

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

as told by

A Friend of Mary

FIRST STATION: Jesus is condemned to death.

Early Friday morning, my friend Mary and I spotted Jesus. We had not seen him since the soldiers took him away last night. He looked awful...bruised...bleeding. Mary clutched her chest, tears stained her face as she swayed dizzily against me. Neither of us could make any sense of it. All around us, a frenzied mob screamed, "Crucify him!" I held Mary tightly, but she strained away from my arms, pleading with the crowd to stop..., stop..., just stop.

All:

Lord Jesus, too often I have belittled somebody and thought, "Crucify him!" Every time I hold a grudge, "Crucify him!" Every time I judge, "Crucify him!" How often have I saddened You? Forgive me, Jesus.

SECOND STATION: Jesus takes his cross.

Somehow Mary and I found the strength to walk with the crowd. We could see that Jesus could barely stand up. Then two soldiers dragged over two heavy tree trunks that were tied together. They plopped the load on Jesus' shoulders. He nearly crumbled under its weight. Mary's heart wrenched, and without thinking, she bolted forward to take the load from him. But too many guards blocked her path.

All:

Lord Jesus, I know I have added weight to your cross every time I gossip about my neighbor, every time I ignore someone's needs. Help me to be like Mary, to lighten the crosses of others.

THIRD STATION: Jesus falls the first time.

As Jesus stumbled toward Calvary, we could see the cross digging into his skin. Suddenly, he fell face-down on the ground, the heavy wood crashing smack on his spine. Mary's whole body trembled as she clutched my arm. Meanwhile, the guards mocked Jesus for having tripped, and they refused to lend him any assistance.

All:

Lord, how often have I seen you fall, only to leave you there without concern? How often have I seen someone slip up only to laugh at their mistake? Help me to open my eyes to each opportunity to give support, to give a helping hand.

FOURTH STATION: Jesus meets his grieving mother.

Without warning, Mary released her grip on my arm and shoved her way through the crowd. I was alarmed at what she might try to do, so I struggled to keep up with her. Soon, she and I were side by side with her son. He saw her and stopped. Their eyes met. I looked from one to the other, and in their eyes I saw anguish, pain, confusion. As I watched them, mother and son, I felt so helpless. But then I heard him tell her, "Mother, have courage! All of this has a purpose."

All:

Lord Jesus, I remember the many occasions when our eyes met, and I turned mine away. I remember when you called me to courage, but I lapsed into self-absorbed fear. Please forgive me for those times. Please give me the grace to have courage.

FIFTH STATION: Simon helps Jesus carry his cross.

We could see the utter distress on Jesus' face. The wood was so heavy. His muscles were so weak. I felt his every step would be his last. Then Mary noticed some commotion near Jesus, and I heard her whisper a prayer of thanks. I followed her gaze and saw a man from the crowd pick up the cross and carry it for Jesus.

All:

Lord Jesus, help me to leave my selfish nature behind.
Show me how you want to use me. With your help,
when I see someone in need, I will try to lighten his load.

SIXTH STATION: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.

Then yet another person came to Jesus' aid. A woman elbowed her way past the soldiers, took off her veil, and began wiping away the blood and sweat from his face. I heard him sigh as his discomfort was momentarily soothed. Mary smiled at me through her tears. She told me how relieved she was to know that not every person was against her son. Some people actually care.

All:

Lord, Veronica was moved to help you. Sometimes I also am moved to help. But every day offers many opportunities to help someone, and I just let the chances slip away. My savior, remind me to seize those chances when I can be of assistance.

SEVENTH STATION: Jesus falls the second time.

Again he stumbled and fell! Mary crumbled against me in unrelieved grief. I looked at Jesus' face as he lay on the ground. I was surprised to see a sort of determination there. With effort, he picked himself up and trod slowly ahead. Mary gently touched me and said we must continue forward. Both she and her son had purpose in their eyes.

All:

Lord Jesus, I want to follow where you go. But I am weak with fear. Help me to choose you and your loving way of life.

EIGHTH STATION: Jesus speaks to the women.

