

Franciscan Way of the Cross

Meditations by Franciscan Father Francesco Patton, O.F.M.

Introduction

The Way of the Cross winds through the narrow streets in the Old City of Jerusalem, allowing us to retrace Jesus' path from the place of his condemnation to that of his crucifixion and burial, which is also the site of his resurrection.

This route is not reserved for the devout or those seeking a quiet space for prayer. Rather, as in the time of Jesus, we find ourselves walking through a chaotic, distracting and noisy environment, surrounded by people who share our faith in him, but also by those who deride or insult him. Such is the reality of our daily life.

The Way of the Cross is not intended for those who lead a pristinely pious or abstractly recollected life. Instead, it is the exercise of one who knows that faith, hope and charity must be incarnated in the real world, where the believer faces ongoing challenges and must constantly strive to imitate Jesus.

Saint Francis of Assisi, whose eighth centenary of death we celebrate this year, describes the Christian life by borrowing the words of the Apostle Peter. He reminds us that we are called to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ, who "called his betrayer a friend and willingly offered himself to his executioners" (The Earlier Rule XXII, 2: cf. 1Pt 2:21).

The Poverello encourages us to fix our gaze upon Jesus: "Let all of us, brothers, consider the Good Shepherd who bore the suffering of the cross to save his sheep" (The Admonitions VI, 1).

As we walk this Way of the Cross, let us therefore accept the invitation of Saint Francis to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. May this be more than a mere ritual or intellectual journey, but one that transforms our entire person and life, as the saint exhorts us: "Take up your bodies and carry his holy cross, and follow his most holy commands even to the end" (The Office of the Passion XV, 13).

I Station

Leader: Jesus is condemned to death

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to John (19:9-11)

(Pilate) entered the praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (Later Admonition and Exhortation, 28-29)

Let whoever has received the power of judging others pass judgment with mercy, as they would wish to receive mercy from the Lord. For judgment will be without mercy for those who have not shown mercy.

Reflection: Lord Jesus, in your dialogue with Pilate, you unmasked every human presumption of power. Even today, there are those who believe their authority is limitless, thinking they may use or abuse it at their whim. Your words to the Roman Prefect leave no room for ambiguity: “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above” (Jn 19:11).

Saint Francis of Assisi, who simply sought to follow in your footsteps, reminds us that every person in authority will have to answer to God for the way they exercise their power: the power to judge; the power to start or end a war; the power to instill violence or peace; the power to fuel the desire for revenge or for reconciliation; the power to use the economy to oppress people or to liberate them from misery; the power to trample on human dignity or to uphold it; and the power to promote and defend life, or reject and stifle it.

Each of us is likewise called to account for the power that we exercise in our daily lives. To us also, Jesus says: “Make good use of the power given to you, and remember that whatever you do to another human being, especially to the small and vulnerable, you do unto me. And it is to me that you will one day give an account.”

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Remind me, Jesus.*

That you identify yourself with every person who is judged: *Remind me, Jesus.*

That I may not be guided by prejudice: *Remind me, Jesus.*

That true power consists in love: *Remind me, Jesus.*

That mercy triumphs over judgment: *Remind me, Jesus.*

That the good must be chosen even when it comes at a cost: *Remind me, Jesus.*

II Station

Leader: Jesus Takes up His Cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

From the Gospel according to John (19:14-17)

Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha.

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (The Admonitions, V, 7-8)

Even if you were more handsome and richer than everyone else, and even if you worked miracles so that you put demons to flight: all these things are contrary to you; nothing belongs to you; you can boast in none of these things. But we can boast in our weaknesses and in carrying each day the holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection: The word “cross” often evokes repulsion within us rather than desire. It is easier to experience the temptation to flee from it than to yearn to embrace it.

Jesus, I am certain that it was the same for you when the cross was first placed upon your shoulders. Indeed, in Gethsemane you asked the Father to take this chalice away from you, even while desiring with

your whole being to fulfil his will. In your time, the cross was the most horrific and painful form of punishment, reserved for slaves, hardened criminals and those cursed by God.

