

The Stations of the Cross

Meditations

✠ 2009 ✠

ST 1 B JESUS IN GETHSEMANE B MT 26.36-39

Jesus takes the same three disciples as saw His glorious *Transfiguration*, and they must now witness His sorrow. Here, therefore, they are witnessing the humiliation of God, of the Lord of hosts. But this mystery is too terrible and wonderful to behold – thus their flesh is weak, despite a willing spirit ... and they fall asleep. Again they fall down to the ground, just as they did at the *Transfiguration* – then, due to the glory ... but now, to the humility. Here is the mystery too great for words. How can Jesus be both God and Suffering Servant at the same time? They were to watch, said Jesus, but they could not; for the sight of Jesus= sorrow unto death was too overpowering. When we worship, let us watch and pray so that we, too, rather than yawning or daydreaming, shall likewise be overwhelmed with this mystery, wherein is our salvation. For in His sorrow He awoke them from sleep, even as He shall awaken all His faithful from the sleep of death to eternal resurrection and joy.

ST 2 B JESUS BETRAYED BY JUDAS B MT 26.47-50

Now Judas kisses the Son, according to the PSALM: ***Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.*** Yet this is not a kiss of devotion – as there required – but of betrayal. Jesus knows full well Judas= false devotion – just as He knows all false devotion, from any who would feign holiness or godliness. All talk of holy things without faith is idle and foolish; all worship without faith is vanity and betrayal. Therefore, let our eyes be ever toward the Lord in true faith – not merely outwardly but inwardly. In this way let us kiss the Son, with the kiss of faith and true worship – i.e., let us hear His Word and eat His Sacrament with ears and lips full of faith in Him, believing what He says. Behold, how the Lord here calls Judas ***friend*** – though he is no friend ... but an enemy. ***Greater love has no one than this: that a Man lay down His life for His friends*** – indeed for all enemy sinners Christ here calls *friend*.

ST 3 B JESUS CONDEMNED BY SANHEDRIN B **MT 26.62-66**

Many men with evil, lying tongues spoke against our Lord before the Sanhedrin. Behold how *the rulers take counsel together against the Anointed One* of the Lord. They have brought in many false witnesses C but the Lord confounds them all, such that their false testimony does not agree. Therefore the Christ of God is not condemned by deceit. No, He will not go to the cross because of lies, but because of the truth: that He is *the Christ, the Son of God*. How different is this counsel of self-righteous, self-seeking men from the eternal counsel of the Triune God. They seek for their own temporal welfare, power, and authority, though they claim it is for good; Christ, Who has all power and authority, discards His own welfare for the true good of all. The Jewish counsel plots death; but God says: *Let us make man in our image*, and creates human life. They seek the destruction of an innocent Man; but from before the foundations of the earth, the Second Person of the eternal Tribunal has determined to give His life to make all people innocent before the Father. The Sanhedrin says: *He deserves death*; but God says: Though they deserve it not, let them have life in My Son.

ST 4 B JESUS DENIED BY PETER B **MT 26.73-75**

A rooster crows. Peter weeps. Once so sure and boastful of his own will-power to avoid temptation and sin: *Even if all fall away on account of You, I never will. ... Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You*. Now dear Peter is driven to his knees in tears, to the depths of bitter sorrow over sin committed C words that cannot be taken back. He is not so strong as he thought – **nor are we**. For we, too, have been fully forewarned of the temptations that will come our way. Christ says also to us: *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation*. And still, we, like Peter, fall – if not in words, then by thoughts and actions we deny our Lord ... Who bought us with His innocent suffering and the pouring out of His holy, precious blood. May we never boast except in our Lord Jesus Christ – the only truly strong One.

ST 5 B JESUS CONDEMNED BY PILATE B **MT 27.24-26**

Note how many people knew of Jesus= innocence. First, Pilate, who is amazed that Christ does not defend Himself against the accusations of the chief priests and elders. Next, the crowds; for it says that Pilate knew it was out of envy that they delivered Him – out of envy: for they knew Him to be good, unlike them, and not evil, like them. Thirdly, Pilate's wife, who though not directly involved in the proceedings, was nonetheless so convinced of the travesty of justice in condemning Jesus that she suffered a nightmare over it. And finally, there is the government itself, for when Pilate washes his hands before the people, he is issuing a verdict of innocence. Yet the obviously innocent Jesus is delivered to crucifixion anyway. Why? The answer is, ironically, from the people themselves: *His blood be on us and on our children*. Indeed! His holy, sacred, pure sacrificial Lamb's blood is on us who are evil – and it, therefore, covers our sins. Let us believe and rejoice in this our redemption.