I was overwhelmed by the size of the throng that lined the road where Jesus walked. Just up ahead was a group of women. Every one of them was moved to pity and cried for him. Mary and I edged forward to hear what was said. He said the oddest thing: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." Mary nodded in understanding, but I must admit that the words confused me.

All:

Jesus, my savior, you asked the women to see their own frailty, and to convert their hearts. They could not see the connection between your walk to death and their salvation. Lord, I am just as blind as they are. Please teach me to understand.

NINTH STATION: Jesus falls the third time.

Mary's hand trembled in mine as we neared the top of the hill where Jesus would be crucified. Then he fell in exhaustion. Mary was so grieved as she shared his suffering. The soldiers screamed at him in impatience, dragging him the last few steps. I held Mary against me, and I could feel her heart pound.

All: My loving Jesus,
I am lacking in patience, in persistence,
In energy, and in courage.
I need you to compensate for my weakness.

TENTH STATION: Jesus is stripped of his garments.

We had arrived. No longer would Jesus have to walk the rocky path. No longer would he have to drag the heavy tree. Perhaps he could have a chance to rest. But no, immediately the guards tore the clothes from his blood-clotted skin. He winced in pain and Mary sobbed silently beside me.

All:
Dear Lord, I am beginning to understand. I once
stripped away someone's dignity. I once stripped away
their good name. I see now that I offend you every time
I hurt someone else. Help me to see you in all people.

ELEVENTH STATION: Jesus is nailed to the cross.

I could not believe I was witnessing such cruelty. Nails punctured his hands. More nails tore at his feet. Then the soldiers lifted the cross up and set it in place. Mary leaned toward me and whispered. I could barely hear her. "There he is. My son. They have hurt him so much. And I love him so much." Then she was silent.

All:

My dear savior, you endured such pain. My sins must really hurt you. And yet, you are ready to forgive me the moment I repent. Help me to turn away from my selfishness, the source of my unhappiness. Help me to turn toward your love, the source of my peace.

TWELFTH STATION: Jesus dies on the cross.

Mary gently moved me away from her so that she could stand next to the cross that held her son. As I watched her, I thought of everything I knew about her life. She had given birth to this savior. She had taught him in his childhood. She had protected him from danger through the years. But now she could not protect him from death. In a moment, Jesus breathed his last, and his pain was over. But I could see that Mary's pain was far from complete.

All:

My Jesus, I thank you for your love for me. You laid down your life for me. Help me to imitate you and your mother. Help me to devote my life to you, by devoting myself to my sisters and brothers. I do not want to fail.

THIRTEENTH STATION: Jesus is taken down.

Eventually the crowd left. Only a few of us remained. Someone asked me to help him climb up the cross and take down Jesus' body. We managed to separate his body from the nails, and we slowly lowered it to the ground. Then we placed the body in Mary's waiting arms. She moaned in sorrow, and I worried that she might never be happy again.

All: Mary, my friend, I recall your words of long ago:
"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
My spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
Behold, from now on all ages will call me blessed.
The Mighty One has done great things for me,
And holy is his name."

FOURTEENTH STATION: Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Those of us who remained were in such a state of numbness, that we couldn't think of what to do next. Then someone came forward and gently suggested that we bury the body. In fact, the man offered his own freshly-hewn tomb. Mary thanked him and sent me to find some clean linens. She herself used the linens to wrap her son's body, lovingly arranging it in the resting place. Then we all walked out of the tomb, and closed the entrance with a large boulder. Then together we turned to face what life had in store for us next.

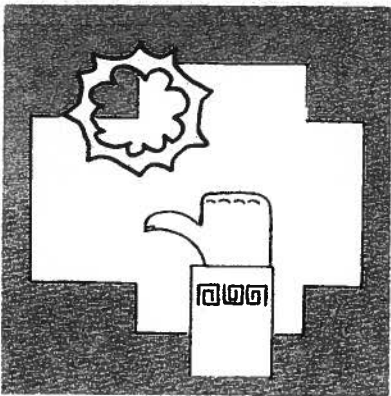
All:

My dear Jesus, when you were under arrest, you submitted to it silently. When you were beaten and mocked, you endured it silently. When your mother watched people kill you, she suffered the pain silently. Give us the strength to lead good lives; give us the courage to walk in your steps, give us the faith to see our salvation. Then we may sing of your love forever. We will shout your praise, and we will never be silent again. Amen.

