

**STATIONS FOR A NEW CREATION:
A PRECIOUS BLOOD WAY OF THE CROSS**

By Joseph Nassal, CPPS

Dedication

**With gratitude to the parishioners
of Precious Blood Parish,
Dayton, Ohio,
and their pastor,
Father Bill O'Donnell, CPPS
who commissioned these stations.**

Begin at Baptismal Font.

Reading: Romans 6, 3-11

Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Through baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. If we have been united with him through likeness to his death, so shall we be through a like resurrection. This we know: our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might be slaves to sin no longer. If we have died with Christ, we believe that we are also to live with him. We know that Christ, once raised from the dead, will never die again; death has no more power over him. His death was death to sin, once for all; his life is life for God. In the same way, you must consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.

Opening Reflection:

As followers of Christ whose blood was shed on a cross that all peoples might be saved and the world be redeemed, we believe that all blood is precious. This sacred bond found in the blood of Christ is a bond that can never be broken. Our ancient ancestors understood that blood is life and that without blood we die. The blood of animals, of lambs and goats, was sacrificed to God as signs of worship and adoration. Jesus became the Paschal Lamb when walked the way of the cross and died as a sign of God's mercy and forgiveness offered in his blood. When he stretched out his arms on the cross, Jesus spanned time and space with sanctifying grace.

The spirituality of the Precious Blood shapes our identity as a people of faith. The devotion of the Stations of the Cross helps us to name and claim this spirituality as our passion. As we begin this journey of faith, walking with Jesus on the way of his cross, we listen to the pulse of the precious blood flowing through the body of Christ. As he shuffles and stumbles and falls under the weight of the wood on the way to his execution, at each station we listen to the heartbeat of love that pulses through his body.

But at each station we also take our pulse. These fifteen stations invite us to listen to the blood of Christ as he walks the way of the cross. In walking this way, in dying this way, Jesus attunes the divine ear and the sacred heart to the sound of blood crying out of every inch of soil in the world today. Wherever violence seeks to take others by storms of anger and rage, of resentment and fear, in word and in deed, the precious blood of Christ screams an invitation to solidarity. This sacred stance of solidarity isn't an invitation to simply commiserate, to have pity or feel sorry for those who are suffering under the weight of crosses and losses today; rather, this is a call to reconciliation. It is a call to stand with others in the struggle, in the loss, with hope and with healing, with prayer and with promise.

These stations remind us how we find our home in the broken heart of God. It is here where every suffering and every death, where every torture and every terror, where every pain and every passion of every human being comes together at the same sacred place: in the broken heart of God.

When we stand close to each at the foot of the cross, listening to the heartbeat of God, we find a soul mate for our suffering and a savior for our world.

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God,
when we listen to the blood pulsing through our arteries and veins;
when we listen to the blood crying out to us from the ground
 where wars and violence raged;
when we listen to the blood calling us to justice,
to protect and promote the dignity of every human being and every human life,
then and only then, will we live the peace won for us in the blood of Christ.

As we walk this way of the cross as a parish named and claimed for the precious blood,
give us the courage we need to live our identity as people of reconciliation
in a wounded world.
Amen.

First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Genesis 4, 10*

And God said, "What have you done?
The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

Reflection:

In the first act of violence recorded in Scripture when Cain took the life of his brother Abel, God did not *see* the blood of the murdered brother; God *heard* the blood of Abel crying out from the ground. God listened to the sound of the blood.

No doubt Cain disposed of his brother's body, but he could no more hide it from God's sight as he could erase what he did from his mind. Besides, even if he could have hidden the body, his violent act was not out of God's range of hearing. God not only has good hearing, but God listens. "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

It is the sound of Abel's blood screaming from the earth that gives Cain away.

What must God be hearing today? What does God hear at this very moment somewhere in this country, maybe even in this city, as the blood of an innocent person stains a sidewalk or a street, another victim of violence? From abortion clinics to death row cells, the blood of the innocent and the guilty screams murder. Bloody murder. God hears it. Do we?

Blood, shed in violence, will not keep silent. The blood shed by violence in our city screams out to God. Blood, shed in war, shouts out to God. Blood shed in emergency rooms where doctors and nurses hasten to help a victim of violent crime, cries out to God.

When we listen to the sound of the blood, we find our voice for this journey of faith, this way of the cross.

