

I. Jesus is condemned to death

They just lied. You would not believe it. They had seen Him touch and cure the sick. They had heard Him speak with power. They had experienced His peace – something so new, so amazing, so liberating... And yet – after all this - they had no problem making up incriminating stories about Jesus in front of Pilate's court.

Has it ever happened to you that people...

...lied about you causing problems for you?

...made decisions about you without bothering to check the facts?

...took advantage of your help only to turn around and attack you for it?

...wished you death?

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. You can choose to be angry over the injustice or you can choose to cry with Jesus. Now, recall one of such experiences. Place in God's hands one of the persons who did such a thing to you.

Jesus, you know the pain of being falsely accused by those who owe you gratitude. Please, help me through the pain. I decide not to focus on the unjust world. I decide to take the ungrateful and lying person and place him or her in your arms. I bless this brother / sister of mine. I realize that my calling is to bring peace and healing through prayer.

- We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
- because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

II. Jesus takes up the cross

Ok, it is one thing to be prepared for it, to imagine yourself doing it, to make peace with the fact you will do it. It is a completely different thing to finally feel the weight of the cross on your shoulders. You had no idea how indifferent to your pain the wooden plank would feel to the touch. There is no heroism or romanticism to its rough, unhewn edges. You get jolted into the reality that makes all your life so far look like a nice movie.

Has it ever happened to you...

...that you got sick with what you only knew from TV and it did not feel even a bit heroic?

...that you thought you had known what you were getting into and yet... it turned out to be much worse?

...the world felt indifferent to your suffering?

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. You can choose to be angry over the undeserved surprise or you can choose to cry with Jesus. What is your current cross that has been thrust onto you? Place it on Jesus's shoulders. They are broader than yours.

Jesus, you know the pain of a cross being heaved onto your shoulders. Please, help me through the pain. I decide not to focus on fighting against the surprise. I decide to take what was placed on me and pass it onto your shoulders.

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III. Jesus falls the first time

Gosh, it hurts so much when one falls face down with the hands tied up. There is no chance to protect the face and the stomach. And then the full weight of the wooden beam whacks the back with no warning. The helplessness gets redefined. And the soldiers are flogging mercilessly. It is part of their job. Not the first guy, and not the last, who needs to be whipped up. Tasting suffering turns out to mean a lot tasting one's own helplessness, smallness, pathetic-ness, and one is not even especially exceptional in it.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. You can choose to be angry at yourself for your own pathetic weakness or you can choose to offer yourself compassion – through Jesus. When did you recently feel like you fell? Turn off your evil inner voice that is jabbing at you for being weak. Look at yourself with Jesus's compassion. What is it that He is telling you?

Jesus, you know the pain of falling unprotected onto a stony road. Please, help me through the pain. I decide not to be my enemy. I decide not to hate myself for being a loser. I decide to look at myself through your eyes. Please, please, speak to me. Teach me compassion with myself. Teach me to be my own good friend.

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IV. Jesus meets his mother

What is worse: to suffer or to see your anguished loved ones watch you suffer? We would do anything to spare them the pain, the shame, the helplessness but we cannot. We know they would do anything to spare us the suffering but they cannot. We feel guilty for putting them through all the pain that our suffering causes them.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. You can choose to feel guilty or angry at yourself – on top of what you are already suffering – or you can choose to receive their affection and to cry with them. You can choose to embrace the blessing that you are not suffering alone, that there is someone who cares about what you are going through. There are so many people who have no one.

Jesus, I am pained to see my loved ones in pain because of my suffering. Thank you for setting them on my side so that I have someone to cry with. Please, spare them the pain if I may ask.

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V. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross.

Simon was looking forward to the cool shade of his home and the delicious midday meal his wife had prepared. Only a few more minutes and he would recline his tired body at the family table. He needed to pass by the group of soldiers escorting some lowlife on his last journey to Golgotha. But, oh no, the lowlife got too weak and could not continue with his cross. The Roman soldiers could do anything without punishment. They grabbed Simon and thrust the wooden beam onto his shoulders. Simon had to postpone his well-deserved rest. He hated the injustice. He hated the soldiers. He hated that lowlife who just ruined his day.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. In your suffering, many people around will be affected by it and forced to interact with you. They will let you feel how they hate the interaction. They will let you know how they resent you for ruining their day.

Jesus, thank you for the help of the people around me in my suffering. Please, touch the hearts of all those who resent the fact that my suffering affects them as well. Please, bless them. Please, give me the grace of not resenting them and of not resenting myself.

