

In His Footprints

SHORT MEDITATIONS ON THE WAY OF THE CROSS

BY

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Illustrated from paintings by Hendricks and Vinck in the
Cathedral of Antwerp

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*“We will go into His tabernacle
We will worship in His footsteps”*

Psalm cxxxi. 7



First Station

Jesus is Condemned to Death.



Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified.—*John xix. 16.*

In spite of the fact that he could find no cause in Him, and because of his fear of the Jews, Pilate condemns Jesus Christ to death to the ignominious death of the cross. Christ hears the sentence without protest of any kind. Like a lamb He allows Himself to be led to the slaughter.

By earliest decree I, too, O Lord Jesus, am condemned to die. I am journeying every day on the road to death. Whether the way be long or short I know not; but it is certain that I am on the way, and at most it is not very long. One may follow that way as he will; but Thou hast shown us that there is but one way— the way of the Cross. Death for me is a just sentence; for Thee most cruelly unjust. May the Holy Spirit enlighten me with true wisdom. As Thou, my Life and my Light, didst willingly accept the sentence of the judge and joyfully go forth on Thy way of terrible suffering, grant that I, too, by frequent acts of love and resignation, may joyfully accept the death God has ordained for me, and every day go joyfully, gratefully on the way.

Second Station

Jesus is Made to Bear His Cross.



Bearing His own Cross, He went forth to Calvary.—*John xix. 17.*

Jesus accepts the Cross. It is placed upon His shoulders, and thus bearing the weight of our sins, He begins His journey unto Calvary.

AN awful load! An infinite weight! Neither our minds nor our hearts can begin to measure the terrible pressure of that wood upon Thy shoulders nor of that Cross upon Thy heart. The sin, the wretchedness, the despair of the long-crowded ages of the world are therein. Yet with love Thou stretchest forth Thy arms to receive the Cross, symbol of what Thou hast endured all Thy life long. For our sakes Thou welcomest it with joy. He that follows Thee, Christ, must take up his cross. God has condemned each one of us as He condemned His Own Son to the burden of the Cross. We justly, because of our sins; His Son, because that Son offered Himself for love of us. My Jesus, may I through Thy grace welcome the cross which Thou askest me to bear; welcome it each day. May the ruling spirit of my life be the spirit of the Cross.

Third Station

Jesus Falls the First Time under His Cross.



The Lord lifteth up all that fall, and setteth up all that are cast down.—
Ps. cxliv. 14.

Though bearing it all with patience and resignation, the weight of the Cross is too great. Weakened by the cruel treatment of His enemies, by His scourging and His crown of thorns, Jesus' strength gives way and He falls.

THOU art not long upon the way of sacrifice when the weight of sin overcomes Thy Sacred Body and crushes Thee to the ground. Last night it crushed Thy soul in the darkness; here it hurls Thee to the ground in the sight of all men who jeer at Thy helplessness. I see myself, O Jesus, among those who mock Thee. I have been of their number time and time again. Yea, I know that my sinful hands pressed the Cross and forced Thee in weakness to the ground. And now, as I aspire to follow after Thee, to do that which I know is necessary for my soul's salvation and my union with Thee— to carry my cross— the knowledge of my sins, the thought that I have so often offended Thee, my Savior and my God, crushes me in despair to the earth. How can I, miserable traitor, aspire to Calvary? Am I worthy of the journey at all? Yet I have no hope but in Thee, sweetest Jesus. As Thou dost rise and go forward, so I know Thou wilt lift me up and lead me on solely by the power of Thy love and in spite of my sins and of myself.

Fourth Station

Jesus Meets His Afflicted Mother.



See if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow.—*Lam. i. 12.*

Journeying on in pain and sorrow, Jesus meets her whom He loved best in all the world— His Mother.

SURELY Thy ways, O Christ, are incomprehensible to us; Thy love unfathomable. The things that were to Thy pain Thou hast changed to cause of joy for us. Face to face with her who bore and nursed Thee, made one with sin before men, how Thy heart bled! Great as were her pain and agony, Thine were infinitely greater. Thy own Mother must see Thee and follow Thee; hear the insults hurled at Thee; mount Calvary; see Thee stripped and nailed to the Cross; watch there through Thine agony and stand till the end with a broken heart. Yet in the meeting and in the companionship there must have been true joy, the test of which is deepest sorrow and of which our small hearts can know but little.

That which was Thy pain, O Christ, is our joy; we thank Thee for sending Thy dear Mother to us time and again as we bear our cross through life. Mary has been comfort and strength and inspiration to us. May Thy Mother be always with us, may she watch over us, inspire us to go onward, and may her presence sweeten death's bitterness.

Fifth Station

The Cyrenian Helps Jesus to Carry His Cross.



