us not into temptation,**  
**but deliver us from evil.**  
**Amen.**

“... the governor put to him the question, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ Jesus replied, ‘It is you who say it.’ But when he was questioned by the chief priests and the elders he refused to answer at all ... to the governor’s amazement, he offered not a word in answer to any of the charges. Now as he was seated in the chair of judgement, Pilate’s wife sent him a message, ‘have nothing to do with that upright man: I have been extremely upset today by a dream that I had about him.’”

Finding that Jesus comes from Galilee, Pilate sends him to Herod; but Herod is too wily to take the blame, so he sends him back to Pilate. Next, Pilate offers to release Jesus as the prisoner to be released at the Passover, but the crowd, urged by the priests, shout for Barabbas.

Pilate has nothing left, so he sends for a bowl of water and ceremonially washes his hands. “I am innocent of this man’s blood.” Pilate has tried everything to avoid condemning Jesus. Now having taken the pragmatic way, the easy way, he seeks to avoid the responsibility for his lack of moral courage.

I’ve done that too – metaphorically washed my hands. But for me, like Macbeth, the spot remains.

The incongruity of the scene is lost on Pilate. Jesus, co-creator of the universe, stands bound before this petty princeling. Who is the judge, and who the prisoner? Yet Jesus answers meekly and respectfully. And Pilate condemns to death the Son of God.

## 2nd Station: JESUS TAKES UP THE CROSS



Jesus has been scourged. The Roman scourge was a whip with a number of tails, each of which had two or three sharp pieces of metal twisted into the leather. It was designed not to take the skin off a man's back but to take the flesh off his bones.

Because it was the heavy cross-piece of the cross that was carried, it was placed across the crucified's lacerated shoulders, and tied to his forearms.

Bent under the weight of the cross piece, he will stagger now down the road to Calvary. Crucifixion was designed not simply to kill but to destroy a man in the view of the onlookers.

"If you want to follow me, you must take up your cross each day."

What is my cross? It is myself – everything about me that I would rather others did not see. And Jesus, who was without sin, took all that on himself. He bore that.

***We pray together:***  
**Glory be to the Father,**  
**and to the Son,**  
**and to the Holy Spirit,**  
**as it was in the beginning,**  
**is now, and ever shall be.**  
**Amen.**



## 3rd Station: JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME



There is no record in the canonical gospels of Jesus falling but clearly he did – the events that are recorded, indicate that.

Remember that the heavy cross piece was tied across his back. He had no means of saving himself but fell straight down flat on to his front, his face against the dirt of the road.

The crowd and the soldiers enjoyed the spectacle. The soldiers pulled on the cross piece to get him to his feet, and a few jabs with the butt of their spears encouraged him on his way.

We find the whole concept of Jesus falling so difficult to grasp. This is God – how can he fall?

But Jesus is also a true man, and people fall.

How often do I fall, fall even below my own standards? So how often do I fall below the standards of my Saviour?

But the real question is, do I then get up and go on? Do I persist, or just give up?

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**is now, and ever shall be.**  
**Amen.**

## 4th Station: JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER



Mary has been told that Jesus has been condemned to death and is on his way to Calvary. She hurries down the side street and meets the main road as he comes in sight.

He totters towards her, arms outstretched, bending under the weight of the cross, his lacerated back casting reluctant goutts of blood at every step.

This is her son, her star, the one all Galilee has been talking about. Simeon's blessing, which gave her such joy all those years ago and which seemed to be coming true, was that Jesus was destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel.

But he also prophesied that a sword would pierce her heart too.

Now she feels the thrust of that sword. Their eyes meet. Strength—love—flows between them. All she can do is to follow him wordlessly, joining him and his Father in the journey to Calvary.

Like Mary, I too am sometimes helpless. Do I choose to walk through the horror? Or do I just run away and hide, try to hide from the hurt, and hide from myself?

***We pray together:***  
**Hail Mary, full of grace.**  
**The Lord is with thee.**

**Blessed art thou among women and  
blessed is the fruit of thy womb,  
Jesus.**

**Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for  
us sinners, now, and at the  
hour of our death. Amen.**



## 5th Station: SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS JESUS TO CARRY THE CROSS



***We pray together:***  
**Glory be to the Father,**  
**and to the Son,**  
**and to the Holy Spirit,**  
**as it was in the beginning,**  
**is now, and ever shall be.**  
**Amen.**

“They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross.”

We know almost nothing about Simon, but he must have been a big man to have been picked for the job. Cyrene was in North Africa, so Simon may well have been black – was that why he was picked? Had he come over for the festival? Or had he come to live somewhere outside Jerusalem – was he a farmer?

The soldiers are clearly worried that they aren’t going to get Jesus to Calvary alive, so he needs to be relieved of the cross. It’s an act of pragmatism, not compassion. A Roman soldier could compel anyone to carry anything for a distance of a mile. Why not a cross? They probably thought it was funny.