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God, some know they only have so much time to live and spend that time drawing as much from the deep well of life as they can. Others are surprised by death's visit through accidents or random acts of violence or premeditated acts of revenge, terror, and murder.

Still others, unable to face the torture of another day, take their own lives.

When death is instant, there is no chance to say goodbye.

And so we stand at this station in solidarity with all those today who will hear the verdict that the illness is terminal or the marriage is over or the mission is dangerous or the loved one is dead.

We stand in solidarity with those who sit on the death rows of our world, those who will be executed in our name, those who will die in abortion clinics and refugee camps, on highways, and in war zones.

We stand in solidarity with your Son, Jesus, who never wavers in his commitment to life in the face of death.

Amen.

Second Station: Jesus takes up the cross

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Exodus 12, 23*

When God sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts
God will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer
to enter your houses to slay you.

Reflection:

The homes of the people are marked with the blood of lambs to signify their special relationship with God. This blood on the lintels establishes the places where the people gather as safe houses—they will be safe here and will escape the angel of death. Because blood is the life force within us, this symbol becomes for the people the sign of their freedom from oppressors and the favor they enjoy in God's eyes. They are God's people; they share the bloodlines that make them a new family of faith.

Our ancestors in faith are huddled in their houses. The space is crowded with family and friends who have been told not to spend this night alone. In this crowded space, standing shoulder to shoulder, they will make it through the night of danger and destruction because of the blood that is splashed on the doorposts of their houses. This blood became the sign of their deliverance from the death and destruction that whirled about their houses that night. This blood became the symbol of their liberation to live God's new dream and new identity for them. They were no longer slaves in a strange land, but pilgrims who would soon be on the move to a promised land.

Jesus takes us his cross and begins his journey. With this cross, marked with his own blood, he will provide shelter from the storms of life. We take up this cross and begin the journey, following the trail of the precious blood.

Prayer:

Gracious and loving God,
under the shadow of the cross of your son, you deliver us from death.
As we walk this way of the cross,
this trail of tender mercy marked by his precious blood,
give us the grace and strength we need to be pilgrims of promise and peace.
No matter how difficult the journey may become,
no matter our dangerous this way of the cross is,
we know you have painted the doors of our hearts with your blood
so we are safe and secure in your love.
Amen.

Third Station: Jesus falls the first time

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *1 Peter 2, 2*

In his own body he brought your sins to the cross, so that all of us,
dead to sin, could live in accord with God's will.
By his wounds you were healed.

Reflection:

One of the most striking features of this way of the cross is that Jesus falls. Not once. Not twice. But three times. Jesus, king of kings, lord of lords, Son of God, falls three times.

But this is not a fall from grace as some religious leaders and popular television preachers and priests have taken in recent years. This is a fall *into* grace. Jesus falls because he knows there are times in our lives when we want to save face and cannot; when we don't want to take the fall for someone else but are blamed anyway; when we are afraid of taking a risk because we might fail and fall so we sit on our hands and put up our feet and shut our mouths instead of speaking up for justice or standing with the oppressed.

Jesus knew also that there are times when we fall flat on our faces because of pride—which always comes before a fall, or so the saying goes—or when we lose our balance on the pedestals we build for ourselves and others and we all fall down. So he showed us how to fall gracefully. Jesus avoided perches and pedestals, thrones and places of honor. He always took the lowest place to embrace the crosses and losses of our lives.

Here is the invitation to grace: trace the bruises on our bodies, the scars on our souls, and the wounds in our relationships caused by our pride, our fear, and our failures. Touch them tenderly, gently, carefully. Place these memories, as painful as they may be, at this station with the One who falls the first time. And remember: it is by the bruises on his body, the scars he endured from carrying the cross, and the wounds he endured, that we are healed.

Prayer:

Gracious and loving God,
Your Son fell under the weight of the wood of his cross.
It didn't take long. Just a few steps along the way,
He tripped and stumbled and fell.
Help us to remember, O Compassionate One,
When we fall out of favor or feel like we have fallen from grace,
we are never out of your reach or far from your loving embrace.
Jesus falls the first time so that each time we fail,
we fall into a place where your pardon and peace,
and the favor of your forgiving love,
gives us the courage to continue the walk of faith.
By the wounds he endured along this way of torture, terror, and death,
we find healing and hope.
Amen.

Fourth Station: Jesus meets his mother

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Luke 2, 34-35*

Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Reflection:

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is filled with God’s grace. How her heart must have been breaking. How her body must have been aching as she watched her son fall under the weight of the cross. She knew now what old Simeon meant years before in the temple when he told her that her heart would be pierced. For she feels the sharp sword of suffering go straight through her heart and penetrate her soul.

