

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

I. In the Garden

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

L: The First Station, a reading from Luke chapter 22.

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

[Sit]

It all started in a garden named Eden. All will now be completed, starting in a garden named Gethsemane. In the first garden, temptation came and plunged the world into the darkness of sin, and ruined Paradise. In the second garden, temptation also came, but this time would not be able to do its awful deed. The second Adam, our Saviour, does what the first Adam could not – He resists temptation and does the will of His Father. And with His perfect obedience and sacrifice, rescues creation from the darkness of sin, and restores Paradise. It was not easy. There was agony and blood-like sweat, and His sleeping disciples gave Him no support. Alone in the garden, alone on the cross, alone against our sin.

And yet He is not alone. Jesus prays to His Father, and His prayer is heard. For Jesus is the Son of God, but also a man – a man of faith. And the Father has promised to hear the prayers of all who call on Him in faith. And so for us too. When temptations comes alluring, when sorrow and agony overwhelm, when the future is uncertain and bleak, we are never alone. We have a Father who has promised to hear, and a Saviour who has promised to help. For He knows all that we face. He knows all that we fear. So let us be not sleeping disciples, asleep in sorrow or security, but turn to Him who came for us, and who – even now – is praying . . . for us.

II. Faithful and Faithless

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

L: The Second Station, a reading from Luke chapter 22.

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, and they said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord,

how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."
And he went out and wept bitterly.

[Sit]

Two men speak. Jesus tells the truth and will not save Himself. Peter lies to save himself.

But what had Jesus spoken earlier? He said: ***“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.”*** (Mark 8:35) So Peter, what have you really done? Have you saved yourself? Or have you saved your body but lost your soul? And what about you and me?

Jesus tells the truth and will not save Himself. He tells the truth to save us who do not tell the truth. That turning to Him in the truth of repentance, we receive the forgiveness of the cross, the forgiveness of His death and resurrection, the forgiveness that He has come to provide.

When the rooster crowed, Peter realized what he had done. He wept bitterly. He repented, and Jesus restored him and forgave him. May it be so also for us. That we not try to hide our sins and failures, but weep for them and repent of them, and be restored and forgiven by our Saviour. So that not when the rooster crows, but when the final trumpet shall sound, we will rejoice and enter into the kingdom, in both body and soul. Saved not by our own words, but by the Word of God made flesh. Who saves not Himself, that He may save us.

Hymn #434 (v. 1, 3) *“Lamb of God, Pure and Holy”*

III. Condemnation

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

L: The Third Station, a reading from Luke chapters 22 and 23, and John chapter 19.

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him."

But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"— a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him." But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands.

[Sit]

Power. If you don't have it, you want it. If you have it, you want more.

Who has the power in this strange scene, where the Creator of the Universe is put on trial?

Is it the chief priests and the rulers of the people, who arrested Jesus and turned Him over to Pilate for trial?

Or is it Pilate and Herod, the earthly powers, who have the power to condemn and to release? To judge and to crucify?

Or is it the soldiers and their strength and their weapons? Striking and beating, mocking and spitting, and crowning the King with a crown of thorns?

Or is it the masses? The throng outside of Pilate's palace, insisting on their way, chanting as with one voice "Crucify Him!"

Or is it the One who speaks not a word. The One who could stop it all with a word; who could summon twelve legions of angels to defend Him. (Mt 26:53) The One who uses His power to serve. Yes, Jesus is the powerful One here. Powerful in silence, powerful in suffering, powerful in death. His power being exercised not against those who pretend to have power, but against the real enemies: sin, death, and the devil. And these He will defeat, in the power of His weakness and death.

May we too use our power and lives in loving service; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:10)

IV. Bearing the Cross

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

L: The Fourth Station, a reading from Mark chapter 15 and Luke chapter 23.

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.

[Sit]

Jesus is forced to carry His own cross. No, He *wants* to. For this He came.

Simon is forced to carry the cross, the cross of this half-dead convict. He was simply in the right place at the right time. Or was it the wrong place at the wrong time? Was it by chance?

It is not just Simon. The cross comes to us in our lives as well. God crossing paths with us. Not by chance, but to work in our lives. To teach us, to train us, in faith. To compel us to bear the burdens of others in love. To kill the old, sinful men in us, and conform us to the image of the Son. And so the cross is not a burden, but a gift. God working good in us.