ST 6 B JESUS SCOURGED/CROWNED W/THORNS B **MT 27.27-30**

Now is the hour of darkness, where there is no goodness to behold with the eyes, and where faith must stand alone. For by sight we flinch, that our blessed Christ is being scourged – while by faith we rejoice in knowing that *by His stripes we are healed*. By sight we recoil at the mockery in the scarlet robe and the crown of thorns – but by faith we call this vesting and coronation of our Lord wonderful, the means and payment whereby He makes the kingdom of this world His own kingdom. By sight we weep over the spitting and the shameful ridicule in this false worship – but by faith we see the spittle of His enemies as a trophy, and the bowing of their knees as true homage. For indeed it is by this Passion that the very demons quake and lose the contest. And by the act of mockery, a beautiful picture of true worship is in fact seen. Now let us mock the enemies in return, following the example they by no means meant. Let us do as they did – but truly bow before the Crucified One,

recognizing Him Lord of all.

ST 7 B JESUS MADE TO CARRY CROSS B **Mk 15.20**

Though only mockery, it was fitting and right that the Lord should wear the purple cloak of royalty. But now, behold, with back and arms and legs torn open from the lashes of the cruel whip, the King of kings is made the slave. A servant's form like ours He wore; therefore He must don His servant clothes once again. The Savior must bear His own Cross C for our Lord does not command us to go where He Himself has not gone before to clear the way. Therefore He willingly takes up the Cross upon His worn and weary shoulders. It is the beam that we are unable to remove from our own eye C though we so often consider the splinter in our neighbor's. Behold, how heavy a burden it is for Him; for this Cross is weighed down with the sins of the whole world – yours and mine. When our Redeemer arrives at the appointed altar, He will once again be stripped C our sin no longer be falsely covered. For, *God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

ST 8 B JESUS HELPED BY SIMON OF CYRENE B **Lk 23.26**

By this point our Lord's physical strength wanes. He has endured corporal punishment for twelve hours – deprived of sleep, struck, beaten, whipped without mercy ... but the worst is yet to come. Now Simon the Cyrenian must carry Jesus' Cross and follow Him, as a vivid and visible reminder of Jesus' words: *If anyone will come after Me, let him take up his cross, and follow Me.* Yet this cross we carry is not like His, for who could bear its true weight? Moreover, our Lord promises that His yoke is easy and His burden is light – though, for a time, it may appear to be more than we can bear, our Lord will lift its burden from us, as He has done when He lifted up the burden of our sins in His own body and allowed them to be nailed to the tree through His suffering flesh. Let us not shun the Cross, therefore, but rather carry it along toward Calvary, rejoicing, with the understanding that in His Cross is victory and through His death comes resurrection unto life everlasting.

ST 9 B JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN B LK 23.27-28

When the great company of people bewailed and lamented Him, Jesus said: *Do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves.* For we who are evil by nature must recognize the cause of our Savior=s Cross – namely our sin. Thus if we are to weep, it ought to be over our own woeful nature. It ought to be the weeping of a contrite heart ... sorely oppressed with its sins. But weep not for Christ, for He is the sacrificial Lamb for our sins ... Who lovingly reconciles us to God. To weep for Christ would be to wish He were not going that way, the way of the Cross, for us. No, rather, we ought cry: *Hosanna!* and rejoice with the children of Jesus= entry into Jerusalem as we did on *Palm Sunday*; that is, pray that He might be spurred on toward His victory C and ours C **through** His Cross and suffering.