First Station

Matthew 27: 19-26

I AM
CONDEMNED
TO DEATH



P

ilate has just read my death sentence. I am to die on the cross. Should I rebel against Pilate? How can I? He is not my enemy. He is an envoy of my Father and the voice of my human destiny.

Pilate told me when and how I would die. You may not get that blessing. You won't have a Pilate to tell you the place, the time or the circumstances of your death. Yet you stand condemned to death as surely as I was. You were destined to die the moment you were conceived. That is part of being human.

Do you think of that very often? If you thought about your death, you could see more clearly that some of the things you are most obsessed with are the least important. You would not be so worried about money, clothes, cars and careers. These things don't make you precious. These things won't help you when your time to die comes.

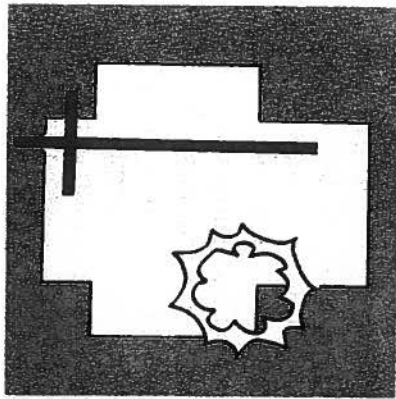
I remind you of your death not because my Father and I want you to be fearful of your future. I remind you to help you live fully and freely as my brothers and sisters, as sons and daughters of my Father. In my death and resurrection you will receive the power to do that.



Second Station

John 19: 16-17

I AM MADE
TO CARRY
MY CROSS



My instrument of suffering and death has been thrust on me. Should I curse this heavy timber and those who laid it on me? No. The cross is neither bad nor good. My response alone determines whether it will be redemptive or destructive.

You also must carry the instruments of your own suffering and death. You were born with defects that you may control but never abolish. You have fatal flaws that cause pain and suffering. You want to be kind, patient and understanding, but at times you find yourself mean, short-tempered and cynical. But you must not curse yourself or your limitations. That becomes like quicksand pulling you down lower.

My cross did not come only from Pilate or the Roman soldiers. My cross came when I took on my Father's work and became human. Your crosses are the same. They are your credentials for being human. The question is not whether life brings crosses, but rather your response to them.

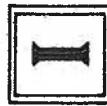
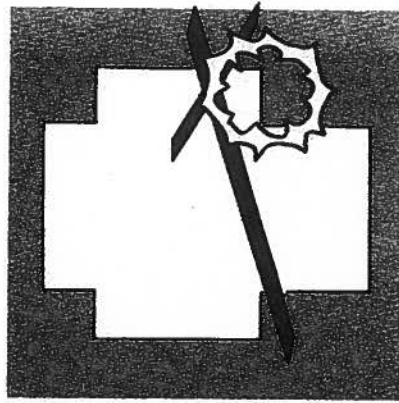
I embraced my humanity. You must embrace your humanity. Resisting crosses leads to self-hatred, hatred of others and bitterness. Some woods are stronger than steel because they bend. Learn to bend. Learn the wisdom of triumphing through your crosses rather than in spite of them.



Third Station

Isaiah 53: 1-3

I FALL THE FIRST TIME



have just fallen flat on my face. I tried to avoid it. I wanted to stay on my feet. I wonder if I fell partly because I was trying too hard to keep from falling?

You can learn from my fall. You also will fall if you try too hard to succeed all by yourself. I was so wrapped up in my efforts that I forgot to let my Father guide me. I forgot for an instant to let Him work through me.

You are often tempted to take on more than you can do well. Or to take on goals that, however worthy, may not be right for you or may be undertaken for inferior reasons. You decide what you want and then say to yourself: I am going to achieve this goal, and when I succeed, even God will have to be impressed.