The Scriptures do not tell us anything more about Simon, or what effect this day had on his life. But that too is no accident. Perhaps this is where you insert yourself into the story. What effect will the cross have in your life? What is your good and gracious God working in you?

Hymn #426 “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*”

V. Weeping and Mocking

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

L: The Fifth Station, a reading from Luke chapter 23.

And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the

criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ 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!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

[Sit]

A great multitude of women were weeping for Jesus. What women? How many had Jesus helped? There was the widow of Nain, the woman He healed from twelve years of bleeding, Jairus' daughter, the Canaanite woman's daughter, Peter's mother-in-law, Joanna, Mary Magdalene, Martha, and countless others. Jesus ignored and despised no one in need, and as His heart went out to them, so now their hearts go out to Him.

But there is also mocking. Taunting voices. Scoffing. Using the compassion He showed others against Him: ***He saved others, but He cannot save Himself.*** Not quite true. He could, but He won't.

The nails have been set, sending piercing waves of pain through His body. As He hangs, bones strain against tendons and ligaments, and each breath is harder and harder to gain. But greater than any physical pain is the sin of the world, now bearing down heavy upon Him, for He makes Himself an offering for sin. (Isaiah 53:10)

Therefore here is the door to glory and life. Which if Jesus had come down would have been shut to us forever. But Jesus has come to open the door, to be the door. To open the door of the grave. To open the door of Paradise. To open the door for His Bride, the Church, so that when He returns, we may rejoice at His coming and welcome Him in faith.

Yes, here hangs the King of the Jews. Quite right. The true Son of David, who through His death and resurrection will sit on the throne forever, and turn our mourning and weeping into eternal joy. For yes, He came to save others, not Himself. He came to save us.

VI. Dying Promises

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

L: The Sixth Station, a reading from Luke chapter 23 and John chapter 19.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he

said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

[Sit]

Even while hanging on the cross, the Word of God is not silent. The Gospel goes forth, as Jesus speaks words of forgiveness, promise, and comfort, even while dying. And all of these things He gives not just to a few from the cross, but to all. For they are why He was there – to give us the forgiveness of our sins, the promise of Paradise, and the comfort and assurance of His atonement and reconciliation with God. He has come for us in His incarnation and to the cross, and He is going to come again for us on the last day.

And so these words of Jesus are not strange to Him. Indeed, they are what the thief's request is really all about – Jesus remembering us. Jesus remembering us in our greatest need. Jesus remembering His promises. We speak of it as “remembering,” but we were never forgotten by Him. Indeed, in all of Scripture, there is only one thing we are told that the Lord will forget. The prophet Jeremiah tells us what that is: ***“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*** (Jer 31:34)

Jesus, remember us. Remember us in our struggles. Remember us in our pains. Remember us in our doubts and fears. Remember us even when we forget you. Remember us in mercy and love. Remember us in our last moments, and take us to Paradise.

Hymn #427 *“In the Cross of Christ I Glory”*

VII. Death and Burial

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

L: The Seventh Station, a reading from Luke chapter 23.

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.

[Sit]

Darkness covers the land, for the sun is ashamed to shine. If sinful mankind is not ashamed to look at their Creator on the cross, the sun will not.

But though it is dark, it is not the darkness. For there is victory here. The darkness is being conquered by our Saviour on the cross. The hour of darkness is almost

over. The darkness of sin is going to be obliterated by the light of the glory of Christ's resurrection.

But not yet. But a glimmer of the light. A prayer of faith: ***“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”***

May that be our prayer as well, when faced with death. To know that now, in Christ, not even death can separate us from our Father. For Christ has breached the wall of separation, the wall of sin, that Adam built. The Temple curtain is torn in two. God and man are reconciled in Christ, once and for all.

Then Christ is planted in the ground. For ***“unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*** (John 12:24) And so Jesus is planted in the ground, that in His resurrection He may be the first of the fruits that God will raise from the dead. An abundant harvest of souls, to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

First, He will rest from His labor. One last Sabbath rest, until He bursts the bonds of hell and death in His resurrection. Until, as Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 11:10), His resting place be glorious – for only empty tombs are glorious tombs.

As so to Him, our great Redeemer, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.