And they forced Simon the Cyrenian to take up His Cross.—*Mark xv. 21.*

Fearing, perhaps, that He would become exhausted and die on the way, the Jews compel Simon, the Cyrenian, to help Jesus carry the Cross.

OUT of the multitude who followed Thee, only one man is found who will help Thee to bear the Cross. What matter if he helped willingly or unwillingly? The fact remains that Thou didst permit a sinful man to help Thee carry Thy burden. Thou didst not need his help. The Will of Thy Father was to be done and Thou, infinite God, couldst give strength and power to Thy human heart— as Thou didst often do— to bear all things even unto the end. Why didst Thou accept this help? For our sakes— to show us that we, too, in bearing the cross which Thou askest of us and giveth us grace to bear, may properly and effectively be helped by our fellows. Wondrous, all-encompassing dispensation of Jesus Christ! Infinite love in itself, it yet accepts and does not reject human love and help. Nay, these have their worth and their virtue only through Thee. Hence, the Communion of Saints upon earth—everyone bears his cross through Thee, and all help one another and accept in humility and gratitude, even as Thou didst deign to do, the help of others. Blessed and sweet beyond words is the love we bear one another through the Passion of Our Lord that has made us all brothers in His Sacred Blood.

Sixth Station

Veronica Wipes The Face of Jesus.



The light of Thy countenance. O Lord, is signed upon us.—*Ps. iv. 7.*

With His wounds still bleeding, His face dripping with sweat, Jesus struggles on. A woman of the crowd, Veronica by name, comes with a towel and mercifully wipes His Holy Face.

AND from out the multitude another, a woman, bravely comes and mercifully wipes Thy face with a towel. It is running with sweat and blood and marked with wounds and scarred by lines of anguish. Willingly dost Thou halt, though Thy heart urges Thee to hasten; bend graciously forward and accept from sinful hands this comfort. Thou needest it not, for Thy body didst sweat blood the night before, and endured. Yet for our sake, and to show us the worth of human ministrations, Thou didst permit this woman to wipe Thy Holy Face.

I thank Thee, sweet Jesus, for all those whom Thou hast sent unto me, who by word, example, aid, have helped me to know Thee better; have taught me the worth of the Cross, and have consoled and comforted me in bearing it. I thank Thee for my parents, my brothers and my sisters; my true friends. I thank Thee for the holy priests of Thy Church who have instructed me and wiped the guilt of sin from my soul in the sacrament of penance. Grant that I may ever humbly and profitably accept and use their ministrations, that I, in turn, through Thy gracious love, may, Veronicalike, console and comfort my fellows on the way of the Cross.

Seventh Station

Jesus Falls the Second Time.



By His bruises we are healed.—*Is. liii. 5.*

Jesus becomes weaker and weaker; the Cross presses still more heavily. Again it overcomes Him and for a second time He falls helpless.

AGAIN the number and the baseness of our sins are too great, and again the Cross crushes Thee to the ground. How Thy shoulder and Thy whole sacred Body must have ached tunder the pressing weight of that wood! How thoroughly Thy heart and soul within Thee must have been crushed; bewildered at this, Thy second fall and so much yet to be endured before the end! Overcome, prostrate, conquered by the weight of the world's sin! How black its malice, how fearfully, terribly repulsive must be its baseness in Thy sight. Yet Thou wilt not lie prostrate long. Thou risest again, conquering its weight, renewing Thy trust in the Father and Thy infinite love for sinners. To one who loves Thee, Jesus, and who, in spite of his sins, would through Thy grace venture to follow Thee, rush thoughts of the world's sin against Thee, of the sins at our very door, in this our day. Ingratitude, impurity, intemperance, injustice, cruelty, touch and pierce the feeling soul on every side. The thought of them overcomes, conquers, lays one prostrate, indeed, and tempts him to despair of himself, of his fellows, yea, of Thy passion and death.

Give me strength, O Jesus, to rise above such weakness; to trust in Thee implicitly; to keep on my way with soul purified, with hope, through Thee, for myself and for others; with faith in Thee unshaken and unshakable; with a love that will carry me beyond the waves of sin to the heaven of Thy peace.

Eighth Station

Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem.



Jesus turning to them said: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me; but weep for yourselves and your children.—*Luke xxiii. 28.*

Jesus meets some women who in sympathy and compassion weep for Him. Turning, He asks no sympathy for Himself, but bids them weep for themselves and their children.

WITH the ever-increasing weight of the Cross upon His body and of my sins upon His soul, Christ continues upon His way. It is natural to think that His agony and unspeakable death would engage His every thought. And yet, consumed with pain, urged on by a brutal crowd, He thinks not of Himself. His love is so abundant that it overflows to those who, in spite of appearances, are in far worse plight than He. His vision is always clear. No mere seeming can hide from Him the truth. No personal pain or sacrifice can obscure His divine purpose— to give up all that He might gain all. And here Christ gave up what it is most difficult to give up when every pain-racked nerve, when tortured heart and soul cry for attention— the thought of self. He turned and comforted the women whom He passed on the way.