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VI. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Muscular arms and legs of the Roman soldiers who escorted Jesus did not invite to challenge them. Not a delicate woman like Veronica, at least. And yet she had enough determination to push her way among them, come up close to Jesus, wipe his face, and walk away. That was fast and that is why they did not get to flog her or shove her to the ground. But the touch of her veil lasted a brief eternity of relief to Jesus. The crown of thorns had caused blood to flow down his face. The fall face down left him with the paste of dirt mixed with sweat plastered all over his face. He could barely breathe. The act of wiping that all off his face was brief. It could not possibly alleviate the pain. It could not possibly save him from all the following forms of suffering. It could not possibly prevent him from dying within the next hour. And yet, for that brief moment, the world became a better place. For a moment, he could breathe. For a moment, he could experience human compassion and affection amid curses and mocking. It could not save him from death, but he sure treasured that moment.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. In your suffering, there will be people who offer simple gestures of affection. They will listen with compassion to your sad story. They bring you cookies. They will notice and complement you on your minute progress. They will not save you from suffering. And that is why, unlike Jesus, you will dismiss them, even complain about them. You will squander the precious little gifts of God on your way of the cross.

Jesus, thank you for all the people who reached out to me with their little gestures of affection and compassion. Please, give me the wisdom and the simplicity to be able to notice their kindness and savor it.

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VII. Jesus falls the second time

This “But I have just been there”- feeling. “I have just tasted dirt in my mouth. I have just banged my face against the stones. I have just felt the stones hit my unprotected belly. I have just groaned as the wooden beam thrust my back into the ground.” Jesus had to go through this again. And he just got his face cleaned a minute before! And the soldiers kept flogging – their simple incentive to get up.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. We humans – we are fallers. Falls do not happen to us just once. We have to keep tasting the same dirt over and over. And while we are lying face down, anguished that it is not the first time, we need to summon up the energy to get up, knowing that the whole experience may repeat itself soon.

Jesus, thank you for lying alongside me when I fall. Please, give me strength so that I may get up from my fall – not the first one and not the last one.

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VIII. Jesus meets the crying women

He was kinda busy – blood in his face, wounds across the back, heavy cross, and all. But there they were – the weeping women. And he had enough energy and kindness in himself to stop and speak to them compassionately about THEIR suffering.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. Seldom do we have the luxury of undisturbed celebration of our suffering as the major world event. In most cases, others next to us are focused on their own tragedies – big or small. In many cases, they demand our attention. And occasionally, they actually depend on us. We cannot dismiss them until later. We need to focus on them. On top of our own actively bleeding wounds.

Have you ever had to attend to...

...your crying toddler while fighting your own splitting headache?

...your Mom distressed about her dog while fighting your own depression?

...your friend’s woes while fighting your own demons?

Suffering is not JUST suffering. It is suffering in a world full of people focused on their own aches who – rightly or not – clamor for our attention. It is suffering in a world full of many other issues. It is suffering and not being remotely interesting or newsworthy about it. THIS is suffering.

Jesus, thank you for your suffering – which most of the time I do not care about. Thank you for suffering and – still – caring about me. Please, give me the peace to embrace my suffering as a non-event to the rest of the world. Please, give me the wisdom to know when I should respond to the tears of others while I am crying myself. Please, give me enough kindness so that I could respond.

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IX. Jesus falls the third time

Ahead of him he already could see the Skull Hill – his grim destination. For a second he felt dizzy, stumbled over a stone and... oh, no, not again. His full weight plus the cross's weight shoved him cruelly down onto the road. How many times can one taste the same dirt and hit the same wounds? The familiarity of the bitter experience does not make it a bit easier to endure. Every time it seems more painful. Every time it takes more pain to gather oneself and get up. Every time the soldiers flog more intensely as they themselves get tired of their assignment. And then – what is the point in getting up? To bring oneself closer to the even more painful crucifixion? Maybe he could just stay lying down there, on the road, prolonging the journey? What is the difference where one dies? But he got up. He got up to bring himself closer to even more suffering. For his Father's sake. For our sake.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. Why keep working diligently if they are going to close down the branch in a few weeks anyway? Why continue with treatment if the doctors gave you another six months? For God's sake. For other people's sake.

Jesus, thank you for being with me when I need to get up and bring myself closer to even more suffering. Please, give me strength. For our Father's sake. For all my loved ones' sake.

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X. Jesus is stripped of his garments

Stripping prisoners naked – the favorite humiliation game from antiquity to modernity. Enjoyable to both soldiers as well as the gawking rabble. We have to understand – there was no television back then. Where else could they possibly have gone for such entertainment? He was standing there, almost physically feeling the groping eyes of the people who had all the power and no compassion.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. Strangers do not think about your privacy when you are at their mercy in the hospital. Others want to catch you in the locker room or a bathroom. Still others delight in delving into private details of your life. And some so-called friends expose you to the world's enjoyment after you confided in them. Your skin burns in embarrassment in face of your secrets made public.

Jesus, thank you for being with me when I am standing naked in front of the salivating crowd. Please, give me peace and composure so that I can hold on to my dignity when everything else has been ripped away from me.