Jesus pauses when he sees his mother. No words are exchanged between mother and son. No words are necessary. They look into each other’s eyes and see the love, the compassion, and the care that will carry them through this excruciating journey of suffering and death.

Mary wears her pierced heart on her tear-stained sleeve. She wants so much to break through the crowd and hold her son in her arms as she did that silent night so long ago when he burst forth from her womb. There was blood then too and indescribable pain. But that pain seems small to what Mary feels now as she watches her Son stumble and fall.

The soldiers push Jesus to continue his journey. Mary reaches out to try to touch him one last time but her hands are pushed away by the cross. She crosses her heart and for a moment remembers that ancient childhood rhyme she taught Jesus when she wanted him to keep a secret: “Cross your heart and hope to die.” Now that simple verse has come into full view: the cross, the pierced heart, and the certain death.

But there is hope, too. The hope is found in the loving glance of a mother and son that gives each one the courage to carry on.

Prayer:

Loving and Gracious God,
Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Jesus,
bless all mothers whose hearts have been pierced.
Bless mothers who have lost children to death. Comfort them in their sorrow.
Bless the mothers of children who have disappeared, children who have been abused,
children who have left home never to return again. Bless them with your peace.
Bless all expectant mothers and those throughout the world who at this very moment
are giving birth. Give us the grace to stand with them in their hope.
And bless those mothers who at this very moment are learning the news:
Your child is dead.
Give us the grace, O Mary, Mother of Jesus, to stand with them in their loss.
May we be willing to wear our pierced hearts on our sleeves
as we catch each other’s tears.
Amen.

Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Mark 15, 21*

They pressed into service a passerby, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

Reflection:

Along the way of the cross, there was a man minding his own business. He was from the country, a farmer or shepherd, perhaps going to the store to stock up on groceries for the family. Why Simon? Why was he the one picked to carry the cross of Jesus? Was he in the wrong place at the wrong time? Or was he in the right place at just the right time to help Jesus in his time of need? We don't know much about this man named Simon but he is remembered forever as one who is willing to help another carry his cross.

Simon of Cyrene is a symbol of compassionate service. He is the one who stops at the scene of an accident and offers assistance. Simon is the one who volunteers at the food pantry, or visits the sick, or brings communion to those unable to travel outside their homes. Simon pulls up a chair at the nursing home and listens to a lonely resident who has no one else in the world.

In the First Letter of Peter, we read: "In prayer you call upon a Father who judges each one justly on the basis of one's actions. Since this is so, conduct yourselves reverently during your sojourn in a strange land. Realize that you were delivered from the futile way of life...not by any diminishable sum of silver or gold, but by Christ's blood beyond all price."

Simon of Cyrene was a sojourner in a strange city that day. He is remembered for his actions of helping another along the way. As he looked into the eyes of Christ, he saw the gratitude but also the grief. Looking into his eyes, he could see the love of this one who was willing to shed his blood. And that look, like the blood he shed, was "beyond all price."

Prayer:

Gracious and Loving God,
Give us the courage to stop and help those in need we meet along the way.
Though we may be shy or self-conscious, may this never stop us from reaching out
to those who need our companionship and our care.
Whether it is a listening ear or a helping hand,
may our actions reflect our gratitude for your grace
offered to us in Jesus who delivered us from our complacency and carelessness
by the immeasurable price of his precious blood.
Like Simon, we are sojourners in a strange land, but we do not walk alone.
May we make this sojourn sacred by our service to all we meet along the way.
Amen.

Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Hebrews 10, 19-24*

Since the blood of Jesus assures our entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living path he has opened up for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near in utter sincerity and absolute trust. Let us hold unwaveringly to our profession which give us hope, for he who made the promise deserves our trust. We must consider how to rouse each other to love and good deeds.

Reflection:

Every picture tells a story. There are some scenes so memorable, so striking, so humorous, that we say, "I wish I had a camera." But this is not one of those moments. We don't want to record pain or suffering, torture or terror on film and paste it in a scrapbook or photo album or save it to a CD or in the cloud. We take pictures of scenes of beauty or babies or spectacular views or the funny faces a friend or family member might make.

