

The Stations of the Cross

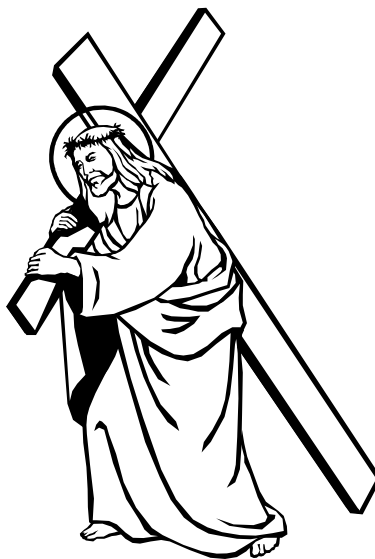
Why do the Stations?

From the earliest of days, followers of Jesus told the story of his passion, death and resurrection. When pilgrims came to see Jerusalem, they were anxious to see the sites where Jesus had been. These sites are important holy connections with Jesus. Eventually, following in the footsteps of the Lord, along the way of the cross, became a part of the pilgrimage visit. The stations, as we know them today, came about when it was no longer easy or even possible to visit the holy sites. In the 1500's, the Franciscans began to build outdoor shrines. The number of stations varied from eleven to thirty. In 1686 Pope Innocent IX gave permission for the Franciscans to erect stations in their churches. In 1731, Pope Clement XII gave permission for all churches to erect stations. Eventually, these shrines became the set of 14 stations we now know.

One of our greatest religious struggles is to realize that we are not alone. The Good News is that Jesus entered into our life's experience completely - even suffering and death - and that he fell into the hands of a Loving God, who raised him from death to life. We can have complete hope that suffering and death have no complete hold on us. We will all share eternal life with him, if we can fall into the hands of the same Loving God. And, along the way, we are not alone. Jesus is with us as one who knows our suffering, and the death we face. That can be deeply consoling.

The Stations of the Cross is a powerful way to contemplate and enter into the mystery of Jesus' gift of himself to us. It takes the reflection on the passion out of our heads, and makes it an imaginative exercise. It involves our senses, our experiences and our emotions. To the extent we come to experience the love of Jesus for us, to that extent the gratitude we feel will be deep. Deep gratitude leads to real generosity and a desire to love as we have been loved.

So try the stations, and experience the consolation they offer. And return often, to be renewed in this intimate experience of Jesus' solidarity with all humanity in our way of the cross each day.



How to do the Stations?

Making the stations is easy.

The first thing to remember is that this is prayer. It isn't an intellectual exercise. It is in the context of our relationship with God. We could read through the text of each of the stations, and look at the stations, but that wouldn't necessarily be prayer. This is an invitation to enter into a gifted faith experience of who Jesus is for us. It becomes prayer when we open our hearts to be touched, and it leads us to express our response in prayer.

The second thing to remember is that this is an imaginative exercise. It's not a historical examination of "what really happened" on that day in history. It's about something far more profound. This is an opportunity to use this long standing Christian prayer to let Jesus touch our hearts deeply by showing us the depth of his love for us. The context is the historical fact that he was made to carry the instrument of his death, from the place where he was condemned to die, to Calvary where he died, and that he was taken down and laid in a tomb. The religious context is that today Jesus wants to use any means available to move our hearts to know his love for us. These exercises can allow us to imaginatively visualize the "meaning" of his passion and death.

The point is to lead us to gratitude. It will also lead us into a sense of solidarity with all our brothers and sisters. In our busy, high tech lives we can easily get out of touch with the terrible suffering of real people in our world. Journeying with Jesus in the Stations, allows us to imagine his entry into the experience of those who are tortured, unjustly accused or victimized, sitting on death row, carrying impossible burdens, facing terminal illnesses, or simply tired.

Do not rush through them. Just walking around a church to look at them is not making them. Contemplation, prayer and response are needed. It could be a wonderful prayer experience to do them as only one or two stations a day for one or two weeks. It can also be powerful to do all 14, very prayerfully, over the course of 40 minutes to an hour, in a single evening, or to do seven one night and seven the following night. Finally, it can be wonderful to return to the experience several weeks or months later, and discover that because of some struggle or difficulty we are experiencing, the stations become a different experience and a fresh experience of consolation.

*Stations are celebrated here at Lourdes every Friday of Lent at 7:00 pm.
Various groups lead them each week. Please join us.*