

# Stations of the Cross

Encounters with Jesus



Jane Leclere Doyle

### About the Author

**Leader:** Dear Lord Jesus, out of love beyond our understanding, you traveled this road of sorrow to die for us. So many times we have abandoned our cross, unwilling to truly follow you. Today as we trace your path and hear the story of your trial, passion, and death, we sincerely wish to walk beside you in sorrow for our sins, as we dedicate ourselves to you again. Amen.

**Jane Leclere Doyle** is a poet, songwriter, and writer of short stories. She was born into a Catholic family and raised on a farm in Southern Indiana. Her Catholic faith has shaped her writings and informed her life. She is married to a scientist with whom she worked for over 30 years at Cornell University. Now retired, she is devoting much of her time to writing. She and her husband of almost 40 years, Jeff, reside in Ithaca, New York.

### About This Work

I wanted to reimagine the Stations from a personal point of view, in order to breathe new life into them for me. As I began to think about the best way to do this, an image of the early Christians gathered in the Catacombs came into my mind. I envisioned them telling stories to one another about being there when Jesus was put to death and how that affected them and brought them to faith in some cases. Once I had that image, characters stepped forward, eager to tell me their stories. All I did was write them down. My hope is that their stories bring new insights to you as you pray this devotion.

**Leader:** Dear Father in Heaven, bless your faithful who have walked this road with your beloved Son. May we who contemplate Jesus' last hours be strengthened to carry his message of love and compassion to a world so in need of it. Amen.



## **First Station: Jesus Is Condemned to Die**

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Pilate, in Roman garb, pacing back and forth:** Don't judge me. My hands were tied. What was I supposed to do? What would you have done, I ask you? Seriously – what would you have done? I had had him scourged, so now this rejected “king” stood before me beaten, bloodied, crowned with thorns, robed in dirty purple cloth – and yet so dignified. I begged the crowd to “look at the man.” No one was moved. In fact they called out for his death all the louder. I had no idea why he was here except for jealousy. As best as I could ascertain, he was guilty of no crime, yet the Jewish leaders and the angry crowd were clamoring louder and louder for his death. I questioned him about why he had been brought before me. He had very little to say in his defense, except that he had come to testify to the truth. I asked him, “What is truth?” but he didn't answer. Well, I know what truth is. It's whatever you need it to be whenever you need it. Then I get a note from my wife begging me not to get involved. It was too late – I was already involved. What I needed was a reason to pacify the crowds. I needed to invent my own truth. Even though I found no reason to have him put to death, I couldn't stand by that inconvenient truth. If I did, I would lose my standing with the community. No one would respect me if I let this rabble-rouser go. Well, he had dismissed Caesar as irrelevant, and if that got out, I'd have trouble with Rome. And he'd managed to scare the Jewish leaders who helped me keep these stiff-necked Jews in place, so I needed them. I really had to condemn him. He was going to have to die for his truth, so I didn't have to die for my truth. With my wife's plea running through my head, I asked for a basin of water. Don't judge me, I say again. Honestly now, what would you have done? Have you never saved your own neck at someone else's expense? (*Mt 27:11-31a; Mk 15:2-20a; Lk 23:2-25; Jn 18:29-29:3*)

**Leader:** When have I been too afraid to stand up for what was right, allowing those around me to shape my response? Have I ever let someone else take the blame for my actions? How did I feel about that? How do I feel now?

**All:** Dear Lord, help us to never compromise the truth at someone else's expense. Keep us faithful to your truth no matter the price. Amen.