Give me strength, O good Jesus, to fix my will upon Thee— to live striving to do God's will, alone with Thee alone, that in the things that concern my soul and God, I may seek comfort from none: and share them only with such blessed friends as are of Thy sending. Give me strength, O good Jesus, that bearing whatsoever Thou mayest ask of me, I may never grow selfish, even spiritually, but ever be ready, when tempted to believe that my trials and my pains merit attention, to serve others, in Thy Name; to give them of my best; not to weaken them by my own weakness but to strengthen them by whatever virtue Thou dost vouchsafe me.

Ninth Station

Jesus Falls the Third Time.



As one struck by God and afflicted.—*Is. liii. 4.*

Heavier and heavier grows the weight of our sins. That great piece of wood has worn His shoulders, sapped the strength from His body, and again, for a third and last time, it lays Him prostrate on the ground.

AGIN, again, and yet again, good Jesus, sin weighs Thee down. That heavy load crashes to earth with Thee beneath it. What, save Divine Power itself sustained Thy human strength, Thy human heart? And, Thy successive falls, what mean they but that my soul, after repeated sins, repeated promises of amendment, repeated receptions of Thy Sacrament of forgiveness, still basely offends; still strikes Thee down. Again, again, and yet again do the words ring in my ear and ring the more loudly and ominously as I appreciate more and more Thy love. It is not the sins of others, not the sins of the world, but my sins that crush Thee, O Christ, and that crush me. They haunt me; they force me to admit that I am worthless; that I cannot think of presuming to follow Thee; that between Thee, the sinless One, and me most sinful, there can be nothing in common.

Sweet Jesus Thou alone canst save me. Without Thee I would continue to lay helplessly prostrate under the weight of despair. Grant me hope through Thy passion. Grant me the love to see that Thou risest up, bearing the weight that oppresses me; taking it up to Calvary and that there, in Thee, am I made whole; there, through Thee, am I made acceptable to Thy heavenly Father.

Tenth Station

Jesus is Stripped of His Garments.



I will go stripped and naked.—*Mt. i. 8.*

In the presence of the multitude Jesus is shamefully stripped of His garments.

COULD sin ask Thee to bear greater human shame, O good Jesus? Standing upon a hill, before a mocking crowd, with the crown of ignominy upon Thy brow, Thou art stripped of every garment and stand naked in the sight of men. Thy face shows the agony and the desolation of Thy soul; Thy Body with its bruises and its torn limbs is weak and trembles. Utterly stripped of all earthly possessions Thou standest, as Thou wouldst stand before Thy Father and before men— the Scapegoat, the Figure of Sin and Shame. Lord Jesus, Thou alone knowest to what extremes Thou didst go in Thy Passion. We cannot begin to comprehend it because we cannot, through our own sinfulness, begin to comprehend sin. But grant me this, O Lord Jesus, God of absolute truth, that I may ever be willing to stand before others as I really am; that I may never seek in learning, in mental or physical gifts, in spiritual attainments to be other than I really am. Grant that I may never put on false raiment; that I may always seek simplicity and aim to be without guile. And grant, I dare pray Thee, sweetest Jesus, for Thou art anxious to bestow, that when men strip me of such things as through Thy grace rightly belong to me, I may learn to endure in silence, seeking justice not from men but from Thee, knowing in my secret soul only Thee Crucified.

Eleventh Station

Jesus is Nailed to the Cross.



When they were come to Calvary, they crucified Him.—*Luke x.iii. 33.*

Jesus is placed upon the Cross. His limbs are mercilessly stretched and nailed with huge nails that cause Him unspeakable pain, and thus crucified, He is raised up on the Cross.

THY love for us, good Jesus, led Thee to give Thyself completely into the hands of enemies stirred by a satanic rage. They seize Thee, utterly helpless. They stretch Thee upon the Cross; pull Thy limbs until hands and feet reach the holes prepared for them. Willingly dost Thou bear the piercing agony of the nails. Thy soul and heart are masters of Thy body, and it protests not. Thou and the symbol of sin are one, and both are raised aloft. The Cross sinks into the bole dug for it. Hands that were never raised save to bless and feet that never trod the way save of blessedness and love for others now bind Thee to the gibbet of shame. Nailed aloft to the Cross; bound to it till death, with the prayer of resignation, of forgiveness on Thy lips, sweet Jesus, may I bind my hands that have often sinned and my feet that have many times walked in the way of wickedness and ingratitude— may I bind them now to Thy saving Cross. Never more, through Thy grace, will they sin against Thee. Fix them there, with my whole body, with its heart and soul, that I may know only Thee, Jesus Christ Crucified. And if it be that, in Thy providence, not only my hands and my feet, but my soul also shall be pierced with remorse and desolation, may I have the courage to embrace the Cross and to know Thy weakness is the only strength and Thy desolation the truest test of love.