Veronica did not have a camera, of course. But in the tradition of these stations, she is the one who uses her veil to wipe the blood, sweat, and tears from the face of Jesus. For her compassion, for her willingness to step out of the crowd and minister to Jesus, for her courage in taking a risk to reach out to the condemned and show him some kindness, she is rewarded with a picture: the face of Jesus forever etched on her veil.

This station reminds us of all the faces of suffering and sadness, poverty and pain, oppression and injustice, hunger and hopelessness we have seen along the way of life. We didn't take a picture of these people or these places but these are the faces we can never forget. They are not imprinted on veils or t-shirts but on our minds, our hearts, and our souls.

Because Veronica's good deed in his time of need, Jesus allowed her to take his picture. She carried the suffering face of Christ imprinted on the fabric of her faith wherever she went.

And so do we.

Prayer:

Gracious and Loving God,

Every picture tells a story.

At this station, the picture tells a story of compassion and kindness to someone in need.

Along this parade route of pain, there stood a woman named Veronica.

She had followed you from a distance but now she steps out of the crowd.

With tears in her eyes and a cloth in her hand, she wipes the blood from your face.

With gratitude for her courage, you gift her with your image

forever etched on the veil of her heart.

Imprint upon our hearts, O Christ, your face is found in the faces

of all who suffer in sorrow this day.

As we follow this path of pain, may we never forget a face—

the face of the one who opens up for us the door to the sanctuary of hope.

Amen.

Seventh Station: Jesus falls the second time

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Ephesians 1, 7-10*

It is in Christ and through his blood that we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven, so immeasurably generous is God's favor to us. God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery, the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ, to be carried out in the fullness of time: namely, to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ's headship.

Reflection:

Falling into sin, someone once said, never condemns anyone. But staying under the sin, like staying under water, we drown.

Falling into sin is often the easy part. But getting out from under the weight of sin and death is difficult. We cannot do it on our own. Sin is such a heavy weight around our conscience, it drags us down until we think we are going to die.

Jesus falls a second time to show us how to get out from under sin and death. He falls to show us that it is in his blood, the blood that marks this trail of tears we walk, that we are redeemed and our sins are forgiven.

The blood of Jesus marks out the map of God's mercy. Like tiny red pins that chart out the route of a new adventure, drops of precious blood dot the landscape of our lives with liberation and love.

Though Jesus felt the weight of the cross crushing his body, he never tried to get out from underneath its weight. Though it caused him to fall violently to the cobblestone pavement, his head hitting stone and pushing the thorns even deeper into his scalp, he would not allow the pain to impede his progress to his ultimate destination.

Jesus would take the fall, a second fall, for us because he knew this was the divine plan for the pardon and peace of all human beings. He would take our sin upon himself and carry it to Calvary and beyond. No matter how many times he would fall along the way, he would take this sin out of this world.

Why, then, do we insist on bringing it back?

Prayer:

Gracious and Loving God,

You know the last thing we want to do is take the fall for something we didn't do.

Though we fall into sin more times than we can count,

we can always count on you to forgive us.

Your Son, Jesus, showed us how to take the fall by taking our sin upon his back.

The weight of the world's sin caused him to fall but did not leave him down and out.

He got back up until he reached the top of the hill

where he would stretch out his arms on the cross,

bringing all things in heaven and on earth under your loving care and concern.

Continue to fashion for us a future, O God, where we are willing to carry the weight

of each other's losses for a while, unafraid to fall, always ready to help.

Amen.

Eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Ephesians 2, 19-22*

This means that you are strangers and aliens no longer. No, you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God. You form a building, which rises on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.

Reflection:

Who are these women Jesus stops to console along the way of his cross? They are mothers and grandmothers, aunts and sisters, disciples and dreamers who have followed Jesus since they first heard him speak. Or were present when he healed a relative or brought a child back to life. These are the women whose sons and daughters left to follow Jesus. Intrigued by their decision, these women followed too and found the truth that set them free. Free enough to stand where they were not supposed to be. They were free enough to mourn and to weep and to grieve over this gruesome scene.

They want to comfort Jesus as he stumbles and falls under the weight of the cross. These women know the pain of rejection and loss; these women know what suffering is. They know the taste of sorrow as they have drawn water from the well of injustice. But instead of them consoling Jesus, the victim comforts them. He whispers words of love but also warns them: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children (Luke 23, 28)."

Jesus catches the tears of these women of Jerusalem but also challenges them to continue to be the "saints and members of the household of God" who comfort the oppressed but also confront the oppressors.

