Today, let us enter into a time of prayer and be Jesus’ companions on the Way of the Cross. St. Ignatius believed that imaginative prayer can play a key role in strengthening our relationship with Jesus. Today, we will engage our imaginations, as we picture ourselves walking with Jesus on the road to Calvary. This text brings to life the Stations of the Cross through the lens of our young adults, as we reflect upon Jesus’ struggle from the teen perspective.

When praying this Way of the Cross, I invite you to find a quiet place and prepare for time with Jesus. If you are praying with your family or friends (maybe via Facetime, Skype, or Zoom in these challenging times), you may want to split up the Stations and take turns reading aloud. Music also can help you to enter into a time of prayer. Some good songs with which to pray the Stations are *Via Dolorosa, Were You There*, *Lead Me to the Cross*, and the Taize chant *Jesus, Remember Me*. Make a playlist and enhance your prayer experience. Immerse yourself in these Stations and see with your heart just how much Jesus loves you.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, as we reflect on your Son’s Way of the Cross, we ask you to please open our ears, minds, and hearts to your Presence. Please lead us to your Son’s Cross, please lead us to your love, please lead us to salvation. This we ask, in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
The First Station – Jesus is Condemned to Death.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You, because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

Although sinless, Jesus is sentenced to death as a criminal. Pilate has the ability to release Jesus, but instead he gives in to what the crowd wants. Pilate thinks Jesus is innocent, but he isn’t courageous enough to stick up for Him.

We reflect upon Jesus at this moment and imagine what He is thinking…

“As I face Pilate, I lift my eyes to heaven and silently repeat the words that I prayed in the Garden last night. ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.’ I lower my eyes to meet Pilate’s and I see fear, distress, regret. I know he has made his decision. The pressure of the crowd is too much for him. He is not strong enough to defend me. He washes his hands of his decision and ties my hands behind my back. I silently pray words that I will later repeat, ‘Father, forgive him. He knows not what he does.’”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, You suffered because others could not stand up to peer pressure. You know how it feels to be treated unfairly. Please give us the courage to stand up for those who can’t defend for themselves. As we begin our Lenten journeys, help us to make wise choices, remembering that You will stand up for us, even when no one else will.
The Second Station – Jesus Takes Up His Cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You, because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

Jesus not only is condemned unfairly, but also has to carry the cross on which He will die. The cross is heavy, as it bears the weight of all of the sins of the world - past, present, and future. Jesus takes up the cross willingly to take away our sins. He takes it up out of love.

We imagine what Jesus might have been thinking…

“I take a deep breath, as the soldiers roughly shove the cross on my back. I understand now how hard the journey ahead will be. But if this is my Father’s will, I will continue. I am not the only one who carries burdens. Many carry crosses of illness and pain, grief and sorrow. This is my cross. If this is what it takes to save others from sin and death, then I will carry it. This is what love is all about.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, we too carry heavy crosses in life. We carry the pressures of school and sports, anxiety and fears about the future, illness among our friends and our families. Sometimes, we can’t help but ask God, “Do I have to carry this cross?” This Lent, please give us the courage to believe in God’s will and the humility to let You help us carry our crosses.
The Third Station – Jesus Falls the First Time.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You, because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

The cross is heavy and Jesus falls under its weight. He falls under the weight of our sins, worries, addictions, and stress. He is tired and beaten, worn down and worn out. Despite His pain, He is pulled up and forced to continue, as the crowd looks on.

We reflect upon what a young bystander might have been thinking, watching Jesus fall the first time…

“I can’t take my eyes off this man, bloody, lying on the ground, crushed by the weight of a massive cross. I’ve heard about Jesus. Some people say that there is something special about Him. As I watch, for a moment, His eyes meet mine in the crowd. With that one look, I know He is innocent. As He gets up, I see His determination. I shake my head and wonder how Jesus can be so determined when he is walking to His death? I know I’m not that determined when lesser problems get me down. Jesus looks at me again and his gaze makes me want to follow Him. As He gets up, I find the determination to walk with Him today.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, we too fall under our crosses. We fall when pressures at school and sports are too heavy to bear. We fall when we fight with our parents. We fall when our friends reject us. In moments like these, we don’t want to get up. Please help us to remember that You know how it feels. This Lent, please help us up when we stumble and give us the determination to follow You.
The Fourth Station – Jesus Meets His Mother.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You, 
because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

As Jesus carries on, He again looks into the crowd and this time meets the gaze of His beloved mother. Jesus can see the pain in her eyes. He looks at her lovingly, as if to say, “Don’t worry, Mom. It will be okay.” Jesus wants to protect Mary from the pain, but knows He cannot. Jesus remembers the story that His mother told Him of His Presentation in the temple – when Simeon predicted that one day Mary’s heart would be pierced by the sword. Jesus and Mary both know that day has come.