- XI. XI. Jesus is nailed to the cross
So there is a “more ultimate” pain after the ultimate pain? After all he had been through, the pain revealed yet another level of its existence. His abused body was pierced by nails that joined it with the wooden cross. Carrying his cross to the execution site might have seemed cruel enough until that cross become part of the body-wood unity. A new level of cruelty and pain emerged.
Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. The past sufferings may pale by comparison when the new suffering sets in. What seemed horrible pain before becomes sufferable as the new level of pain sets in. Have you ever experienced the switch from horrible to more horrible as...
...your inability to have kids grew into the inability to participate in many adult conversations, the inability to share many family life experiences of your peers, etc.?
...your physical problem grew into a social-life problem, a financial problem, etc?
...your illness became terminal?
Jesus, thank you for being with me at the moment when I realize that pain has an even deeper level than I could imagine. Please, be with me when I need your peace and healing the most.
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- XII. Jesus dies on the cross
“God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” As his body was slumping down, he choked. As he was heaving his body up, straining to gasp for air, it caused an excruciating pain in his ankles nailed to the wood. The torture had to be repeated every minute. But even more piercing was the pain of not feeling God. Like all experiences of ultimate suffering, his agony on the cross was a lonely planet. In his immense love for us, he chose to share with us this human experience – the pain of not feeling God when we badly need him.
No tearful hand-squeezing of our loved ones will make up for the loneliness of our suffering. We may feel supported and comforted, but at the end of the day we need to ride the road of suffering alone. And the spiritual loneliness follows close behind. We can endure a lot of pain. But it becomes horrible to suffer when we stop knowing if there is God.
Jesus, thank you for choosing to share with me the pain of not feeling God. Thank you for being with me when I cannot feel you on my side. Thank you for being with me when I doubt you exist. Thank you for loving me when I curse you in my pain.
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XIII. Jesus is taken down from the cross

Today we call it “vicarious traumatization” - the care-givers of victims become traumatized by witnessing the traumas of these victims. (It is unclear if Mary of Magdala pronounced it exactly that way in her conversations with John the Evangelist.) This station is about the vicarious traumatization. The loved ones – Our Lady, Mary her sister, Mary of Magdala, John the Evangelist, Joseph of Arimathea, and other caring individuals that stayed with Jesus to the very end – as they were washing the mutilated body, they had to re-live every wound inflicted on Jesus.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. Your suffering can be vicarious. Your suffering may come from witnessing to the pain of another human being. This suffering may be as intense as if you were the very victim. This suffering needs the same care and attention as the suffering that you go through personally.

Jesus, please give me healing when I witness someone else's suffering. Please, help me not let it accumulate in me. Please, be my way to peace and joy in a world of endless suffering pouring over me in my daily life and on TV.

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XIV. Jesus is laid in the tomb

This station is about: "It's over. I'm not kidding – It is OVER" It was not a wink-wink-let-me-act-like-I-suffer thing. He actually died. It was not a coma. He actually died. It was not a look-what-can-happen thing. He actually died. It was over for his loved ones. Jesus might have mentioned something about the eternal life but who knew what he meant by that. The bottom line was – he died. They just washed his dead body. They put him in the tomb. They rolled over a stone to close the tomb. They rolled the stone over their hopes for a better future. He was just a nice and bright guy with an interesting perspective. For a while they had actually bought into his vision of a better world. But this station was about coming back to the real world – a world without Jesus and his rosy, happy-clappy stories.

Today you are invited to accept such experiences as part of life. On occasion you will have to roll a huge stone over the tomb of a dream. You will never be an athlete again. Roll the stone over it. You will never afford this or that again. Roll the stone over. Your children will never accomplish this or that. Roll the stone over. You will never see this person again. Roll the stone over. Every time we bury a dream, we run the risk of losing our Christian faith. We risk switching into the mode of "Actually, all this Christian thing is just a nice perspective to make the world a more peaceful place". Bury a dream but keep your hope and faith.

Jesus, please be with me when I am standing at the tomb of a dream of mine. Please, teach me how to bury dreams without burying hope and faith along with them.

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XV. Resurrection

They all were speechless at first. They had never thought he actually meant that. He was alive again!

Today you are invited to embrace hope and joy and peace of Jesus. Not the likes you can reason yourself into on your own following the newest self-help seven-step book. Today you are invited to embrace hope and joy and peace that only Jesus can give. Today you are invited to open your heart and ask him to come in.

Jesus, I am opening my heart to you. I am asking you to enter it – you the one who conquered death. Please lead me from the realm of what humans can accomplish on their own to the kingdom where you accomplish things and we are your instruments. Jesus, I am opening my heart to you. Please enter.

Hosanna! Alleluia! Amen!

Cristo ha resucitado. Felices Pascuas.