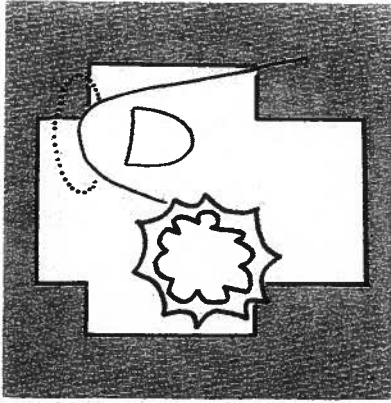
You do not need successes to get my Father's attention. If you succeed, it is because of His grace anyway. So what you would be holding up as yours is really His already. My Father wants you, not your successes. In all you undertake, go first to Him in prayer and ask what He wants. Then, when you go to work, open your heart to Him and let Him work in and through you.



Fourth Station

Lamentations 1, 12

I MEET MY
SORROWFUL
MOTHER



I have just seen Mary. I wished for a second that she and I could have been spared that meeting, which was short but painful. Was I trying to hide this final agony from her, thinking she might not be strong enough for it?

Do you tend to avoid your loved ones, and they you, in times of crisis? Some spend a lifetime shielding their deepest selves from their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, sons and daughters. In the end, this will fail, because your death exposes your weakness to your loved ones as nothing in life could.

Why wait until death or desperation to "meet" your loved ones? Share with them your most profound aspirations, joys, fears and troubles before the opportunities are gone.

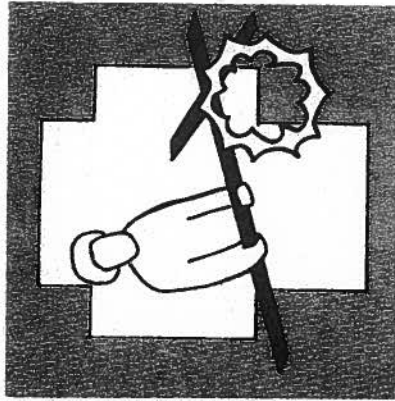
But no matter how often you open yourself to them in crises, it won't be easy. I know. You want them to see you at your best, just as I wanted Mary to see me. I didn't want her to see me so helpless. For an instant I was underestimating Mary and losing sight of my Father's grace. Just as He gives you the grace to face loved ones when all hope seems lost, so He gives them the grace to cope not only with your pain but theirs as well.



Fifth Station

Luke 23, 26

**SIMON IS
FORCED
TO CARRY
MY CROSS**



I felt badly for Simon of Cyrene. He had no way of preparing for what happened to him. He was a farm hand coming in from the fields when the soldiers forced him to carry my cross. I overheard him complain to himself, 'Why me?'

Don't you dare condemn Simon. You would have been startled, reluctant and bitter, too, if you had been in his shoes!

You must learn, as Simon did, that much in life is not just and fair. You will be startled by crosses thrust upon you when you least expect them. When that happens, my Father and I will not hold against you your reflexive cry of 'Why me?' But you must quickly move beyond that. You must not spend your life looking for "reasons" for your crosses. You may never know until you die.

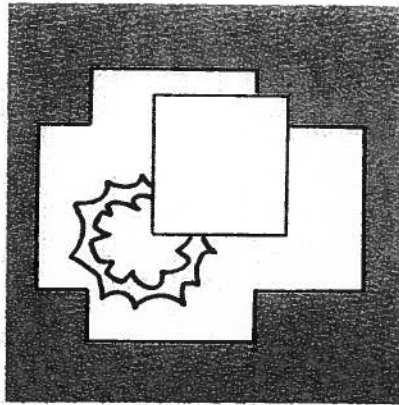
Learn this from Simon's plight. My Father uses anything and anyone to accomplish salvation. He used Simon, so Simon could be said to have done the will of my Father. But that alone doesn't make one holy, because holiness is willing what my Father wills, wanting what He wants, accepting it and embracing it and making it your own. Only you in the depths of your freedom can do that.



Sixth Station

Psalms 17, 15

VERONICA WIPES MY FACE



I am grateful to Veronica for wiping the blood, sweat and dirt from my eyes. She had not been as close to me in life as many others, but she responded when I needed an act of kindness. Do you realize she was the last person in my earthly life to touch me in a gentle act of mercy?

You never know when an act of kindness you do will be the last one a person experiences. So you should regard every opportunity for kindness as an act that will last an eternity.