Twelfth Station

Jesus Dies on the Cross.



It was almost the sixth hour and there was darkness over all the earth.—
Luke xviii. 44.

After three hours of agony, during which He offered Himself to the Heavenly Father, the eternal Sacrifice is consummated and Jesus dies on the Cross.

FOR three hours of agony, during which mind and heart were selfpossessed and love reigned in full power, Thou, O good Jesus, didst hang upon the Cross. What filled Thy last hours? Forgiveness of enemies; the promise of heaven to a repentant sinner; thirst for souls; the gift to us of Mary our Mother; utter desolation, absolute resignation to the will of Thy Father. Thou hast wrestled with sin. Sin has been permitted to do its utmost against Thee. “Thou wast reputed with the wicked.” The last word has been said, and Thy word and Thy love, sweet Jesus, have conquered. Thy death, so shameful, is all glorious for me. It transfigures my life, for Thou hast accepted my shame, borne my sin and bestowed faith and hope and love upon my soul. Truly Thy death is my Life.

Sweet Jesus, grant from this moment that I may live in Thy death, live for the great offering of my own death, which Thou wilt ask and art asking every moment of me. Grant that I may husband my time; use my every power, consecrate by thought and prayer every act, every sacrifice, every sorrow, every pleasure, every ambition, to Thy Sacrifice. Grant that I may be straitened to do all that in me lies “to make up what is wanting of the sufferings of Christ”— that my way may be with Thee beneath the Cross; that my death may be with Thee upon its arms of mercy.

Thirteenth Station

Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross.



They took therefore the Body of Jesus and bound It in linen cloths.—
John xix. 40.

Joseph and Nicodemus take the dead Jesus from the Cross and place Him in the arms of His heartbroken Mother.

OUR good Savior, our Life and our Love is dead. But at least He is with those who love Him. Most sorrowing of all is she, His Mother, who must now receive into her arms the Sacred Body of Him whom she brought into the world and nursed at her breast. Against that same bosom she presses Him, mangled and torn and cold. A sword, yea, a many pointed sword thy heart, O Mary, has pierced. He is dead. He has been done to a brutal death before thy eyes. He has gone from thee and all thou holdest is His cold form, and the tomb will claim that at once. But thy love and faith fail not nor falter even now. Strong in life they are most strong in death. With divine courage Thou holdest Him in thy arms and with faith greater than Abraham, with a love second only to that of thy Son, thou offerest Him in joy, in boundless charity, and thyself with Him, to thy Father and His in heaven.

Mary, teach me thy confidence. Thou, who art sinless, teach me and obtain for me, a sinner so full of the weakness and dread of my own sins, not alone the virtue of penance but the still greater virtue of a hopeful, confident love of God. Ask thy Son to fill my heart with it, for without it I cannot live. And, dearest Mother, if God should ever in disciplining my spirit as it deserves, so abandon me (at least seemingly) that my Lord Jesus seems cold and dead to my soul, win for me the grace to accept the desolation and, privileged like thee, to offer it to our Father in heaven.

Fourteenth Station

Jesus is Placed in the Sepulchre.



There they laid Jesus because the sepulchre was nigh at hand.—*John xix. 42.*

The disciples prepare the Sacred Body of Jesus for burial; place the Body in the tomb; seal it and depart from Calvary.

THOU art taken away, good Jesus, from the sight of men. No longer, save for forty days after the resurrection, wilt Thou be visible to human eyes. To men who see only with the eyes of sense Thy shame and Thy glory are alike unknown. But through Thy grace our souls know what the tomb meant. Our souls know Thee, the Living Christ, in Whom there is newness of life. Thy Passion, save for the blood and suffering, is endured this day for us. Over the world at this moment art Thou passing, bearing Thy cross, offering Thyself in sacrifice upon a thousand altars. To sense Thou art not. To the soul Thou art more truly visible than the noonday sun. Thy Passion is the triumphant answer to time, to sin, to suffering and to death. For in Thee alone has the soul life. Through Thee alone are its powers and its works made acceptable, immortalized; through Thee alone is its life made eternal and divine. In the tomb Thou art sealed to sense. But into the world of the spirit and the senses, also, Thou sendest us forth as other Christs to bear witness to Thee. In courage, in joyous, unselfish devotion may we not fall short. Have mercy on our weakness and our unworthiness, O Lord Jesus. Above all else grant us love, love strong enough to hurl sin behind us, strong enough to carry us fearlessly on the waves to Thee. Grant us the love that trusts and confides in Thee— a love stronger than death, stronger than sin or the fear of sin that Thou mayest be in us and we in Thee, with the Father and the Holy Spirit to Whom be infinite praise now and forever.