We reflect upon what Mary may have been thinking…

“When I see my son, bloody and beaten, I gasp. How could this be happening to my child? I think back to when Jesus was a little boy, playing in Joseph’s workshop, asking me to remove a splinter from His finger. Now, I look at the wood of the cross and want nothing more than to remove that from His back. I will take His place. I would bear any pain to spare my son. Jesus looks at me and I see that He is trying to protect me. I must stay strong for Him. I take a deep breath and give my Son the only gift I have left - a loving smile that, while forced, may give Him extra strength to continue. I will hold back my tears and let my love hold up my Son.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, sometimes we try to protect our parents from our pain. We know they do the same for us, time and again. When we are hurting, help us to remember that we don’t have to suffer alone. Help us to reach out to our parents and loved ones when we are in pain. Help us to know how much we are loved – by our parents and families, by our Blessed Mother, and by You.
The Fifth Station – Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,
because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

The soldiers pull a man named Simon from the crowd and force him to help Jesus carry the cross. The soldiers have no interest in helping Jesus; their one job is to execute Him. They don’t want Him to die along the way before they have the chance to crucify Him. Simon doesn’t volunteer for this, but he is not given a choice. Likewise, Jesus doesn’t ask for help, but He is forced to accept.

We imagine what Simon is thinking…

“As the soldiers pull me from the crowd, all I can think of is, ‘Why me? Why not someone else?’ I don’t know much about Jesus, but I do know that I don’t want to get involved in this. I guess I don’t have much of a choice… The soldiers will probably kill me if I say no. I reluctantly move forward to pick up the cross. And then Jesus looks at me—In His eyes, I see gratitude, humility, love, even though I am a stranger. Moments ago, I didn’t want to get involved, but I realize that helping is the right thing to do. I can’t save Jesus, but I can help. He looks at me again; His silent “thank you” tells me that my help is enough.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, as teens, it can be difficult to ask for help when we want to prove to our parents, teachers, and coaches that we can handle difficult situations on our own. It also can be hard to offer help, especially when we’re afraid to get involved in other people’s lives. You know how it feels both to give and receive help. This Lent, please give us the humility to accept help when we need it and the courage to pay it forward and help others who are struggling.
The Sixth Station – Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,*
*because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.*

A woman pushes her way through the crowd and approaches Jesus. Veronica can no longer stand by and watch Jesus suffer. She has to do something, so she wipes the blood and dirt from His face with her veil.

We picture Veronica and imagine what she is thinking at this moment…

“I have watched the soldiers torture this man. I see the crown of thorns digging into His head and I cannot stand here any longer. I have to do something. I break away from the crowd and run to Jesus. The soldiers yell and spit at me, but in this moment, I don’t care. I need to show Jesus that I believe in Him, even if others don’t. I wipe His bloody face with my veil and He looks at me with love and compassion. His kind smile tells me that this small action made a difference. The soldiers push me back into the crowd and I stumble. I look at the veil in my hands and see the imprint of Jesus’ face. Whenever I wonder if kindness and compassion are worth the risk, I will remember this and act with love.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, our world is filled with big problems…pandemics, poverty, terrorism, hatred, violence. As teens, it can be easy to sit back in defeat and think our actions won’t matter. But You don’t call us to do what is easy. You call us to do what is right. This Lent, please help us to step out of our comfort zones to help the poor, visit the lonely, stand up for our beliefs, and live our faith. Help us to be more like Veronica and have the courage to believe that all of our actions, when done out of love, **do** make a difference.
The Seventh Station – Jesus Falls the Second Time.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,
because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

Jesus’ pain is unbearable and He falls a second time. Lying on the ground, maybe Jesus wants to give up, but He is forced to continue. His love for us gives Him the strength to keep going.

Let us imagine what Jesus is thinking in this moment of pain.

“As I stumble, both my body and my spirits fall. I think of the times when I’ve healed people – and now I can’t even help myself. How many times will I fall under this cross? I take a deep breath and remember that I am not the only one who falls – I think about the people I have helped, people who continually fell under addictions, illnesses, demons, grief. I understand now how hard it can be to get up and keep going. For them, I will carry on. I join them in their suffering now, so I can take away their pain later.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, sometimes problems push us to the ground. We see friends falling repeatedly under crosses of addiction, anxiety, and depression. We see loved ones falling under crosses of cancer and serious illness. It hurts us to see them in pain; it hurts us to see our parents cry. When we feel like we don’t have the strength to keep going, please help us to remember that you understand pain – physical, mental, emotional. You will always pick us up when we fall. This Lent, please give us the strength to endure hard times and the courage to believe that you will never leave us alone.
The Eighth Station - Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,
because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

Jesus continues the brutal journey to the cross. His friends have deserted Him, His body is failing, His dignity is diminishing. Along the way, Jesus meets a group of women. As Jesus sheds His blood, they shed their tears. Despite His own pain, Jesus stops to console them.

