

ST. JAMES CATHEDRAL

THE **STATIONS** OF THE CROSS

THE ORIGINS OF THE TRADITION

In the late Middle Ages Christian pilgrims were prevented from visiting the holy sites of the New Testament. A custom arose of recreating these sites close to home, with places or images where the faithful might come to pray. This included 'Stations of the Way of the Cross', 14 images of events along Jerusalem's *Via Dolorosa* (the route from Jesus's place of trial to the hill where he was put to death). By the 16th century, Stations of the Cross had become a popular aid to devotion in churches and cathedrals.


Each Station is an invitation to reflect and pray. Eight of the 14 Stations are based on events in the Gospels. The other six are imaginary reconstructions of possible moments between the Gospel events.

THE ARTIST


The St James Cathedral Stations of the Cross were made by Attila Keszei (b 1947), a Hungarian-Canadian sculptor, painter, woodcarver and ceramicist. They are raku fired ceramic plates, an ancient Japanese technique that creates a unique finish to each piece. They were installed in 2015, a gift of Marge Yearwood in memory of her sister, June Yearwood, who died in 2011.




I. JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

 **SCRIPTURE** Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.” But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)


Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.” But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. (LUKE 23:13-23)


 **A CLOSER LOOK** The Roman governor Pontius Pilate could not reason with the chants of the frenzied crowd. So he condemned Jesus to death. The finality of those words “crucify him” must have filled Jesus with fear and dread. How it must have shattered the heart of Mary too, as she realized the finality of Pilate’s order?

 **PRAYER** Lord Jesus, you were condemned to death out of political expediency: be with those who are imprisoned for the convenience of the powerful. You were the victim of injustice: change the motivations of oppressors to your way of peace. *Amen.*




II. JESUS TAKES UP THE CROSS

 **SCRIPTURE** Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the Place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called *Golgotha*). There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. (JOHN 19:16-20)

 **A CLOSER LOOK** Jesus is forced to carry his cross along the Via Dolorosa, the instrument of his own death. Some historians suggest it may have been only the *patibulum*, the heavy cross-beam, that he carried. If that was the case, it would later be attached to a pole driven into the soil at Golgotha.

Am I carrying a cross in my life? Maybe mine is a physical ailment, an emotional cross no one else sees, a broken relationship, or a temptation I can't overcome. One of the central themes of the Christian faith is that Jesus not only carried his own cross on the Via Dolorosa – he carried my pain and brokenness too.

 **PRAYER** Lord Jesus, you carried the cross through the streets of Jerusalem. Be with those who are loaded with burdens beyond their strength. You bore the weight of our sins when you carried the cross, help us realize the extent and cost of your love for us. *Amen.*



III. JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

A CLOSER LOOK The Stations include three moments when Jesus falls, even though the Bible makes no direct mention of him falling. The distance from the Roman Governor's Palace to Golgotha, place of his crucifixion, is at least 600 metres. So the weight of the cross might well prove too much for a man recently tortured. So the idea that Jesus fell is plausible. If he did, he rose and continued along the Via Dolorosa.

St Paul wrote to the early church in Corinth: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4)

Have I seen someone who is hurt and passed by? Have I even benefitted from someone else's loss? Have I done what was right for me, but not for the other person? Have I given up when times got difficult? Jesus knew he would die a painful death. People Jesus loved had betrayed him. How must that have felt? Would I have helped? Have I listened to someone else's struggles? Held their hand? Prayed with them?

PRAYER Lord, when I'm struggling, help me be strong. When I'm bullied, give me courage. When others are mocked and hurt, help me stand up for them. When I weep, comfort me. When I'm struggling, be by my side and bring me peace. Help me to help others. *Amen.*



IV. JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER


A CLOSER LOOK The Gospels do not mention Jesus seeing his mother in the crowd, nor her seeing him. But we know she was there at the time of the crucifixion, so it's plausible she caught his eye. She who nurtured Jesus as a baby, saw his first steps and words, now sees her son on the way to his death. What pain Mary must have felt, unable to reach out to help or comfort. Yet she remained present and steadfast, like so many mothers throughout the world in times of catastrophe. She was there at the foot of the cross when his journey ended. Can we walk beside those who are suffering with compassion and love, whatever the outrage we feel?