Kindness begets kindness. Veronica didn't just happen to be at the right place at the right time. She had spent a lifetime learning to be gentle. My face wasn't the first — or the last — that she soothed. You, too, cannot expect to be gentle in a crisis unless you have practiced gentleness so often that it comes naturally.

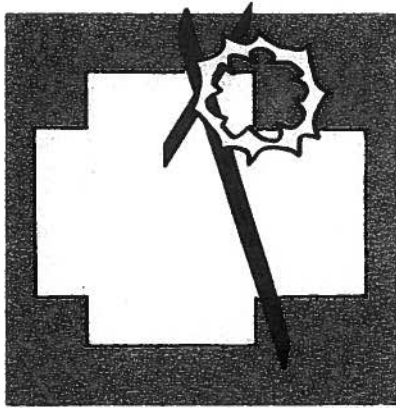
Would you have wiped my face? How can you say you would have if you had ignored a thousand troubled faces before you saw mine?



Seventh Station

Isaiah 53, 4-6

I FALL THE SECOND TIME



I

had wanted to pace myself better to make it to Calvary without another fall. But I tripped. I'm not sure how. Maybe it was a loose cobblestone, a rock I stubbed my foot on or a wet spot that was too slick.

This fall shows me up for being human as nothing else on my way to Calvary. I had enough strength and presence of mind to avoid it. Why did I fall? I think I was lulled into a momentary lapse. Simon had eased my burden. Veronica had soothed my sweaty face. A breeze had cooled my body. What flashed in my mind was that these fleeting strokes of good fortune meant I could somehow bypass the rest of the journey. Before I even recognized that as a temptation, I fell.

I smiled, the only time I remember smiling on my way to crucifixion. I smiled because I recognized how deeply I was like other people in being tempted to cheat my Father.

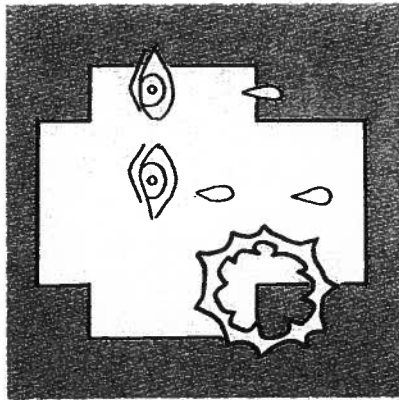
What a profound lesson for you! Momentary good fortune does not mean the struggle is over. If things are looking rosy, be careful. You may be about to fall harder. Both good and bad are fleeting in this life. Do not count on them. Count on nothing except my Father.



Eighth Station

Luke 23, 27-31

I MEET THE
WAILING
WOMEN OF
JERUSALEM



Why wasn't I more understanding with these weeping women, who, after all, seemed to be showing me sympathy? Instead of graciously accepting their show of concern, I turned on them with the seemingly harsh words: 'Don't weep for me, Weep for yourselves and your children.'

I was harsh because these women were part of a great multitude of curiosity seekers who had turned out to watch an execution. Remember that these women were engaged in a kind of formal religious practice of mourning and lamenting for the dead or condemned. They were weeping for the sake of weeping. They were weeping without really knowing me or my Father.

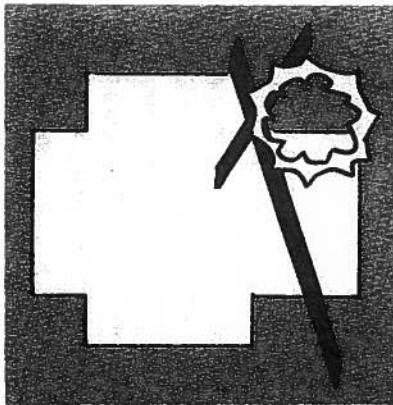
I am intolerant of religious practice — for its own sake. I detest your religious routines when they are an excuse to avoid your deep personal commitment to me and my Father. Sometimes it is better to be silent, to pour out your heart where no one can hear. Go to your room and pray. When you know for whom you weep, then come to the Calvary's road.



Ninth Station

Isaiah 53: 10-11

I FALL
A THIRD
TIME



I have no regrets about this fall. My strength was gone. I did not want to fall and I did not want to stand. I just fell. And this time I had to be helped up. I couldn't get up myself.