But Simon must have been appalled. Such indignity, such humiliation, heaped on someone whose only fault was to happen to pass by. With his arrival at Calvary Simon passes out of history, but his sons Alexander and Rufus both became Christians, so we can deduce that something clearly happened to Simon on the journey. What started as humiliation, indignation and probably hatred of the hapless prisoner as well of the soldiers became something very different.

What happens to me when I carry the cross? Do I get stuck on the righteous anger, or do I too develop love, good from evil?

## 6th Station: VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS



Eusebius, the church's first historian, says that Veronica was the woman whom Jesus cured of a haemorrhage. If so, then Veronica had every reason to love him, for he did not simply cure her of an illness but restored her to her place in Jewish society, stopping the flow of blood which Jews held to be ritually unclean.

She sees him coming down the road and is filled with compassion, with love. But what can she do to help? She does the simplest thing. Darting between the soldiers, she runs to Jesus and wipes his face, wipes it of the spittle, the sweat, the dirt of the road on which he has fallen.

The relief is temporary, but it is real. She has not risked the wrath of the soldiers for nothing. And tradition says that Veronica is rewarded by the image of Jesus' face left on the cloth.

When the great thing cannot be done, do I do the little thing, the simple thing? For our acts of compassion, acts of love, are marked by the imprint of Jesus' face on our lives.

***We pray together:***  
**Hail Mary, full of grace.**  
**The Lord is with thee.**

**Blessed art thou among women and  
blessed is the fruit of thy womb,  
Jesus.**

**Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for  
us sinners, now, and at the  
hour of our death. Amen.**



## 7th Station: JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME



Jesus is no longer carrying the cross, but he is very weak. We cannot know what emotional and psychological strain he is under, but we know he has been up all night, pushed from one tribunal to another, tried for his life.

He has been scourged, and men commonly died beneath the scourge.

However, the soldiers have orders to crucify him, and they will get him to Calvary. This time he has been able to save himself from falling flat on his face.

As he kneels in the dirt of the road the soldiers urge him up with butt of spear and then with point.

We rarely think of the persistence of Jesus, of his determination to achieve the objective which none but he and his Father understood.

But we can see in this determination what has been called “the reckless love of God”: “love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be”.

***We pray together:***  
**Our Father, who art in heaven,**  
**hallowed be thy name.**  
**Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be**  
**done, on earth as it is in heaven.**  
**Give us this day our daily bread,**  
**and lead us not into temptation,**  
**but deliver us from evil.**  
**Amen.**

## 8th Station: JESUS CONSOLES THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM



A number of high-born women had taken it as their religious and social duty to mourn, to wail or keen, for all condemned criminals, simply because this was an important part of the funeral rites, and because there would be no one to mourn the death of such criminals.

This was a sort of aristocratic WVS. Some of them may have known Jesus, but the majority were simply doing the duty they had laid on themselves.

“But Jesus turned to them and said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children.’”

It is remarkable that in his suffering Jesus sought to give comfort, as he was receiving comfort. His concern, even in his great pain, was for the women. He gave comfort to them.

Is that my reaction when I receive comfort from others?

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**Hail Mary, full of grace.**  
**The Lord is with thee.**

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Jesus.**

**Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for  
us sinners, now, and at the  
hour of our death. Amen.**



## 9th Station: JESUS FALLS FOR THE THIRD TIME



This time Jesus has collapsed. He is flat on the ground. The soldiers are seriously worried – he cannot be allowed to die here.

They have orders to get him to Calvary to be crucified. They lift him with greater care than before and encourage him to go on, supporting him along the road, not from kindness but from necessity.

Jesus was fully man and fully God. God was not simply using a soulless human body. There was nothing artificial, nothing make-believe, in the suffering of Jesus.

He couldn't just stop being a man when it all became too much. He has taken frail flesh and must see it through.

Jesus' suffering, Jesus' wounds, were real. His wounds speak to our wounds, wounds we often do not wish to acknowledge. And no god has wounds but our God.

***We pray together:***  
**Glory be to the Father,**  
**and to the Son,**  
**and to the Holy Spirit,**  
**as it was in the beginning,**  
**is now, and ever shall be.**  
**Amen.**

## 10th Station: JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS



“They shared out his clothing by casting lots.”

The Roman practice was to crucify men naked, but it is likely that, because of the deep-seated Jewish objection to nakedness, the three men were allowed to wear their loin cloths. Jesus is stripped of his clothes.

Our clothes are important to us. They keep us warm, they protect us, but more than that they are an expression of our identity. That is obvious when someone is wearing a uniform, but it is always true that our clothes are an expression of ourselves – or perhaps what we would want to be seen to be.

Stripping someone of their clothes is to remove their identity. It is to say: “you don’t matter, you don’t exist as a person – you’re just a body.”