Perhaps Mary remembered a curious episode from the start of Jesus' life: "When his parents took Jesus as a baby to the temple to be consecrated to God, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too. Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.' And his mother kept all these things in her heart." (LUKE 2:34-35, 51)


PRAYER Jesus, you looked through the crowd and saw your mother's eyes. Her love gave you the strength to carry on. Walk with us. When we don't want to listen, open our ears to hear. When it would be easier to look away, open our eyes to see. *Amen.*




V. SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS JESUS CARRY THE CROSS

 **SCRIPTURE** A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. (MARK 15:21)

Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (MATTHEW 16:24)

 **A CLOSER LOOK** Simon was a foreigner from the Jewish community in Cyrene, in Libya, and it appears he happened to be in Jerusalem that day. The Roman soldiers pressed him into service – but he seems to have accepted the task willingly. Perhaps he was in Jerusalem in order to see Jesus. He may even have been a follower of Jesus. Our short quotation from Mark’s Gospel does not name only him, but also his children. Maybe they were known as Christians too. Maybe Simon was an immigrant member of the local community.

 **PRAYER** Lord, thank you for the generosity of strangers. You opened the eyes and heart of Simon of Cyrene. Help us to be willing to bear the cross of others and walk with you along the way. *Amen.*



VI. VERONICA WIPES JESUS' FACE

A CLOSER LOOK According to tradition, Veronica was a local woman who saw Jesus carrying his cross along the Via Dolorosa. She was moved with compassion and handed Jesus her veil so he could wipe the blood and sweat from his forehead. The name Veronica is not found in the Bible: the sources for her story come from extra-biblical Christian traditions. While the legend of Veronica's veil is not based on Scripture, the story of a passerby offering kindness to Jesus on his way to Calvary may be based in fact, passed on through oral tradition.

Veronica allowed herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit. In an instant she didn't reason or hesitate; she didn't talk herself out of helping; she didn't remind herself how busy she was with her own family. She was moved, and she acted. Am I brave enough to do the same? Do I block out the quiet whisper of the Holy Spirit, or can I too find the grit and fortitude to overcome my hesitations and reach out to help those in need?

PRAYER Lord, help us recognize your presence in the world. May we encounter you on our own journeys and show you to the world. *Amen.*



VII. JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME

A CLOSER LOOK Jesus' body is failing – from the torture of whipping and the exhaustion of carrying the cross. As he falls again, the cross crushes his scourged and beaten back and pushes the crown of thorns deeper into his skull. The burden is not just the heavy wood of the cross. There was also his rejection by people who had seemed so full of enthusiasm for him; the burden of his betrayal by Judas; his abandonment by the disciples at the hour of greatest trial; his triple denial by his close friend Peter.


In an earlier outburst against hypocrisy, Jesus had cried out: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (MATTHEW 23:37)


What struggle or temptation causes me to fall? Do I pray for strength and guidance, or try to go it alone? Am I making progress? What could I do differently to make better progress?


PRAYER Lord lift us up, for by ourselves we cannot rise from the dust. Help us recognise the spiritual and material needs of others, and give them the help they need. Lift us up, that we may lift others up. *Amen.*



VIII. JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

 **SCRIPTURE** A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and weailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ For if people do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (LUKE 23:27-31)

 **A CLOSER LOOK** At this point, Jesus has been suffering for several hours. Despite the acute pain he is experiencing, Jesus comforts a group of women he calls *daughters of Jerusalem*. It’s an astonishing act of selflessness. Jesus tells them not to weep for him, but for themselves. In many cultures today women face injustice, persecution and violence. Globally, women are less likely than men to be involved in decision making, or own land or property, or have access to education, technology and employment.

 **PRAYER** Lord Jesus, thank you for your compassion and love. Help me to be a source of comfort to others. We pray for women everywhere, especially those who suffer and bear the burden of caring for family and others in distress. *Amen.*



IX. JESUS FALLS THE THIRD TIME

A CLOSER LOOK The 9th Station is another not found in the biblical accounts, but is one of the traditional Stations. In Jerusalem the 9th Station of the Via Dolorosa, where Jesus fell for the third time (as he may well have done under the heavy weight of the cross), is next to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The 9th Station reminds us of Jesus' perseverance in the face of cruel adversity. He was forced to carry the weight of the cross, even with Simon helping. He did not give up. Though exhausted, he persevered. He showed us how to be faithful and dignified under the most horrific circumstances.