We imagine what one of these women might be thinking...

“I look at this man and I can only cry. I’ve heard about Jesus and about the people He has healed – even women like me. When I see him now, bloody, beaten, and scorned, I realize that He is an outsider, like me. I am used to living on the fringe of society; as Jesus looks at me, I can tell He understands. As I lower my eyes and continue to weep, I hear His voice, comforting me, telling me not to cry for Him, but for me and my children. This is Jesus’ darkest moment and He is comforting me? I look up at Him, speechless. I can only nod, as He continues on this way of the cross. I will remember this kindness forever.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, in many ways, You were an outsider to the in-crowd in Your day. When You saw that strangers were weeping for You, You must have remembered that Your own friends had abandoned You at Your darkest hour. We feel like that too when our friends are not there for us or when they reject us for following our faith. Doing the right thing can put us at odds with our peers and make us feel alone. Please help us to be selfless and courageous disciples, even when we feel like outsiders. You will never abandon us; please give us the courage to do the same for You.
The Ninth Station – Jesus Falls the Third Time.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,
because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

Jesus falls a third time. Lying in the dirt, He is alone and in pain, wondering how even God can make good of this. Most of His friends have deserted Him and disappeared.

We imagine Simon Peter, hiding in the shadows of Jerusalem, watching Jesus fall yet again.

“How could I be such a failure? Not only did I leave my best friend in His darkest moment, I also denied Him – not once, but three times. My shame is so great that I can’t even stand up. As I hide in an alley, kneeling in the shadows, I watch Jesus fall a third time. While He can’t see me, I can see His eyes – eyes that are weary and tired. Eyes that are sorrowful and pained. Eyes, that despite all this, are still filled with love and forgiveness. How can this be? I watch Jesus struggle, but see that He gets up again. His love is so great that He doesn’t surrender to the pain. If He can keep going, then maybe He can forgive me. If He can keep going, then I need to keep going too. As I watch from the shadows, I silently pray, “Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner…”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, there have been times when we, like Peter, have failed. We think about the times when we didn’t try hard enough, times when we failed to do the right thing, times when we didn’t make the cut. At times like these, it can be hard to believe that we can get up again. You teach us that we can get up and keep going. Despite our sins and failures, You made the ultimate sacrifice for us. Jesus, help us to trust that, in your eyes, we are never failures. This Lent, help us to love all people, including ourselves, with a love like Yours.
The Tenth Station – Jesus is Stripped.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,*
because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

Jesus not only has been condemned to the most brutal means of execution, He also is subject to humiliation. As the soldiers strip Him of His clothing, they strip away His dignity in front of a world that refuses to see the truth.

We try to imagine what Jesus is thinking at this moment…

“I lower my eyes, unable to meet the taunting jeers of the soldiers and the crowd. They rip my garment away, opening up my wounds and closing off my dignity. If only they could see the truth! If only they could see my love. They are blinded by their desires for power, money, status…the things of this world. I keep my eyes closed and try to block out my embarrassment. I think about those who suffer humiliation each day and pray for them, in solidarity.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, while we can’t wrap our minds around how you felt in this moment, we do know how it feels to be embarrassed. We see people who are stripped of their dignity each day…like kids who are constantly bullied, friends who are trapped in bad relationships, and the homeless who can’t catch a break. Sometimes, we don’t reach out to those who have been humiliated, out of fear of being shamed in return. Please help us to remember that every life is worthy and important. This Lent, please give us the courage to stand up for the dignity of every person, including ourselves.
The Eleventh Station – Jesus is Nailed to the Cross.

_We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,
because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world._

Jesus reaches the end of the Via Dolorosa and the soldiers crucify Him. They pound spikes through Jesus’ wrists and feet. The sound of the hammer hitting the nails cuts through the heavy air.