## Second Station: Jesus Bears His Cross

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Jesus in a dirty, stained robe with the cross on his back and the crown of thorns on his head. He looks up as often as possible while saying:** My shoulders and back were already raw from the scourging when the crossbeam was thrust upon me to carry to Calvary, to my death. I wasn't prepared for the immense weight of the crossbeam. I winced with pain and almost cried out while staggering to regain my balance. The weight of the crossbeam was a challenge to my strength, because I was already tired from the all-night "trial." As I began the long journey, I could feel trickles of fresh blood flowing down my back from reopened, scabbed-over wounds. Blood, flowing from my scalp that was pierced by my crown, collected in my eyes, blurring my vision. I had lost my sandals somewhere along the way, so now my bare feet were hurting as I labored along the streets of stone. I looked ahead of me up the winding street stretching out of town. My heart sank. This would be a lonely, long, and painful journey. My sadness increased as I scanned the crowd. I saw no one to give me aid, no one from whom I could expect help or comfort. I saw only angry faces lining the street. I heard their insults, felt their spittle. I knew what the end would be when I reached Calvary, and I was frightened. I wondered where I would find the strength and courage to make this last journey – how was I to keep walking and then face my death? Blows from the soldiers' whips were falling anew on my bleeding back to prod me along more quickly. I begged my Father for strength. Then I saw your face in my mind's eye. I was filled with love. You were the answer to my prayer! Yes, you! Remembering my mission and why I came to Earth, I felt the surge of new strength flow into my arms and legs. With you in my heart, I took a step, and then another. (*Mt 27:31b; Mk 15:20b; Lk 23:26; Jn 19:17a*)

**Leader:** Have I ever felt that I had too much to bear? Have I ever just walked away from my responsibilities instead of toward them? Did Jesus walk away from his? Do I ever think that I was on Jesus' mind, that he saw my face during his passion and death? How does that make me feel – grateful, humble, sorrowful?

**All:** Dear Lord, with love beyond my comprehension you chose to bear my burdens and die for me. Help me to bear the burdens of my life unflinchingly and follow after you. Amen.

## Fifteenth Station: The Resurrection

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Roman soldier, holding his cloak:** We thought this assignment was a fool's errand. Who guards a tomb? Did they really expect some mischief? We laughed about how this would be the easiest pay we'd ever earned. We had food, wine, dice, and a fire. Yet it would be a long night, especially since I couldn't afford to lose much money at dice. It was early spring with a just-past-full moon, and the evening was already chilly. The night would be cold. As the hours wore on, we grew bored with gaming. Then the wine ran out. I drew the long straw, meaning I got the last watch. About an hour before dawn, I was awakened to take my turn. I shook the grass and leaves from my cloak, throwing it over my shoulders. I decided to climb to the top of the tomb for a better view of the trail. This was a newer section, a bit out of the way with only one trail, making it easier to guard. My view from the top was to the east, with Jerusalem to my back. I was enjoying the tranquility, but as the first rays of the sun broke over the horizon, the earth shook. Losing my balance, I fell in front of the mouth of the tomb. I took a moment to right myself, and as I did, the stone rolled away, breaking the official seal. A light more dazzling than the sun came from within. I shielded my eyes with my arm, but I saw him! I saw him walk out of the tomb. He was more brilliant than hundreds of suns, yet I could look at him. I saw the nail holes in his hands and feet and an ugly gash in his side. He was alive and walking! He smiled to me, stepped over my comrades as they were trying to get up, and disappeared into the garden. They saw only his back, but they knew where he had come from. They jumped over their gear in great haste and ran away. I sat down to ponder. (*Mt 27:62-22, 28:1-8; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-13*)

**Leader:** Do I really believe? Do I live and behave as one who is sure of your Resurrection and eagerly awaits the Resurrection of the Dead? Or am I running in fear?

**All:** Dear Lord, shake me. Shake me out of my daily routines. Let me ponder the mystery of your death and resurrection that I may truly know your overwhelming love for me and live the life of Easter people. Amen.

### **Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid to Rest**

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Joseph of Arimathea, a well-dressed older Jewish man:** I used to come to Jesus in the night to be taught by him and to talk. He gave me instruction about the law. Even though I was a scholar of the law, Jesus opened my eyes to things I'd never dreamt of before. His teachings were so genuine, so new, and so simple because they were for all the people—and yet so hard. I could've listened to him forever. Yet I was afraid. He was a threat. The people loved him, and that frightened the temple leaders. I had to be careful to be sure no one knew I was one of his disciples. You see, I wanted to retain my position at the temple. I am ashamed to say that I was at the "trial," but too fearful to say anything. He didn't reproach me with his eyes when he looked at me, though. Seeing into my heart, he seemed to understand my weakness and my fear. Yet I knew that if I'd said something in his defense, he might not have been crucified. Though I suspected it was more likely I would've been crucified alongside him had I found the courage to speak up. But now, here at the foot of the cross, was the time to come out of the shadows. I, being a wealthy old man, had just purchased a newly hewn tomb. I went to the authorities and asked for his body. After receiving permission, I made sure his body was washed and wrapped in clean linen before laying him in my tomb. No time for a proper burial. I showed his cadre of friends where he was buried, enlisting their help in rolling the stone into place at the mouth of the tomb. Satisfied, I went home to wash and purify myself for the feast. I held my head high. The civil and temple authorities now know me as a sympathizer. Well, so be it. No more secretive behavior. (*Mt 27:57-61; Mk 15:42-47; Lk 23:50-56; Jn 10:38-42*)

**Leader:** Have I come out of the shadows or am I a Christian in name only, one who is in hiding? Is my faith evident to others? Do I have the courage to acknowledge Jesus in public?