How many times do I feel the weight of grief, sadness, fear, hopelessness, betrayal, embarrassment, or pain? Do I see Jesus in the kindness of others? In the wonders of nature? In the gifts I've been given? Do I reach for someone's hand when they fall? When someone loses their job, a loved one, mental health, worldly status, bodily health, do I reach out my hand?

PRAYER Almighty God, your Son was mocked, abused, tortured, and profaned. Give us empathy to lift others who have fallen, and let us never forget that in Jesus' suffering we find our redemption. *Amen.*



X. JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS CLOTHES

SCRIPTURE When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” (JOHN 19:23-24)

A CLOSER LOOK We are told Jesus’ robe was “seamless.” In those days most clothes were made in the home, on small weaving looms. This meant small pieces of fabric had to be sewn together to make bigger garments. The fact that Jesus’s robe was seamless means it was of rare quality. This is underlined by the fact that the Roman soldiers cast lots to see which of them would now own it.

Jesus’ robe also carried memories: of home life as a young adult, and of his itinerant ministry. It was the robe whose hem was touched by a woman suffering from long-term illness, earlier in the story. Like everything else on that first Good Friday, his robe was taken from him. The removal of Jesus’s robe said: “You no longer deserve beauty, you no longer have a history, you no longer have an identity. You’re nothing.” The worst torture is emotional as well as physical.

PRAYER Lord Jesus, we live in a culture that places high value on personal identity. With the removal of your clothes before crucifixion, we see a literal and symbolic ripping away of your identity. Thank you that you went through this agony for us. Help us find our true identity in you. *Amen.*



XI. JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

SCRIPTURE It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!” In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. (MARK 15:25-32)


Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (JOHN 19:25-27)

A CLOSER LOOK Jesus entrusts his mother to the care of his friend John. Once again, this gives us an insight into his care and concern for others, even when he himself was in agony. He saw the raw pain in his mother’s eyes, the sword that pierced her soul, and provided for her by selecting the disciple who had always been the most loving.


PRAYER Lord Jesus, when we see others in pain, make us loving comforters. When we hear any crying out, may we be there to listen. When we are in a crisis of our own, help us still to care for others. *Amen.*




XII. JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

 **SCRIPTURE** At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) (MARK 15:33-34)

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (JOHN 19:28-30)

 **A CLOSER LOOK** Take a moment to reflect on the agony of crucifixion, the pain of the nails driven through hands and feet. When we experience suffering, our instinct is to seek immediate relief. What does the cross tell us about suffering? Am I suffering in my life right now? Who is really in control?

 **PRAYER** Father, we can hardly take in the agony of the scene. But thank you that it means you know first-hand what it means to suffer. Help us reach out to others in their sufferings, both friend and stranger. *Amen.*

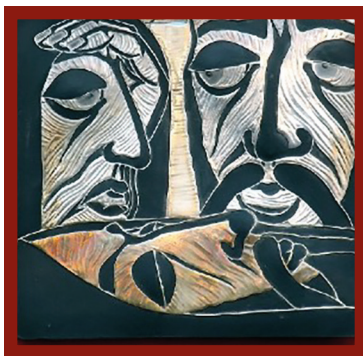


XIII. JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS


SCRIPTURE As evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. (MARK 15:42-47)


A CLOSER LOOK Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy, influential figure in the local community – and a follower of Jesus. The bodies of those crucified were usually left on the cross to decay. But in Jesus' case, Joseph of Arimathea and a few other friends and followers came to retrieve his body. As Mary watched, the crown of thorns was removed; the nails and straps that held Jesus to the cross were removed; and Jesus was carefully lowered and placed in the arms of Mary at the foot of the cross.


PRAYER Jesus, not all your friends deserted you. Some risked their own lives to take your body from the cross. Walk with us. Teach us to see you in everybody, to be kind, loving and strong. To be like you. *Amen.*



XIV. JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

 **SCRIPTURE** Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. (JOHN 19:38-41)

 **A CLOSER LOOK** Jesus experienced betrayal, torture and death. But as he did so, he was never alone. Under the cross stood Mary his mother and her sister. Also present were Mary Magdalene and Jesus' friend John. Joseph of Arimathea allows the body of Jesus to lie in his own tomb, which is set in a nearby garden. A member of the Sanhedrin (the Supreme Court of the day) called Nicodemus is also present. This is the same Nicodemus who had listened as Jesus explained rebirth by water and the Spirit. Even in the Sanhedrin, which condemned Jesus to death, there is a believer. In this hour of grief, darkness and despair, a light of hope is mysteriously present. The birth of the Church is beginning.