ST 10 B JESUS IS CRUCIFIED B LK 23.33-34

Christ is brought now to the place called *The Skull* for crucifixion; so He Who is our glorious and ever-living Head now dies upon a death-head. But whose head does this place called *The Skull* signify? Recall the first promise in the fallen Garden, the promise made to that serpent of old, who beguiled the woman: *her Seed shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.* Now the woman=s blessed Seed, with heel bruised in crucifixion, is lifted up upon the head of the serpent who brought death – for in His death Christ the victim becomes the Victor over satan ... reconciling the world to the Father. And Christ prays to His Head, saying: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* This word of forgiveness is for those who have wrongfully found the Innocent Lamb guilty ... who have scourged and scorned and shorn Him ... and bruised His heel by iron spike and rough-cut tree. But it is most surely also **for you** and **for me**. For so often we know not what we do – and sometimes, even knowing, bruise Him again. And thus the Seed pleads for His seed – His children by way of His Bride, the Church, of which He is the Head C *Father, forgive them.*

ST 11 B JESUS PROMISES PARADISE TO THIEF B LK 23.39-43

Two thieves: one reviles the Crucified, the other prays to Him. One mocks, the other praises. For the first believed what his eyes saw: a mere wretched bleeding Figure. But the second saw the words his faith gave him: *This is the King of the Jews*. Yet He does not look like a king here, and therefore here is the true test of faith, by which the faithful are distinguished from the faithless. Faithlessness calls Him a foolish imposter, and rails at Him with the first malefactor. But faith calls Him King and confesses the coming of His kingdom, with the second malefactor. And Jesus rewards such faith, turning toward this praying thief and promising him Paradise *today*, while at the same moment He turns away from the other, even as all the faithless will be rejected at the coming of Christ=s glorious kingdom. But the faithful may have the kingdom *today*, whenever they hear this Gospel..

ST 12 B JESUS ON THE CROSS, MARY & JOHN B JN 19.26-27

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved – who knew Christ=s love and cherished it above all. Mary, the Mother of the Lord – who by God=s choosing her brought forth the Christ to human life. Both stand now before the Author of Life as He dies on the Cross – from which the Son both honors and cares for His dear mother. Even here Jesus fulfills the Law of God for us in active obedience. Mary has a new adoptive son by Christ=s providence and command ... much as Christ=s Bride, the Church, is continually receiving new sons and daughters through adoption by the Savior=s providence and command – even as the Scriptures say: *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons*. John has a new mother, much as we receive a new mother – Christ=s Holy Church – when we are born of the water and the word in Holy Baptism. And in this Christian Church we are cradled and nourished in spiritual life through Word and Sacrament, much as Mary once cradled and nourished her own dear Son.

ST 13 B JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS B MK 15.34-39

Here, most clearly, we see that *The Cross* is *The Sign of Finality*. At three in the afternoon the Savior cries out: *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?* The eternal wrath of the Father is poured out against the sin of the whole world C which rests totally and completely in the Son. The Father turns His back on sin C for He will not look upon it, even when it is enfleshed in His very own, only-begotten, dearly-beloved Son. Then Jesus utters a loud cry. *It is finished!* the Lord says, before commending His spirit into the Father=s hands and breathing His last. *It is finished!* The punishment for sin is finally over. The suffering Servant has borne it all C forever faithful, forever obedient C to the last. The task our Savior came down from heaven to perform is completed. Nothing remains to be done for our salvation. *It is finished!* The curtain of the temple is torn in two, from top to bottom; for God Himself has removed that which separated God and man. In the torn flesh of the Son, the ultimate atoning sacrifice has been offered and the Holy of Holies is now opened to all believers. *Truly this Man was – forever IS – the Son of God!*

ST 14 B JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB B MT 27.57-60

Here faith triumphs over all evil and darkness. For Jesus is now crucified, dead, and buried, and a stone blocks the tomb. But in spite of all this dread for the eyes to see, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sat down opposite the tomb, as the next verse tells us. How faithful were these women! For they, in spite of all the grief that this experience and sight gave them, remained faithful to their Lord and His word (for He had told them to be watchful). So there they sit; yea, there sits faith, keeping watch in the hour of darkness. Thus does faith triumph over darkness and the grave. On whose behalf, then, do these women sit and keep watch? On behalf of all the faithful ones, the very Bride of Christ, who keeps vigil for the Lord on the eve of Easter. No darkness can daunt them, no grief nor sorrow can dissuade them, for in spite of their weeping they remain faithful, now, to their dead Lord, somehow knowing still that His is the Resurrection and the Life. Thus Holy Saturday marks the triumph of faith, expecting Easter, for this Holy Sabbath rest of our Lord in the tomb C Who rests once again from all His work, this time the work of Salvation C will give way

to the never-ending Eighth Day of the New Creation.