Prayer:

Gracious and Compassionate God,
You weep for the children of the earth who are trapped in places of violence.
You weep with the mothers and fathers who bury their children
killed in the action of war or murdered on the streets of our nation.
Give us the compassion to weep with those who mourn the loss of loved ones.
But also give us the courage to confront systems and situations
that contribute to the injustice, oppression, and violence of our day.
Make our hearts tender with mercy
but also tenacious in our pursuit of justice, truth, and peace.
Amen.

Ninth Station: Jesus falls the third time

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Hebrews 9, 14, 22*

...How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself up unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God! According to the law almost everything is purified by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Reflection:

How much more can he take? How much longer can he continue on this trail of terror? He falls again. Fatigue is taking hold of his body. The body of Christ is suffering from chronic fatigue caused by the abuse he has endured. His muscles ache. His legs are so heavy, so weary, he can barely walk. He slips and falls a third time.

Those standing along this parade route of pain wonder if he's down for good. Will he simply die from exhaustion before he reaches the execution site? Will he suffocate under the weight of the wood? Has he lost too much blood for him to continue?

Jesus has lost a lot of blood. His precious blood forms tiny pools each time he falls. Drops of blood splatter the landscape like so much paint from a careless painter. But he takes a deep breath and rises once again.

He must shed a little more blood before he reaches Golgotha. Until now, the blood has trickled from his open wounds, from the cuts and bruises he has suffered already. But once he reaches the top, his blood will flow, poured out for the forgiveness of sin.

No dream worth its salt is achieved without pain. Jesus is willing to pay the price. It will cost more than a pint of blood or a pound of flesh. He will give it all so that all might experience the salvation of our God.

The question this station raises is, am I willing to pay the price? Or am I always looking for a shortcut, always counting the cost, holding a little back in the service of others?

Prayer:

Gracious and Loving God,
cleanse our consciences from all the dead works that clutter our lives.
So many times we have fallen along the way and waiting for someone else
to come along and take our place or help another in need.
Too many times have we asked, "What's in it for us?"
rather than give our all in the service of love.
Make our lives a living worship
so that wherever we are and whatever we do our lives may give your glory.
Strengthen our weary arms; make firm our feeble knees and fragile legs.
May we not grow weak under the burden of our responsibilities
but serve you and others without counting the cost.
Amen.

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Colossians 1, 19-20*

It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him and, by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross.

Reflection:

Jesus arrives at the place known as Golgotha. He is stripped of his clothes but not his dignity. He stands naked before his accusers but will not be ashamed, will not be disgraced.

After all he has experienced, now he suffers one more indignity. He will be the laughing stock of all who pass by. People will jeer at him, mock his nakedness, and make fun of his predicament.

There is no place to hide. He will be hung out to die.

How many today are being stripped of their possessions, their land, their livelihood, and their lives? How many today have no place to hide and no one to take them in? How many today stand ashamed and disgraced for misusing or abusing God's greatest gift?

Here is the Naked Truth: unlike Adam and Eve who retreated after eating the forbidden fruit to hide in the bushes when they realized they were naked, Jesus will not be ashamed of his nakedness for he is about to initiate a new genesis. The naked body of Christ will give birth to a new creation as he hangs from the cross. Naked he came forth from his mother Mary's womb and naked he will return to the womb of Mother Earth. His body will become the seed planted in the ground that will bring to the world a new garden of peace.

Prayer:

Loving God,

the truth is we often stand ashamed and disgraced because of our sins.

But at this station we hear the echoes of the Suffering Servant,
embodied in the Naked Truth, Jesus:

“God is my help therefore I am not disgraced;

I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.”

When we stand naked before you, our Compassionate God,

You will clothe us with your garment of grace.

Help us to trace the threads of this baptismal robe

and count us among those “who have survived the great period of trial;”

those who “have washed their robes and made them white
in the blood of the Lamb.”

May we never be afraid, ashamed, or disgraced

to live as the naked Truth that sets the whole world free.

Amen.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Mark 15, 22-24*

They brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). They offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him....

Reflection:

When we were young and someone made fun of us or called us names, we might respond to their verbal assault with the refrain, “Sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me.” But now we have arrived at the place where the Word made flesh will indeed get hurt—hammered to two large sticks joined together in the form of a cross.