Yet, you embraced the cross; you carried it upon your shoulders, and then you allowed yourself to be borne upon it. You did so not because it was beautiful or attractive, but out of love for us. In bearing its heavy burden, you knew that you were relieving us of the weight of evil that oppresses us, taking upon yourself the burden of sin that ruins our existence. By embracing the cross and carrying it upon your shoulders, you embraced our fragility and deigned to carry the weight of our humanity. You took upon yourself our enslavement, our offenses and even our curse.

Free us, Jesus, from fear of the cross. Give us the grace to follow the path you trod and to seek no glory other than in your cross.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Deliver us, Lord.*

From the desire for worldly glory: *Deliver us, Lord.*

From the temptation to ignore those who suffer: *Deliver us, Lord.*

From the narrow concern for ourselves alone: *Deliver us, Lord.*

From the fear of embracing steadfast fidelity: *Deliver us, Lord.*

From the fear and the rejection of our own cross: *Deliver us, Lord.*

III Station

Leader: Jesus falls the first time.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to John (12:24-25)

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (The Admonitions, XXII, 3)

Blessed is the servant who, after being reprimanded, agrees courteously, submits respectfully, admits humbly, and makes amends willingly.

Reflection: Your life, Jesus, was one of continual abasement and lowliness. Though you are God, you divested yourself of your glory to become man. Rich as you were, you became poor. As you reached the culmination of your mission, bearing upon your shoulders the weight of the entire human race, you fell upon the hard stones of the Via Dolorosa — the path trodden by those condemned to death, watched by the crowds of Jerusalem as if it were a mere spectacle.

This fall is a foretaste of an even deeper descent: the descent into the realm of the dead and a surrender to the enigma of death — the fall that awaits each of us at the end of this earthly life. Yours, however, is like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies in order to bring forth fruit.

Help us to choose a life of humble service rather than seeking prominence and dominance. Teach us the way of humility even through the experiences of our own falls and humiliations, so that we may endure offenses and injustices in peace.

May we feel your presence close to us, especially when we fall — so close that we realize it is you who lifts us up and sets us back upon our way. Teach us also to entrust ourselves to the earth, like the grain of wheat, knowing that through you, death becomes the womb of eternal life.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Lift us up, Jesus.*

When we fall due to our own weakness: *Lift us up, Jesus.*

When we fall due to the actions of others: *Lift us up, Jesus.*

When we fall due to wrong choices: *Lift us up, Jesus.*

When we fall into despair: *Lift us up, Jesus.*

When we fall into the mystery of death: *Lift us up, Jesus.*

IV Station

Leader: Jesus meets his mother

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to John (19:25-27)

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (The Later Rule VI, 8)

Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit!

Reflection: It is natural for a mother to be present at the beginning of our lives. It is not natural for her to be by our side at the moment of our death, because that means that life has been taken from us — whether by illness, accident, violence or despair. Mary, the woman who gave birth to you, Jesus, is also with you on your way to Calvary and stands with you at the foot of the cross.

You ask her to become a mother once again and to continue to be the mother of the beloved disciple, of each one of us, of the Church, of the new humanity born at the very moment when you give your life and die. In the most solemn hour of your mission, before bringing everything to completion, you first ask her to embrace each one of us; and only then do you ask us to embrace her. For the Mother always acts first. At the wedding at Cana, she had even anticipated your request.

O Mary, look with tenderness upon each one of us, but especially upon the many — too many — mothers who, like you, even today see their children arrested, tortured, condemned and killed. Look with tenderness upon the mothers who are awakened in the middle of the night by heartbreaking news, and upon those who keep vigil beside a dying child in a hospital. Grant us a maternal heart, that we may understand and share in the suffering of others, and learn, in this way too, what it truly means to love.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Comfort us, O Mother.*

For mothers who have lost their children: *Comfort us, O Mother.*

For orphans, especially those bereaved by war: *Comfort us, O Mother.*

For migrants, the displaced and refugees: *Comfort us, O Mother.*
For those who suffer torture and unjust punishment: *Comfort us, O Mother.*
For the despairing who have lost their sense of purpose in life: *Comfort us, O Mother.*
For those who die alone: *Comfort us, O Mother.*

V Station

Leader: Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to Mark (15:21)

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (The Admonitions, XVIII, 1)

Blessed is the person who supports his neighbor in his weakness as he would want to be supported were he in a similar situation.