**All:** Dear Lord, when I am caught in darkness, feeling as though I am entombed, give me the courage to step out of my fear so as to make a clean start, confident in you. Amen.

### **Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time**

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Youngish woman, head covered in homespun, wearing traditional garb:** I had been given a second chance—a chance to get up and live again. You see the man now lying face down in the dust? He healed me, and nine others, of leprosy. He told us to go show ourselves to the priests. Less than halfway to the temple, we noticed that we had indeed been healed. The foreigner among us turned back. He wanted to thank the man. "What a fool," I thought. Better to follow instructions to the letter lest the cure be reversed. I raced ahead of the other eight. Jabbering of a cure and begging to be purified, I threw myself at the feet of a priest. The priest asked how I had been cured. I told him. He retorted, "Everyone knows that 'miracle worker' to be a fake, not a man of God!" He claimed I had never been a leper, that I was making it all up. He told me to "leave the temple right this minute." What was I to do now? While a leper, I could beg, but now, a Jewish woman without a husband and turned away from the temple, I had no means of support. Suddenly I was so angry with Jesus for healing me. My life was ruined! In my despair I collapsed at the city gates weeping bitter tears of fear, disappointment, and anger. While I was steeped in my self-pity and rage, a group of women came by. They stopped to ask why I was crying. My story spilled out. They knew Jesus, and they invited me to travel with them. I was hesitant. They asked me if I was brave enough to get up and try something new, if I was willing to trust that Jesus had cleansed me for a reason. I hadn't considered that the cure was for a purpose. Since I didn't wish to spend my last days sitting in the dust crying, I went with them, serving and learning from him for many months. Thankful for my second chance, I watch him struggling to get up. Because of him, I was able to get up, too. (*Lk 17:11-19*)

**Leader:** When have I wept bitter tears over what seemed to be misfortune, allowing myself to come near to despair? When have I been so blinded by my own self-pity that I did not look for your will, choosing instead to sit in the dust weeping?

**All:** Dear Lord, never let disappointment lead me to despair and blind me to your call. Strengthen my fearful heart so I get up and keep going. Amen.

#### Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Mary, dressed as we so often see her:** Oh, Son, why did I not see this coming? The signs were there from the very beginning: The angel Gabriel telling me I would bear a son, followed by the visit of the Magi and their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then there was Simeon telling us in the temple of “a sword to pierce my heart.” Your conversing with the priests, when you were just a boy, about things Joseph had not yet taught you. That wedding at Cana when you rebuked me because it was “not yet your time,” but you made all that wine anyway. Your teachings, like when you answered that “everyone who acted on the word of God were mother, brother, sister to you.” How those words hurt me, but I understood them later. And then there were your confrontations with both Roman and temple authorities. Why was I unable to put it all together? Or rather, why was I unwilling to put it all together? I can still see you as a boy, covered in wood shavings and sweaty from working with Joseph in the shop. Your wood-scented hugs still fill my nostrils. Oh, Son, I didn’t want to see it end this way – yet it had to. I wanted you to be like all the other boys in Nazareth’s rabbinical school, yet I didn’t want that, because you were so much more. I love you so much, and Joseph was so proud of you, yet we couldn’t keep you – so we let you go. Watching you walk away that morning to begin your work was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. Joseph tried to comfort me, but the tears in his eyes spilled over, too. He didn’t ever see you again, dying before you could come home. Joseph loved you so. Son, I don’t want to lose you! This time the loss is forever. How am I to bear never seeing you again? Yes, son, you must move on; on down the street, the path to your death. Yes, I know, I know, I must let you go again.

**Leader:** Have I clung selfishly to things, people, or situations longer than I should, impeding your will, Lord? Have I lacked in faith and trust to let go?