The stripping is not simply humiliation – it is the destruction of the personality.

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**Glory be to the Father,**  
**and to the Son,**  
**and to the Holy Spirit,**  
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**Amen.**



## 11th Station: JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS



“When they reached the place called The Skull, there they crucified him and the two criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.’ Above him there was an inscription: ‘This is the King of the Jews.’”

The centrepiece of the cross was taken out of the post-hole. The cross-piece was taken from Simon of Cyrene and slotted into the upright. Jesus was laid on the cross and a spike driven through each wrist. His feet were drawn up and a long spike driven through his ankles. The crowd fell silent: the noise of the hammer blows were clearly heard.

The cross was lifted up and dropped into the posthole. Slowly, Jesus began to suffocate, and to relieve his breathing, painfully pulled himself up on the spikes through wrists and feet. Until he died, his choice stayed between suffocation and incredible pain. And remember, all this was done to the Son of God: the hands that threw stars into space now hold only nails.

Jesus is crucified for us, for you and for me. My sins made this necessary – my bad temper, my impatience, my thoughtlessness. Mere pinpricks, but my sins, for which I must answer.

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**hallowed be thy name.**  
**Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be**  
**done, on earth as it is in heaven.**  
**Give us this day our daily bread,**  
**and lead us not into temptation,**  
**but deliver us from evil.**  
**Amen.**

## 12th Station: JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS



“From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, eli, lama sabachthani?’; that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up his spirit.”

In creating us, God chose to give us the choice of good or evil, chose to give us that choice so that we could become his adopted sons and daughters rather than his slaves, his zombies. And having created us, God is not complete without us. So the sacrifice of the Son, through which we see the Father’s love for us and are offered the opportunity to respond, becomes necessary.

This is the singular moment in all creation. To this moment all creation has looked forward. From this moment all time is measured. It is accomplished.

***We pray together:***

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but deliver us from evil.**

**Amen.**



## 13th Station: JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS



Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man of importance, has asked Pilate for the body. He comes now with Nicodemus and takes down the body – no easy task for two middle-aged men.

Tradition says that the body was placed in the arms of his mother. She must have remembered the first time he was placed in her arms, just after he was born. Then the body was perfect, broad shoulders, narrow hips – his baby pot belly came only with being fed. Now the body is broken, horrifically torn. Then, his body was bloody, with her blood and his. Now, blood still weeps reluctantly from his back, his hands and feet, his side. Then, he was full of life, bawling lustily, greeting this strange new world into which he had been thrust. Now, he is silent in death.

“And many women were there, watching from a distance, the same women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and looked after him. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.”

***We pray together:***  
**Hail Mary, full of grace.**  
**The Lord is with thee.**

**Blessed art thou among women and  
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Jesus.**

**Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for  
us sinners, now, and at the  
hour of our death. Amen.**

## 14th Station: JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB



“So Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean shroud and put it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a large stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away. Now Mary of Magdala and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre.”

There is no time to wash the body, anoint it with myrrh or aloes, prepare it decently for burial. Very soon the Sabbath will begin, so the body is simply wrapped and then placed in the tomb. The women will need to come back on Sunday and finish things then. Now they hurry away before the Sabbath, a day that is the most miserable that any of the disciples can remember. The great adventure is over. The glory that was to be Jesus' triumph – and theirs – will never happen. The last three years have been wasted. There is nothing left now but to go back to their old life.

Except, of course, that we know that, far from being over, the great adventure is really only now beginning. From now on they will always meet Jesus in every breaking of bread. At every Eucharist the bread and wine will be one with the broken body on the tree and with the glorious body sitting at the right hand of God the Father, continually pleading for us.

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**Amen.**



## about Fr Derek Powney and Aid to the Church in Need

**Fr Derek Powney** has been a Roman Catholic priest since 2000. Ordained for the diocese of Brentwood, he is now resident in Edinburgh. Previously Fr Powney was a Director of Science and a headmaster in secondary schools.

**The pictures of the Stations of the Cross shown here were made at St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, Edinburgh, and appear by permission of His Grace the Archbishop, Leo Cushley.**

**Aid to the Church in Need (ACN)** is a Pontifical Foundation of the Catholic Church, supporting the Catholic faithful and other Christians where they are persecuted, oppressed or in pastoral need.

Founded on Christmas Day 1947, ACN supports around 5,000 projects across the world each year.

For regular updates from the suffering Church around the world or to find out more information, please visit [www.acnuk.org](http://www.acnuk.org)

ACN, its project partners and thousands of suffering Christians around the world are deeply grateful for the part you are playing to care and pray for God's people everywhere. We pray especially for those who are faithful, even under the threat of persecution or death.

**Thank you for your prayers and support for our brothers and sisters in Christ across the world.**

**Contact details for ACN's Community Outreach Team:**

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