You may someday fall for a third time and have no strength to get up. You will have to be picked up by others. Don't let that lead to despair; it does not mean you are less than human. Do not let those around you rob you of your dignity when you are on the ground.

"What good am I to anyone," you may ask as others pick you up. If you bear your weakness with love, you are doing wonders for yourself, as well as the whole of creation. You are making yourself like me.

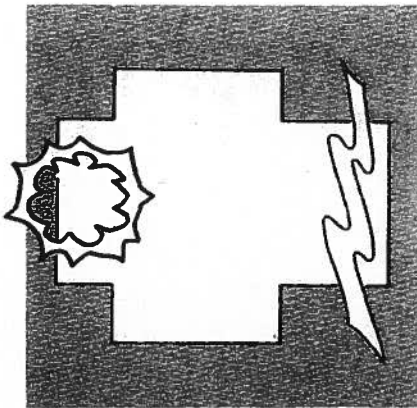
In this life, you cannot become like me in many things. You cannot have the power I have. You cannot have the knowledge I have. You cannot have the wisdom I have. But you can become like me in the love you show when you are weak and helpless.



Tenth Station

Matthew 27, 27-31

I AM
STRIPPED
OF MY
CLOTHES



W

hen I was stripped of my robes, it hurt because parts of them were plastered to my body with caked blood. But it didn't hurt my ego. By this time, I had nothing to cling to. I was emptied.

I want so much for you to know and live the truth symbolized by the ripping off of my clothes. My human life was an emptying of myself so I could be filled by my Father. Your life must be the same.

Clothes are very personal. You would instinctively resist having them ripped from you. Yet clothes are a part of your outer self, and a symbol of it rather than your spirit.

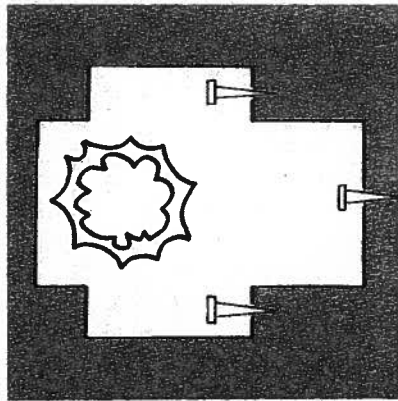
The more you cling to your superficial self, the more you wrap layers of clothing around you that will one day be stripped off. Your death will be the end of your ego, and all other empires you have been building in a lifetime. If you have died daily to yourself, the stripping of your humanity at death will not hurt so much. You may, like me, not even clutch at them as your clothes are stripped from you.



Eleventh Station

Luke 23: 33 & 34

I AM
NAILED TO
THE CROSS



The pain of those nails almost made me black out. They were blunt Roman spikes that crushed flesh and bone. Yet it was not so much *that* pain I felt. It was the agony that welled up at the thought of what was happening. "Why, Father? Why nails in your Son?"

Let me tell you the difference between pain and suffering. Pain is the blind impersonal clashing of forces that is universal. Suffering is uniquely human. A plant or an animal may be in pain, but there is no suffering. Suffering springs from a mind capable of turning raw pain into agony by asking *why*. Why is this happening to *me*? *Must* it happen? Is it *fair*?

That is why you must never underestimate the degree of suffering of any of your brothers or sisters. If you look only at their pain, you may wonder what they have to complain about. But you cannot see their suffering. You don't know how sensitive their souls are, how quickly their pain can become insufferable agony. Instead of judging, do all you can to relieve both their pain and their suffering.

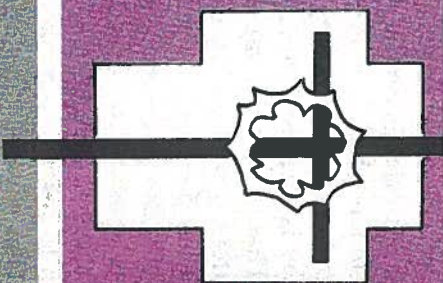
That is why, too, that you must never underestimate the power of my suffering. No one sustained more pain than I. But pain was not the issue. Suffering was. My suffering was infinite because my capacity to ask why was infinite and my love for you was infinite.