**All:** Dear Lord, your mother grieved at the thought of losing you – but still let go. Help me to cherish those I love and those who love me, never causing them reason to grieve. Strengthen me to be able to let them go when needed so they and I can best serve you. Amen.

#### Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Roman soldier, holding a lance:** It is a sickening sound – the thud and crack of sledgehammers smashing into the legs of not-yet-dead criminals hanging on a cross. The two men wail in pain, not seeing the good of it. It is a merciful thing, really. They will die more quickly now, once they can no longer support themselves in order to breathe. They are lucky, because it usually takes days to die on a cross. Because tomorrow is some big day for the Jews, the condemned must be dead and down by nightfall. The one in the middle isn’t moving. I stop the soldiers with the hammers and grab a lance from another soldier to thrust into the criminal’s side. He doesn’t move or even sigh. Blood and water flow from the wound, running down the lance’s shaft onto my hand. I’d heard him declare, “It is finished,” and so it was. He was dead. The ropes bring the cross to the ground, and the hired Jew removes the nails. He is taking longer and being more careful than usual, and then with almost reverent care he carries the body to a woman sitting on a rock nearby. She cradles the body and weeps. But not the abandoned wailing I’ve seen so many times before. Hers is the quiet weeping of a deep loss, which is heartbreaking to witness. The water from his side on my still-wet hand seemed to make me feel forgiven for my role in this – like I had been washed clean. What kind of man was he? I know only what the passersby said as they taunted him, and what the Jewish leaders said about him – how he claimed he would destroy their temple and rebuild it in three days. Then there was what I had heard from the other soldiers and the Jew who nailed him to the cross. I am confused, but intrigued at the same time. Even though I am Roman, I feel the need to understand who he was. (*Jn 19:31-37*)

**Leader:** How do I face the many deaths of my life? Do I feel overwhelmed by my sinfulness? Do I truly believe that I can be washed clean, or do I stay in my sorrow?

**All:** Dear Lord, I weep and mourn over the losses of my life. Sometimes I am not able or willing to move on. Teach me to understand and to accept that dying is a part of living – a major part of living. Help me to find the strength to trust and receive your forgiveness. Amen.

## Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Roman centurion, speaking with conviction:** As the sun climbed higher, the sky grew darker. By noon it was almost like night, and so very quiet. The only sound was moaning from the two men on the sides. The man in the middle was silent. Well, that's not completely true. He'd had a conversation with one of the other criminals – something about a kingdom, and later talked to some man and a woman. That caused her to cry and him to put his arm around her, then lead her away. I can't count the number of executions I have witnessed or taken part in during my assignment here in Palestine, but this was the strangest one of all. Leaders of the Jews were here sanctimoniously belittling him, but they wouldn't come near anymore once it got dark. People passed by to mock and jeer, but they too fell silent as the darkness fell. When he asked for something to drink, we offered the drugged wine, but he refused it again. At about three in the afternoon, he called out. The bravest ones rushed forward, asking if one of their prophets would take him down. But they scattered when the lightning bolt streaked across the sky as he died. The earthquake that followed shook the crosses as well as the confidence of any remaining bystanders. Even we Roman soldiers got a little weak in the knees. Shrieks came from the city near the Jewish temple, as shouts about long-dead people roaming the streets arose. I'd heard some of his preaching, passing it off as the ranting of yet another Jewish rebel trying to stir up trouble. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Ha, as if there's a difference! There's no difference, right? Yet Caesar can't cause the earth to quake or darken the sun. Now after all this, I find myself remembering these and other words, and then suddenly, just like the flash of that lightning bolt, it was clear to me. I got up from my knees and declared: "Truly this was the Son of God." (*Mt 27:45-54; Mk 15:33-39; Lk 23:44-48; Jn 19:28-30*)

**Leader:** Do I profess Jesus to be truly the Son of God only in extraordinary moments? Do I call upon God only in times of pain, loss, and death?

**All:** Dear Lord, when I am faced with death, be it the death of someone I love, loss of a job, or sudden illness, allow me to look beyond my pain so that with profound trust and faith I can say, "Truly you are the Son of God." Amen.

