

# *A Reflective Guide to Praying the Stations of the Cross*

*by Father Gregory, SDS*

*This meditation is based upon an alternative version of the Stations of the Cross first observed by Pope John Paul II. His aim was to offer us a way of reflecting even more deeply on the Gospel accounts of our Savior's Passion.*

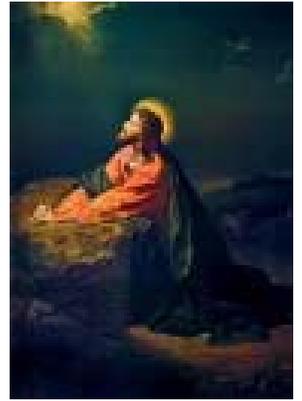
## **1. Our Savior Prays in the Garden of Gethsemane**

Have you ever experienced the temptation to avoid something, to simply say “No, I’m not up to that” – to “cut and run”? Jesus surely did, more than you and I could ever imagine. Being both divine and fully human, he knew the horror that awaited him in the next few hours, if he followed through with God’s plan.

It was more than the physical pangs of crucifixion, as horrible as they were. Our Savior was being asked to descend into the very spiritual depths of hell itself to redeem humankind from our own faults and sins. No wonder he prayed, “Father, let this cup pass from me ...”

And yet, “Let not my will, but yours be done.”

**Prayer: Dear God, as we confront trials and challenges throughout life, give us the faith and courage to keep trusting and believing in your never-dying love for us. Amen.**



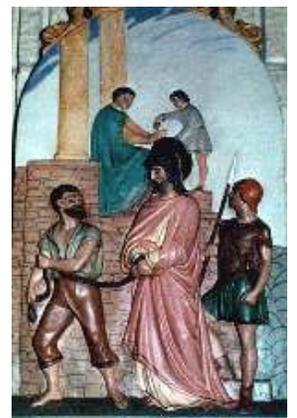
## **2. Our Savior Faces His Betrayer and Is Arrested**

The 12 disciples were an odd lot. A couple of hit-and-miss commercial fishermen, a tax collector, even a political radical. Of the dozen, many Bible scholars have suggested that only one seems to have been particularly well-suited for helping establish and run a successful organization. His name was Judas Iscariot.

What motivated Judas to betray our Savior? It had to be more than simple greed; 30 pieces of silver was not a large bounty, even in ancient Judea. More likely pride was a major factor. Judas wanted Jesus to do things Judas’ way, perhaps hoping to force Jesus to reveal his divine nature and the power to summon angels in his own defense.

If so, it didn’t work. Instead, the bitter irony of Judas’ behavior made our Savior’s heartbreak all the more piercing: “Judas, you betray me *with a kiss*?”

**Prayer: Dear Lord, it hurts to be betrayed by those we love. If that were to happen, let us be reassured by your steadfast love that never disappoints or sends us away with an empty spirit. Amen.**

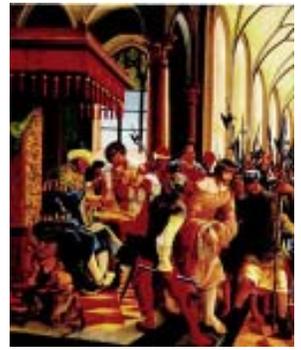


### 3. Jesus Is Tried and Condemned By the Religious Authorities

Have you ever heard someone say, “He wouldn’t know the truth if it was staring him in the face”? Or, “Don’t bother them with the facts; they’ve made up their minds”?

Both pretty well describe the attitude of the temple leaders when Jesus was brought before them. They had already convicted him, deciding he was a threat to the influence and sway they held over the spiritual imaginations of the people.

**Prayer: Jesus, when we are tempted to condemn others without first listening to what they have to say, let us recall how you were treated by your critics. And may it give us pause. Amen.**



### 4. Jesus Is Denied By Peter

Again, the irony is almost overwhelming: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church,” and “Before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.” In each instance our Savior was describing the same man.

How often do we fail to live up to our calling to be followers of our Savior? And yet, he continues to look to us to share his love and mercy with others.

**Prayer: Jesus, you know far better than I how unworthy a disciple I am. But I thank you and praise you for still trusting me to carry out your will, no matter how often I fail. Amen.**



### 5. Jesus Is Brought Before Pilate

In the ego-driven world of Roman politics, getting assigned as governor of Judea was the next thing to being sent into exile. Few men really sought the job. And yet for whatever reason, the emperor Tiberius had appointed Pontius Pilate to bring Roman law and order to the Jews.

Pilate’s reign was distinguished by his gross ineptitude and abiding fear of alienating both his superior and his subjects. His cynicism was most glaring when he asked Jesus, “What is *truth*?”

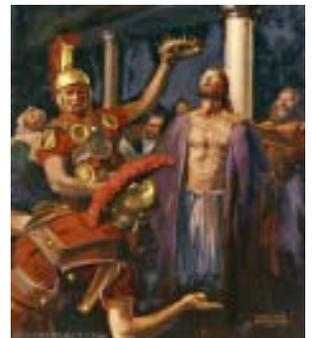
**Prayer: Jesus, when we encounter suspicion, distrust, and contempt from others, bless us with the calm spirit and clarity of vision you showed before Pilate. Amen.**



### 6. Jesus Is Scourged and Crowned With Thorns

As cruel as it was, Pilate had his reasons for ordering our Savior scourged before being crucified. It was to weaken Jesus so that he might die more quickly, before sundown and the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath—testimony again to Pilate’s fear of giving offense and inciting a riot among those he was supposed to rule.