Twelfth Station

Luke 23, 44-49

I DIE ON THE CROSS



I was dying, and it hurt. I was alone, so utterly alone. I had never felt this way before. I was sinking into hell and wondered if I was going to come back. I said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Some of you may think I said that only to fulfill an Old Testament passage. But I said that because I felt it. I was lost. I was in despair, even if I didn't stay in despair for long. This was not pretending. How could it be? Could I have lived and died as a man without experiencing despair and doubt?

If someone tells you that faith and hope will keep you from experiencing doubt and despair, do not listen to them. Faith and hope are opposite sides of doubt and despair. They are not as different as most people think. You pass through doubt and despair, not around them.

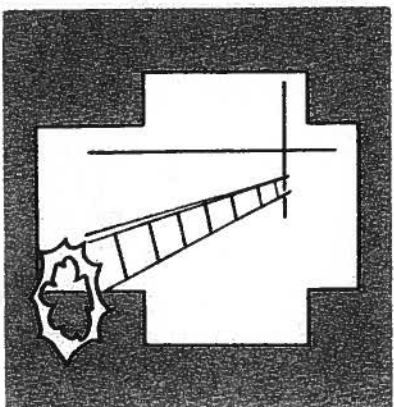
When you are falling into hell do what I did. Shout your anguish directly to my Father. Complain to Him to your last breath, as I did. Your complaint will become a prayer, even as mine did . . . and He will hear and answer.



Thirteenth Station

Luke 23, 50-53

I AM
TAKEN DOWN
FROM THE
CROSS



The noise has stopped. Mary and a few faithful disciples take me from the cross. They say nothing. They do nothing, except, with hearts aching, hold my limp body. All is silent.

You may have been taught that being my disciple is an active role. The more you do to improve yourself, the Church and the world, the better. There are times when you must work, but there are even more crucial times when you must say nothing and do nothing except be with me, your heart aching, as Mary and the faithful disciples after the crucifixion.

I had asked some of my Apostles to be with me during my agony in the garden. But they were so depleted from talking, walking, planning and worrying that they quickly fell asleep. Not even one of them had the energy left to be with me. How often that has happened through the centuries!

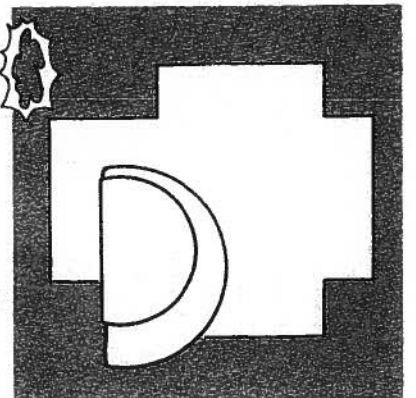
After my crucifixion, my disciples waited and watched in silence. Some were closer to me then than before. Do I have to die to get you to listen and love in silence?



Fourteenth Station

John 19, 38-42

MY BODY
IS PUT
IN A
TOMB



I had no grave of my own. My body was laid in somebody else's tomb. Was it fitting that I be buried in a borrowed tomb?

I was always borrowing things. I borrowed a crib in Bethlehem to be born. I borrowed Peter's boat to preach from. I borrowed a donkey to ride on when I came into Jerusalem. I borrowed bread and wine to make my body move and my blood flow in history. I borrowed thorns, wood and nails to redeem the universe. Why should my burial be any different?

I will go on borrowing things until the end of time, until I have borrowed them all and made them holy.

I will also borrow you. You will be my tongue and my throat, parched. You will be my hands and my feet, nailed. You will be my head, thorned. You will be my side, lanced. You will be my body, stripped. You will be my corpse, buried. And when the borrowing is over, you will be my brothers and my sisters, risen.



AN EASTER PRAYER

"The right hand of the Lord is exalted,
the right hand of the Lord does wonders.
I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.'
Christ, the Son of the Living God,
accept from us this prayer on Easter night
and give us that joy of the new Life,
which we bear within us,
which only you can give to the human heart.
You, the Risen Christ.
You, our Paschal Lamb!"

Pope John Paul II