## Fifth Station: Jesus Is Helped by Simon

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Simon, dressed in the dirty robes of a day laborer:** I was just minding my own business, trying to get home, when I got caught up in the crowded street. "Just great," I moaned to myself, "another execution." These public spectacles disgust me. They're just overt threats, reminding us what will happen if we don't remain obedient and passive during this Roman occupation. Even knowing that, the people still throng to gawk. I was looking for another way home when I noticed that the condemned man seemed overwhelmed by his burden. He seemed powerful and determined, but was visibly struggling. The crowd was jeering, and one of the soldiers was whipping him in an attempt to move him along faster. As I turned away to escape, the soldier with the whip grabbed me. He ordered me to help the criminal "move along more quickly lest he die before his time." The bloodthirsty crowd roared their approval, not wanting to be denied their sport. Revulsion must have shown on my face, for I received a mighty blow from the soldier's whip and a strong shove toward the criminal. I looked into the eyes of the criminal, even though I didn't want to. Then I recognized him! It was the teacher, Jesus from Nazareth. Many times I'd heard him preach. His teachings were so simple, and so hard. I'd hoped he would bring about a revolution to be rid of Rome. But now he was carrying his cross to his death, and I was being forced to lend aid. So I did, and together we struggled to Golgotha. It was actually a privilege to help him, yet how strange to bring him to his death. When at last we arrived, I was exhausted. His crossbeam was heavy, even for me – and I am a man used to heavy work. How tired he must have been! He looked over at me and thanked me. He thanked me for making sure he didn't die along the way! As I handed over my burden to the executioners I knew in my soul this journey had somehow strengthened me. I vowed to help keep his message alive after he died. (*Mt 27:32, Mk 15:21; Lk 23:26b*)

**Leader:** When have I been unwilling to lend aid, walking away instead? When have I found myself in situations where I was needed and felt better for answering the call? Do I listen for your call?

**All:** Dear Lord, my journeys are long and at times lonely. Strengthen me to be attentive to the needs of others, lending support where I can, and to be humble enough to accept aid when offered. Amen.

## Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes Jesus' Face

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Veronica, holding a veil in her hands:** I knew his mother and family. I'd listened to him preach many times. He'd eaten at my house and played with my children. They loved him, and he was like a nephew to me. Oh, how my heart broke to see him like this—jeered, beaten, and staggering under the weight of all he was bearing. He was silent too—so unlike him. I don't think I'd ever seen him silent. He was always talking, or singing, or laughing. He was a great storyteller, too. He'd given so much of himself so generously to all who asked, never asking for anything in return, except for a change of heart—a turning to the real meaning of God's law. I cried to see his tired, yet determined face, his bowed and bleeding back, and his bare feet. I wanted to help; to show him some of the love he'd shown me. But what could I do? The soldiers were hurrying him and the man carrying the cross with him along and trying to keep the crowd at bay, so I wouldn't have much time even if I tried. Then I remembered him saying: "When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink." I didn't have water, but I could wipe the blood from his face. That would restore some dignity to him. I stepped out of the crowd. I walked up to him, took off my veil (the crowd gasped at that) and held it to his dirty and blood-spattered face. A soldier roughly shoved me aside and pushed him along. My veil fell to the ground. When I looked down at it, Jesus was looking up at me from it; another cherished gift from him! Not that I needed the reminder. His face, so full of love, is forever and indelibly etched in my mind and on my heart.

**Leader:** How often have I failed to treat with dignity those I meet daily? How often have I failed to see you in them? Did I turn my back because it is easier?

**All:** Dear Lord, grant that with you etched in my mind and on my heart, I can see you in others. May I always seek to serve you by serving others even in seemingly small ways. Amen.