But the crowning with thorns was sheer brutality on the part of the Roman soldiers overseeing Jesus’ execution. Their stonehearted contempt for human life and suffering is typical of those who fail to see in others or themselves the image of a loving and merciful God.



**Prayer: Dear God, it's very hard at times to understand, much less obey, your command to love our enemies. But let us never forget that this is exactly what you did in forgiving those who scourged and taunted you. Amen.**

## 7. Jesus Bears His Cross

Forcing a condemned man to carry his own cross was another means the Romans designed to both weaken and humiliate those they punished. It was to serve as a warning to anyone inclined to resist the imperial power of Caesar.

For Jesus, the worst burden was not only the weight of the cross borne on shoulders that had suffered the lash, but the mockery again of those who earlier had cried, "Crucify him!"

**Prayer: Jesus, when we suffer our crosses, may we do so not alone, but united with you in your divine love and compassion. Amen.**



## 8. Jesus Falls and Is Helped By Simon the Cyrenian

Not even our Savior could withstand the torture he had endured without stumbling several times along the way. To his aid came a man named Simon from Cyrenia. Simon picked up the cross and carried it the rest of the way to Golgotha.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, during the most difficult and trying times of our lives, may we never be too proud to look to others, as well as to you, for comfort and for help. Amen.**



## 9. Jesus Encounters the Women of Jerusalem

Our Savior had a few friends and sympathizers gathered along the road to Golgotha. Among them were his Blessed Mother and a woman named Veronica. When Jesus collapsed, Veronica appeared with a cloth to wipe the blood and perspiration from his face.

It was but a small act of kindness, perhaps, but one that has come to signify the Christian's share in experiencing the Passion of our Savior.

**Prayer: Jesus, when I'm tempted to think 'there's nothing I can do to help,' let me remember St. Veronica and her brave and selfless act of solidarity with you. Amen.**



## 10. Jesus Is Crucified

The usual and most torturous method of crucifying a person was to tie him to a cross; the condemned slowly suffocated under his own weight. Pilate had ordered that Jesus be nailed to the cross, again to hasten his death. A process that could have taken days was concluded in only three hours—but three hours in which our Savior suffered not only physical agony, but the spiritual throes of hell itself.

And yet still he prayed, "Father, forgive them ..."



**Prayer: Lord, as we observe Holy Week, let us be ever mindful of the torments you endured to win our salvation. Amen.**

## **11. Jesus Promises Salvation to the Good Thief**

Two convicted felons both face imminent death, and yet their responses are totally different. One thief joins his voice to that of the mob mocking our Savior, while the second thief recognizes Jesus for who he truly is and asks forgiveness. Is the second thief really “good,” a “better man” than his companion? Or is there something else operating here, a mystery beyond our grasp?



The only word we have for it is *grace*.

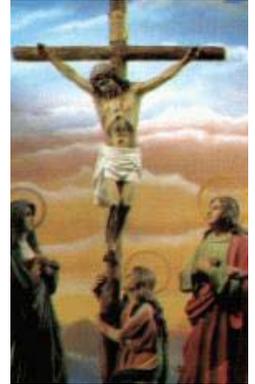
**Prayer: Jesus, imbue me with grace so that I say ‘yes’ to your offer of redemption. Amen.**

## **12. Jesus Speaks to His Blessed Mother and to John the Beloved Disciple**

“Mother, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.” Even while nailed to the cross, our Savior’s primary concern was for those he had known and loved in his brief time on this earth. He wanted to see to it that his Blessed Mother was cared for, as were others dear to him.

For us, Lent is a good time to ask ourselves, “Have I let those close to me know how much I love them? And have I made plans to provide for them after I am gone?”

**Prayer: Dear Lord, let me not neglect to say ‘I love you’ to those I love. And guide me in how I may best continue to show my love for them after I have left this earthly life. Amen.**



## **13. Jesus Dies**

“It is finished. Father, unto you I surrender my spirit.” With these words, our Savior’s Passion came to its end. His suffering was over. By all appearances, though, his broken and bleeding body should offer a sure symbol of defeat and cause for despair.

Instead, it would serve to inspire devotion, even martyrdom, among millions for the next two thousand years and beyond.

**Prayer: Jesus, when our spirits are at their very lowest, may we recall how your followers must have felt when you died. And then, let us remember that the story does not end there. Amen.**



## **14. Jesus Is Entombed**

While many of the disciples hid after Jesus’ crucifixion, expecting that a similar fate might await them, one man boldly identified himself as a follower of our Savior. Joseph of Arimathea approached Pilate and asked for the body. Pilate consented, and Joseph cleaned away the blood, wrapped Jesus in clean linen, and placed him in a tomb hewn in rock, one which Joseph had intended for himself. Joseph then had the tomb closed and sealed with a large and heavy stone.

Pilate had guards placed before it, so that no number of mortal men might come in the night and steal away with the body, claiming that Jesus had been resurrected.

Pilate's plan worked halfway: No group of men did come. Instead, angels arrived on the scene. And the rest, as they say, is history.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, as we reflect upon your Passion and death, renew our love for you and our sense of oneness with all who suffer pain and injustice. Amen.**



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