We imagine what a soldier might have been thinking…

_“My superior thrusts a hammer in my hand and says, ‘Grab his right wrist.’ Sick to my stomach, I hesitate. I had believed all along that this man was a criminal, but now, looking at his face, I wonder if I see something different. My boss yells at me, ‘Move!’ I force myself to grab the spike. As soon as the nail pierces His wrist, Jesus closes His eyes and cries out in agony. I look at His face again and know that I had been wrong. This man is no criminal. Jesus opens His eyes and looks into mine. I try to hide my tears and my shame. Jesus’ eyes turn to heaven and I hear His words, ‘Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.’ Forgiveness? How can He be talking about forgiveness after I’ve nailed Him to the cross? Surely, this man is the Son of God.”_  

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, we realize that it was not only the soldier who nailed you to the cross. Our sins equally hammered the spikes in place. We can’t remove the nails from your hands and feet, but we can ease Your pain by changing our lives for the better. You willingly accepted death on the Cross - because that is how much You love us. You sacrificed everything for us. Now it is our turn to make sacrifices for You. This Lent, please help us to remove from our lives the sins that nailed You to the cross. When we are tempted to sin, help us to remember the hammer hitting the nail and give us the strength to do what is right instead.
The Twelfth Station – Jesus Dies on the Cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You, because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

As Jesus hangs on the cross, each breath is a struggle. He has been crucified between two thieves, one who mocks Him, one who defends Him. After three hours, Jesus can bear no more. He cries out, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” Jesus breathes His last and gives up His spirit.

We imagine what He is thinking in these last moments…

“The end is near. The pain is too much; I can’t hold on for much longer. I feel alone; my Father feels distant and I don’t understand why. The man crucified to my left is mocking me, yelling ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.’ For a moment, I wish that the Father had taken this cup away from me. The thief to my right puts the other in his place and then quietly asks me, ‘Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.’ I look at him and nod, ‘Yes, friend. Today you will be with me in Paradise.’ Even though I feel abandoned, I realize that this is all necessary to be with Our Father for eternity. If this is what it takes to destroy death, I will endure to the end. ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ I breathe my last breath, out of love for you.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, on the cross, You felt abandoned by Your Father. When something horrible happens, we sometimes feel abandoned by God too. In times like these, we must trust in God’s plan for us. In painful times, we still believe that everything happens for a reason. We may not understand these reasons, but we trust that God does. Dear Jesus, You will always be there for us. May your love carry us out of the darkness and into brighter days.

*Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.*
The Thirteenth Station – Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,
because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

Jesus’ body is taken down from the cross and given to His mother. Mary and the faithful disciples grieve and yet somehow they stay strong.

We imagine what Mary is feeling at this moment…

“I hold my Son in my arms one last time and think back to the first time that I held my baby boy under the bright star on that Silent Night. I realize now that Jesus was born for this…He was born to live for us AND to die for us. At the wedding at Cana, I told the servants, ‘Do whatever Jesus tells you.’ As I hold my Son in my arms today, I must take my own advice. I cannot drown in my grief. I must do as He wants me to do…to love as He loves. I must continue to follow Him.”

Let us pray. Dear Jesus, what are You telling us to do today? Sometimes, it can be hard to hear Your voice, amidst the noise and distractions of life. This Lent, please help us to listen for Your voice by going to Mass, praying more often, and reading Scripture. Please help us to spend less time on our phones and more time with those we love. Please help us to walk in Mary’s footsteps and always follow You.
The Fourteenth Station – Jesus is Laid in the Tomb.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,  
because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world.

Jesus’ friends prepare His body for burial. Joseph of Arimathea lays Jesus’ body in the tomb. As they roll the stone to seal the tomb, the Way of the Cross seems to end in sadness and desperation. The disciples feel lost and broken. As the sun sets on Good Friday, they hope beyond hope that God won’t let His Son’s story end this way.

We imagine what Joseph of Arimathea is thinking…

“Sadness fills me, as I wrap Jesus’ body in linen. Mary thanked me for being courageous and asking Pilate for Jesus’ body. I don’t think I deserve that compliment. I am a member of the Sanhedrin and, while I didn’t consent to Jesus’ execution, I didn’t stop it either. I was a disciple of Jesus in secret. Nicodemus and I would meet with Him at night to learn, to ask questions, and to hear the words that He spoke with authority. I lied to myself and pretended that the timing was convenient for my schedule, when in truth, I was too afraid to meet with Him in the light, too afraid to show the world that I am a follower of Jesus. That cowardice stops now. Jesus suffered and died for me. I will not let my story as a Christian end with this tomb. Now, my discipleship begins.”

Dear Jesus, it is not always easy to follow you in this world today, but it is always worth it. After walking this way of the Cross, we realize how much the world needs You. We realize how important it is to follow you in the light. Today, we know that your story does not end with the tomb. Neither will ours. Help us to follow you always. This Lent, help us to see past the tomb and look towards the Resurrection.
The journey to the Cross can change your life.

When you are struggling, lean on Jesus. When peer pressure is high, when burdens at school are heavy, when you feel alone in trying to live out your Christian values, find strength and courage in Jesus and His cross. Open your heart to the fire of God’s love. His Love *will* change your life when you let it.


*Reflections written by Shannon Jones & members of SPARK Teen Ministry*