Though crucifixion was the method of capital punishment used to execute Jesus, death by stoning was also very common in Jesus’ time. The crimes for which a person could be stoned ranged from adultery to idolatry, from blasphemy to violating the Sabbath, from divination to fornication, and from parents being stoned for sacrificing their children to the gods to children being stoned for rebelling against their parents. Historians suggest the stoning was such a popular means of execution because stones were readily available. Stoning was also viewed as an acceptable means of punishment because it involved the entire community. Everybody could throw stones but no one would be able to tell which stone would deliver the death blow, so there would be no personal guilt attached.

It certainly would have been more convenient—and probably less expensive—to stone Jesus than to crucify him. But crucifixion won out over convenience. Jesus, the living stone rejected by the builders who will become the cornerstone of the new creation, is not stoned to death but stretched out on two planks of wood and fastened with nails to these sturdy sticks.

We have evolved in the manner by which we execute our criminals. Now, instead of stoning or firing squads or public flogging or public hanging, we build our death chambers in the most remote areas we can find, bring in a few anonymous witnesses, and use a lethal injection as the means to deliver the death blow. But whatever means we use to kill people to teach people that killing people is wrong, we are complicit in contributing to a culture of death.

Stick and stones can break our bones. But the Word of God will save us.

Prayer:

O Loving and Compassionate God,
we are witnesses to the execution of so many in our world today.
Your Son, Jesus, innocent and without sin, is nailed to a cross,
a victim of capital punishment in its most heinous and horrifying forms.
Give us the courage to confront our culture of death
by remaining committed to protecting all human life, innocent as well as guilty,
trusting that You, just Judge of all the world,
whose reign falls upon the just and the unjust
will sort out all of our actions and missed opportunities
in the fullness of time and in the fullness of Your grace.

Amen.

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Philippians 2, 5-8*

Your attitude must be that of Christ. Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in our likeness. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!

Reflection:

The testimony John renders in his telling of this scene is gruesome to hear: "One of the soldiers thrust a lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out." Like the light streaming from the broken body of that young man, so love and life stream forth from the body of Christ. We know from our own experiences of pain and loss, of bruised hopes and broken hearts, that this testimony is true. It is in those places where we have experienced brokenness that we grow strongest.

This is one we can cling to, a view we can look to, in those moments of our lives when anger, resentment and bitterness take hold of us when we have experienced injustice, unfairness, violence, brokenness. Where else can we look when physical illness slows us down or keeps us low to the ground: "They shall look on him whom they have pierced."

Where else can we look when the loss of a friend has us gazing at the gaping wound of loneliness: "They shall look on him who they have pierced."

Where else can we look when life seems unfair, or people seem not to care; when love seems distant and we teeter on the brink of despair; when the world seems harsh or decisions by church authorities seems cruel, where else can we look? "They shall look on him who they have pierced."

Prayer:

Compassionate and Loving God,
as we take a long, loving look at the one who is pierced,
may we come to see how through the cracks and crevices
of our own broken and bruised hearts,
your grace flows and your light glows.
When we look at the precious blood, symbol of love,
flowing from the open side of the one who gave his life,
we come to know there is no greater love than this.
When we look at the water, symbol of life,
pouring out upon the ground,
making streams that refresh soul, renew faith, wash wounds,
and bathe the world in the beauty of new life.
we see the redeeming grace that renews the face of the earth.
Through the water and blood of his cross, O God,
change our attitude to reflect the presence of Christ in our world.
Amen.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Ephesians 2, 13-14*

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ. It is he who is our peace, and who made the two of us one by breaking down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart.

Reflection:

A few sturdy souls who were not afraid to stand at the foot of the cross now claim the dead body of Christ. They remove his body from the cross. His mother who held him on that glorious day when he was born now holds his lifeless body covered in blood.

Most of the people who watched this spectacle of suffering have gone their separate ways. Some who saw the way in which he died, who felt the earth move beneath their feet, who felt the earth quake and the temple shake and the curtain torn in two, now have their doubts. They wonder if maybe, just maybe, this rabbi was more than just a rabble-rouser. Could he have been who he said he was? Was this the savior, the messiah, the prophet sent by God to redeem the world?

Though we often go our separate ways, because of Jesus' death on the cross we have been brought near. Having been brought so near, how close to we want to be?

As the sanctuary curtain split in two, so "the barrier of hostility that kept us apart" is now shattered. The living stone has scattered the bricks built to keep us on the defensive, to keep us from reaching out to one another. The walls that divide us have come tumbling down.