Reflection: Simon of Cyrene was not a volunteer. He did not freely choose to care for you, Jesus, or to help you carry the cross. He probably barely knew who you were. Yet, by helping you carry the cross, something within him changed — so profoundly that he later passed on to his sons, Alexander and Rufus, the profound meaning of that journey made together with you. In time, they became witnesses of your passion and Resurrection within the first Christian community.

Even today, there are many people throughout the world who choose to do good for others. There are thousands of volunteers who, in extreme situations, risk their lives to help those in need of food, education, medical care and justice. Many of them do not even believe in you, and yet — even unknowingly — they help you carry the cross. As they care for others in the flesh, they are, once again, caring for you.

Lord, grant that we too may learn to offer our neighbors the support we would desire in similar circumstances. Help us to be empathetic and compassionate, not only in words, but also in deeds and in truth.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Make us attentive, Lord.*

To the people we meet: *Make us attentive, Lord.*

To the poor, the suffering and the marginalized: *Make us attentive, Lord.*

To those who are alone and neglected: *Make us attentive, Lord.*

To those who are left behind and fall: *Make us attentive, Lord.*

To those who have no one to listen to them: *Make us attentive, Lord.*

VI Station

Leader: 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

From the Gospel according to John (12:20-21)

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father, 4: FF 158)

Your kingdom come: that you may rule in us through your grace and enable us to come to your kingdom where there is clear vision of you, perfect love of you, blessed companionship with you, eternal enjoyment of you.

Reflection: The one whom the Psalms proclaimed "most handsome of men" (Ps 45:2) now bears the features of the suffering Servant foretold by Isaiah, who "had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Is 53:2).

Veronica is the guardian of your image, Jesus. She obtained it through a simple yet profound gesture of charity: wiping your face, covered with blood and dust. She does not preserve for us the memory of a posed image, but that of the Man of sorrows, who healed us through his own wounds.

Help us, Jesus, to cultivate the desire to behold your face. Grant us the grace you gave the Apostles, to see you radiant and transfigured. But above all, help us to imitate the attentive gaze of Veronica, who knew how to recognize you even in your disfigured beauty. Make us capable of wiping your face today — still covered with dust and blood, still disfigured by every act that tramples upon the dignity of the human person.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Help us to recognize you, Jesus.*

When your face is disfigured: *Help us to recognize you, Jesus.*

In every person condemned by prejudice: *Help us to recognize you, Jesus.*

In the poor deprived of their dignity: *Help us to recognize you, Jesus.*

In women who are victims of trafficking and enslavement: *Help us to recognize you, Jesus.*

In children whose childhood has been stolen and whose future has been compromised: *Help us to recognize you, Jesus.*

VII Station

Leader: Jesus falls the second time.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to John (13:3-5)

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (The Earlier Rule, V, 13-14)

Let no brother do or say anything evil to another; on the contrary, through the charity of the Spirit, let them serve and obey one another voluntarily.

Reflection: Your entire life, Jesus, was one of continual humility and self-emptying. When you washed the feet of your disciples at the Last Supper, you gave us an example, a teaching and a prophecy: namely, the example of service, the teaching of fraternal love and the prophetic witness of giving your life. Saint Francis of Assisi was so deeply moved by your humility that he urged us to wash one another's feet — that is, to be ever ready to serve our brothers and sisters. He even asked that this same Gospel be read to him on the evening of 3 October, eight centuries ago, shortly before his death.

Your love for us to the very end, even to the point of giving your life for us, already reveals the promise of your Resurrection, for such great love is stronger than death. Such love reveals the ultimate meaning of love itself: to draw us into the very life of God.