## Eleventh Station: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Hebrew man in poor clothes, carrying a sledgehammer:** "Forgive me for I know not what I do!" I don't need your forgiveness! I know what I'm doing—my job, nailing criminals to their crosses—conveniently forgetting, or maybe I'm just inured to the fact that it's murder. I get paid. I get paid well. Yes, it is blood money, but my family and I can live well, so keep your offer of mercy to yourself. Instead, you beg for mercy. Why don't you fight against me as I grab your feet? It would go quicker for you if I don't nail them, you know. Look, I am good at what I do; one long nail, one good blow, and ... both feet are affixed. Yes, you feel the pain now. All I can say is "Good!" You must've done something really awful to be dying like this. Notice, the nails for the hands are smaller, but they do the trick. Yes, get your fingers out of the way; otherwise I'll just smash 'em with my hammer's blow. So, you healed the blind, the deaf, and lepers with these hands? Where are your powers now? Huh? Here comes the worst part. Oh, yes, it gets worse. These ropes will hoist you up and then you'll drop into place with a major jolt. You can see Jerusalem from your vantage point—the city that turned its back on the "King of the Jews." Fitting way to die—looking out on your utter rejection. We Jews always reject what is good for us. Oh yes, I am a Jew, but I no longer believe a Messiah will come. I have grown tired of waiting. I wanted to believe in someone like you, but where is the revolution? Hey, where are the men who followed you? Did they become disillusioned, too? Yet sometimes I want to cry over the man I have become—but don't feel sorry for me. No, don't feel sorry for me; I did it to myself by abandoning faith. Sometimes I want to find that faith again, be restored to the man I once was. What, you think I can change? You really do? Then I will ask for that forgiveness. *(Mt 27:33-35a; Mk 15:22-24a; Lk 23:33a; Jn 19:17b-18)*

**Leader:** Have I lost faith because life has not turned out as I wanted? Have I lost my way such that I no longer seek forgiveness from you and others? Am I willing to rekindle my faith?

**All:** Dear Lord, call me back to you. Forgive me for nailing you to your cross. Strengthen me to amend my life. Amen.

## Tenth Station: Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Roman soldier, holding a tunic:** Our pay was meager. Not that there was much to spend money on in this hole of a town. No, not like in Rome, where money seemed to slip through my fingers as quickly as I was paid. But still, any way to augment my salary was gratefully taken, and relieving the condemned of their possessions was a time-honored tradition. This criminal had a very nice tunic – woven in one piece. I won it with my toss of the dice. I was certain it would fetch a good price. Granted, it was now dirty and bloodstained, but my washerwoman could deal with that. I had trouble getting the tunic off him, though. He was stooped over from fatigue, and the tunic was stuck fast to his back in some places with dried blood. But I was not going to be denied this prize. At last, though it required some yanking and the removal of his “crown,” I got it off his back, and over his head, too. As I did so, he straightened up, making it harder for me to shove his “crown” back on. Now, most people shrink when they stand naked before the crowd, but not him. He seemed to gain strength from being unburdened of this last piece of personal property. Even though this should have been the final act of humiliation for him, it strengthened him! I was amazed at his self-possession. Then I remembered hearing that the Jews teach they are the chosen people and believe they are made in the image of their one God. I had also heard members of the jeering crowd taunt that this man called himself the “Son of God” and therefore claimed to be equal to God. If any of this is truly so, then their one God’s body is battered, bruised, and bleeding – but beautiful. I’ve never seen such dignity, such complete trust displayed. I’ll never sell this tunic, but will cherish it. (*Mt 27:35b; Mk 15:24b; Lk 23:34b; Jn 19:23-25a*)

**Leader:** Do I fear being exposed to the crowd, unwilling to risk others’ scorn? Am I afraid to be known as a Christian and live an overtly Christian life? Do I hide behind my possessions?

**All:** Dear Lord, I am loath to discard my filthy trappings of pride and prestige. I hide behind them from others, myself, and from you. Strengthen me to throw off the cloak of human pride and sinfulness, so I may stand tall before you. Amen.

## Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Roman soldier, holding a whip in his hand:** I could sense that the crowd was worried. They were worried this criminal would die before we got to crucify him. He was staggering under the weight of the cross even though I had pressed some Jew into helping him. And then he fell again. The crossbeam hit the stone street with a thud. He was on all fours, blood dripping off his face. It flowed onto the street and between the stones, where the ground hungrily drank it up. Almost like he was giving himself as nourishment to this godforsaken town and its mulish inhabitants. Funny that I should think that, because I hated this assignment, and this city – I hoped that it would soon be torn down. And I hated these quarrelsome, hard-to-manage people. Why don’t they see how great the Roman way is? Why do they cling to their silly notion of one God instead of just going along with Rome? It would’ve been so much easier for everyone. But these people were stiff-necked. I raised my arm to whip him again just as he began to get up. Waiting to see if he could do it, I watched as he got tangled in his garments and almost tripped again, but managed to stand upright. With fierce determination he hauled the crossbeam up onto his shoulders and walked on. What could drive someone to such a degree? What motivated him to struggle on, knowing that this struggle ended with crucifixion? I’d heard vague stories of his teachings and of his zeal, but look where that got him. Yet was he carrying something more than just his cross? Being a Roman soldier, I understand striving for something greater than just myself. Was that what was motivating him, something much greater than himself? His determination impressed me, and I’m not easy to impress. Against every fiber of my Roman being I began to respect him, found myself wishing I’d known him, and vowed to learn about what motivated him.