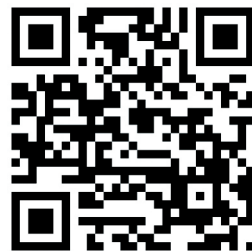
 **PRAYER** Lord God, thank you that I've been able to walk with Jesus along the Via Dolorosa. Help me reflect in the days to come on its implications for my own life journey. Teach me what it means to follow you. *Amen.*

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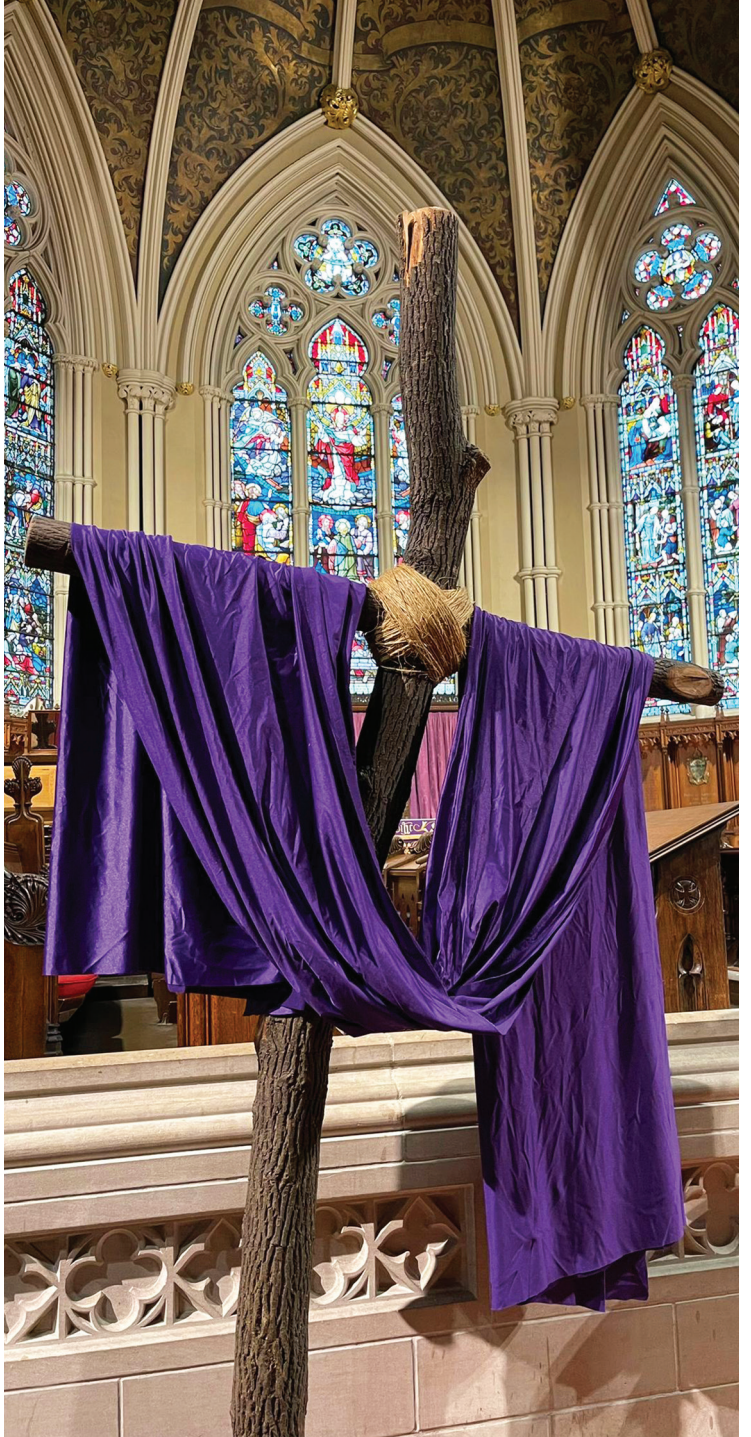
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