When you fall, Jesus, you do so in order to lift us up from our own falls. When you fall, you do so to raise up those who are crushed to the ground by injustice, by falsehood, by every form of exploitation and violence, and by the misery produced by an economy that seeks individual profit rather than the common good. When you fall, you do so to lift me up as well.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Lift us up, Lord.*

When our mistakes weigh us down: *Lift us up, Lord.*

When the burden of responsibility overwhelms us: *Lift us up, Lord.*

When we fall into discouragement: *Lift us up, Lord.*

When we fail in our commitments: *Lift us up, Lord.*

When we are overcome by addiction: *Lift us up, Lord.*

VIII Station

Leader: 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

From the Gospel according to Luke (23:27-31)

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us;' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Reader: From the Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father, 5)

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven: that we may love you with our whole heart by always thinking of you, with our whole soul by always desiring you, with our whole mind by always directing all our intentions to you, and by seeking your glory in everything, with all our strength by exerting all our energies and affections of body and soul in the service of your love and of nothing else; and we may love our neighbor as ourselves by drawing them all to your love with our whole strength, by rejoicing in the good of others as in our own, by suffering with others their misfortunes, and by giving offense to no one.

Reflection: From the beginning of your ministry, Jesus, women have followed you and cared for you. They are there even now, standing at the foot of the cross. Women are present wherever there is suffering or need: in hospitals and nursing homes; in communities dedicated to care and providing shelter; in foster

homes for the most vulnerable children; opening schools and clinics in the most remote mission lands; and tending to the wounded and comforting survivors in war zones and areas of conflict.

Women have taken you seriously, and even now they take to heart your demanding words. For centuries, they have wept for themselves and for their children, children taken away and imprisoned during protests, deported by policies devoid of compassion, shipwrecked on desperate journeys of hope, killed in war zones, and wiped out in death camps.

Women continue to weep. Grant each of us, Lord, a compassionate heart — a maternal heart — and the grace to make the suffering of others our own. Give us tears once more, Lord, lest our conscience fade into the fog of indifference and we cease to be fully human.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Give us tears, Lord.*

To weep over the devastation of war: *Give us tears, Lord.*

To weep for massacres and genocides: *Give us tears, Lord.*

To weep with mothers and wives: *Give us tears, Lord.*

To weep over the cynicism of the powerful: *Give us tears, Lord.*

To weep over our own indifference: *Give us tears, Lord.*

IX Station

Leader: Jesus falls the third time.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to John (14:6-7)

Jesus said to [Thomas], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Reader: From the Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (The Earlier Rule, XXIII, 3)

We thank you, for as through your Son you created us, so through your holy love with which you loved us you brought about his birth as true God and true man by the glorious, ever-virgin, most blessed, holy Mary; and you willed to redeem us captives through his cross and blood and death.

You who were “born for us on the way” (Saint Francis, The Office of the Passion XV, 7), now fall for the third time along the painful road that leads to Calvary.

Reflection: Your falling three times reminds us that there is no fall of our own in which you are not beside us. You are with us in all our frailty, and you both can and want to lift us up after each fall. For you desire that each of us, at your side, may reach the Father and find life — true life, eternal life — the life that nothing and no one can ever take away from us.

As we walk in your footsteps, it does not matter how many times we fall. What matters is that you are beside us, ready to lift us up once more, again and again. For your love, forgiveness and mercy are infinitely greater than our frailty.

Hold us up in our unbelief, and grant us the grace to believe that you can lift us up.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Make us your instruments, Jesus.*

To lift up all who have fallen: *Make us your instruments, Jesus.*

To lift up those who lie on the ground: *Make us your instruments, Jesus.*

To lift up the most frail: *Make us your instruments, Jesus.*

To lift up those we judge as having “brought it upon themselves:” *Make us your instruments, Jesus.*

To lift up those who seem beyond hope: *Make us your instruments, Jesus.*

X Station

Leader: Jesus is stripped of his garments.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to John (19:23-25)

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” And that is what the soldiers did.

Reader: From the Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (A Letter to the Entire Order, 28-29)

Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by him! Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that he who gives himself totally to you may receive you totally!

Jesus, you chose to strip yourself of divine glory and to clothe yourself in “the flesh of our humanity and frailty” (Saint Francis, Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 4). Now your garments are torn from you in a cruel attempt to humiliate you and strip you of your human dignity.