The body of Christ comes down from the cross and is wrapped in burial clothes. People who were strangers before but who stood their ground around the cross come together to prepare for his burial. Death brings those who have been at a distance closer together.

How close do we want to stand?

Prayer:

God of Life,

The dead body of your Son is taken down from the cross
and with him the walls of hostility and hatred.

In his death, through his precious blood, he has brought us together.

May we always be willing to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in solidarity with others
rather than toe-to-toe in combat.

The blood of your Son has washed away the fences in our unforgiving hearts.

Draw us ever closer to those we find most difficult to love in our world
so that the blood of your Son might truly prepare the ground of our hearts
for a new creation of reconciliation.

Amen.

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is placed in the tomb

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *Hebrews 13, 12-13*

Therefore Jesus died outside the gate, to sanctify the people by his own blood.
Let us go to him outside the camp, bearing the insult that he bore.

Reflection:

The first creation began in a garden. Now the new creation begins in a garden, “and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried (John 19, 41).”

The path to the promise land of peace goes through the cemetery. Here is the crossroads to a new creation: an unmarked, borrowed grave where Jesus is laid to rest.

He had spent his life on the fringes, on the margins, with the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and the victims. He once said that he didn't have a place to lay his head. Now he is buried in a tomb owned from someone else.

It is fitting that he did not have his own burial plot because he belongs to all of us, all of the earth, and all of creation. From this place of death, he will rise to new life. But before he does, he must know what every human being knows: what it means to die, his body buried in the ground. As he is buried, he sanctifies all the graves on the face of the earth. All the graves of unknown saints and sinners are made holy at this station. All those who are swept away in natural disasters or buried at sea; all victims of genocide buried in unmarked graves; all people who die alone, with no family, friends or faith community to mourn their passing, all who are buried “outside the camp” with no one to remember they even lived, now find a place of eternal peace.

Prayer:

Compassionate and Gracious God,
your beloved Son makes holy the graves of all who have died.

In the sacred soil of our souls,
may we expand the boundaries of our belonging
so no one is ever left “outside the camp.”

Jesus, who identified himself as the Bread of Life,
is the grain of wheat he once described falling to the earth and dying
to produce the abundant fruit of forgiveness and peace.

Here the seeds of justice and compassion, mercy and truth
are planted in the fields of our faith.

May these seeds break through the hard and harsh ground
of unforgiving hearts to yield an abundant harvest of hope.

Amen.

Fifteenth Station: Jesus is raised from the dead

Leader: *In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*

Response: *Making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reading: *2 Corinthians 5, 17-18*

If anyone is in Christ, you are a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new! All this has been done by God, who has reconciled us to the Divine Self through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

Reflection:

They were carrying on a lively conversation when Jesus joined them on the road. When he asked them what they were talking about, “they halted in distress.” I can imagine one of them saying to this stranger they meet along the road, “Have you been living in a cave?”

Well, in fact, he spent three days in a cave. And while he was hibernating, amazing things happened. “What things?” Jesus asks. And the disciples begin to tell the story of all that happened that weekend in Jerusalem in a breathless fashion.

Jesus, in turn, told them a few amazing stories of his own that helped them to connect the drops of blood on the way of the cross to help them see the map to God’s mercy.

Later Jesus would appear to his friends huddled in fear, hiding out behind locked doors. He would show them his wounds and breathe on them and say, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” In this gentle breath from his scarred and resurrected body, the new creation would be realized and our sins forgiven.

This is the sign when one enters the new creation: “Your sins are forgiven.” In his blood, in the blood of his cross, Jesus has reconciled the world to God. A new genesis is born in his precious blood. We who wash our robes and our hopes in this blood, who claim the name of the Precious Blood, give witness to this new genesis of grace and mercy when we live in a spirit of compassion and reconciliation.

As we have journeyed with Jesus on this way of the cross toward a new creation, may these stations revive our spirit, refresh our hope, and rekindle our desire to renew the face of the earth and the faith of our church.

Prayer:

Gracious and Loving God,

The old order has passed away and you have made us new in the blood of Christ.

May we who claim the promise and peace of the Precious Blood

provide a safe and sacred space for all to find a place
in the grace of your compassion and care.

May all who pray on this holy ground, find a welcoming embrace and a place at the table.

May your blessing rest upon us and upon all who walk this way of the cross,

+ In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

May we go in the peace of Christ that is found in the blood of his cross.

Thanks be to God!