**Leader:** How often am I tripped up by my pride, and end up falling? Do I lash out at others or swallow my pride and struggle on? Do I forgive others their failures, even when I am hurt? Do I try to understand them and their motivations?

**All:** Dear Lord, when those around me fall, or fail me in some way, open my heart to be forgiving and respectful, so my first reaction is kindness, patience, and gentleness instead of harshness, condemnation, and anger. Amen.

## **Eighth Station: Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem**

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Woman with head covering, but with hair showing and holding a water jar:** I wonder if he remembers me, and that day? I will remember it forever, because it changed my life. Somehow I suspect that he changed many lives over the course of his life, but this is my story. He asked me for a drink that day at Jacob's well. Yet he knew I was the one who was thirsty. He showed me just how dry my life had been. Then he refreshed me and gave me a reason to live. Now he is about to die. I weep for him. He tells us not to weep. How can I not weep? My heart is breaking. He warns me and the other women that this young "new way" will require all we can give it. We must strive every day as it matures. I have matured since he talked to me that afternoon. I was so excited that I ran to tell the townspeople about him. They had shunned me in the past, but something in me compelled them to come see him – something he'd placed within me. They listened to me, then came to respect me and to believe in him. I, and these other women, have proclaimed his message alongside Jesus as we traveled across Judea to all the people in the villages and countryside who'd listen. We spoke to women mostly – other women like me. We've given the living water of Jesus to many thirsty souls. He's been our strength. But now Jesus is walking away. Our Lord is leaving us, never to return! I watch him struggle along the street as I dry my eyes. I've had struggles in my past, though none like his. I pray to be strengthened by his resolve so I, and these other women, can give the "water of new life" to the other thirsty people we'll encounter along our way. (*Lk 23:27-32*)

**Leader:** When have I experienced periods of loneliness and abandonment in my life? Do I pray for courage or blame You, Lord? Do I bring your refreshment to all I meet in life? Have I changed because I know you?

**All:** Dear Lord, I struggle to follow you. I struggle to bring your message of love, compassion, and new life to a harsh dry world. I pray for the resolve and wisdom to recognize and walk away from situations I cannot change, but to never walk away when I can make a difference. Amen.

## **Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time**

**Leader:** We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**All:** Because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

**Older woman, dressed conservatively with head covered:** I saw him stagger. He might have been able to right himself if not for the missing cobblestone, coupled with the momentum of the crossbeam, but he didn't, so he fell. He hit the street hard, causing the man helping him to fall, too. The crossbeam crashed heavily over the criminal's already bleeding back. The air was knocked out of him, so he just lay there prostrate in the dust with the beam over his back. The other man got up right away and started to reach for the crossbeam. The soldier without a whip stopped him. "Let him get up on his own," he sneered. The other soldier, strangely enough, did not use his whip, even though the crowd and the sneering soldier were calling for him to beat the man. Painfully, slowly, the criminal got up. The crowd cheered mockingly. He seemed not to hear or to care. He didn't look at them. Instead he looked at me. I knew that face, those eyes! But where had I seen him? I wasn't from Jerusalem. I was only in Jerusalem for the feast – to celebrate our deliverance as a nation, and my personal deliverance from my long-term ailment. And then I recognized him! Even though his face was a bloody, dirty mask of pain, I recognized those love-filled eyes. He was the man who had healed me of my hemorrhaging! Why were the Romans putting a man so full of compassion to death? What had he done to deserve this? How could I repay all that he'd given to me? What could I do? I promised myself to follow him to the end, find out why this had happened, and try to keep his memory and compassion alive. As if he'd seen into my soul and read my heart, he nodded to me, and then turned to trudge on to his death. (*Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48*)

**Leader:** Do I often ask for healing, but fail to show gratitude for it? Do I seek reconciliation often enough from you and from others?

**All:** Dear Lord, I am a frail human. Remind me that when I seek your healing grace I am forgiven and made whole. Help me to show that same compassion to others. Amen.