Reflection: This violation is repeated time and again even today: when authoritarian regimes force prisoners to remain half-naked in bare cells or courtyards; when torturers tear away not only clothing but also skin and flesh; when authorities permit forms of surveillance and intrusion that disregard human dignity; when rapists and abusers reduce their victims to mere objects; when the entertainment industry exploits nudity for the sake of profit; when the media exposes individuals to public opinion; and even when we ourselves, through our curiosity, fail to respect the modesty, intimacy and privacy of others.

Remind us, Lord, that each time we fail to recognize the dignity of others, our own dignity is diminished. And whenever we condone or take part in inhuman behavior toward any person, we ourselves become less human.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Clothe us, Jesus.*

With your infinite humility: *Clothe us, Jesus.*

With respect for every human being: *Clothe us, Jesus.*

With compassion of heart: *Clothe us, Jesus.*

With a renewed sense of modesty: *Clothe us, Jesus.*

With the strength to defend the dignity of every person: *Clothe us, Jesus.*

XI Station

Leader: 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

From the Gospel according to John (19:17-19)

Carrying the cross by himself, [Jesus] went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Reader: From the Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (The Canticum of the Creatures, 10-11: FF 263)

Praised by You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Reflection: Nailed to the cross like a criminal, yet with a title that reveals your royalty, O Jesus, you show us what true power is. Not the power of those who believe they can dispose of the lives of others by putting them to death, but the power of those who can truly conquer death by giving life, and who can give life even by accepting death. You show that true power is not that of those who use force and violence to impose themselves, but that of those who are capable of taking upon themselves the evil of humanity — ours, mine — and destroying it with the power of love that is manifest in forgiveness. You are King and you reign from the cross: you do not resort to the supposed power of armies, but to the apparent powerlessness of love, which allows itself to be nailed to the cross. You are King and your cross becomes the axis around which history and the entire universe revolve, lest they be plunged into the hell of the inability to love.

O crucified King, you remind us that if we want to share in your kingship, we too must learn to forgive for love of you and to bear the difficulties of life in peace, because it is not love of power that conquers, but the power of love.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Teach us to love.*

When we suffer injustice: *Teach us to love.*

When we would seek revenge: *Teach us to love.*

When we are tempted towards violence: *Teach us to love.*

When forgiveness seems impossible: *Teach us to love.*

When we feel crucified: *Teach us to love.*

XII Station

Leader: Jesus dies on the cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to John (19:28-30)

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 11-13)

The will of the Father was such that his blessed and glorious Son, whom he gave to us and who was born for us, should offer himself through his own blood as a sacrifice and oblation on the altar of the cross:

not for himself through whom all things were made, but for our sins, leaving us an example that we might follow his footprints.

Reflection: “It is finished.” This does not mean that all has ended, but rather that your purpose in becoming one of us, O Jesus, has been brought to completion. You have accomplished the mission entrusted to you by the Father, and now you return to him, bringing us with you.

From this moment on, we know that, if we allow ourselves to be drawn to you and lift our gaze toward you, we stand before the One who reconciles us, who remits our “debt,” and who brings us into the sanctuary that is the very life of God. We stand before the One who, in fulfilling the purpose of the Incarnation, opens for us the path to fulfill the deepest meaning of our own lives: to become children of God, to be his masterpiece.

Help us, Lord, to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, whom you poured out upon us at the hour of your death on the cross. Grant that, united with you, we too may pass from this world to the Father.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Give us your Spirit, Lord.*

That we may become new creatures and live in God: *Give us your Spirit, Lord.*

That we may experience the forgiveness of our debts: *Give us your Spirit, Lord.*

That we may pray, “Abba, Father:” *Give us your Spirit, Lord.*

That we may welcome every person as a brother or sister: **Give us your Spirit, Lord.**

That we may discover the ultimate meaning of life: *Give us your Spirit, Lord.*

XIII Station

Leader: 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

From the Gospel according to John (19:38-39)

Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (Canticle of the Creatures, 27-31)

Praised be you, my Lord, / through our sister bodily Death, / from whom no one living can escape: / woe to those who die in mortal sin; / blessed are those whom death will find in your most holy will, / for the second death shall do them no harm.

Reflection: Jesus has just died, and already his death begins to bear its first fruits. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who were disciples of Jesus in secret out of fear of revealing themselves, now find the courage to go to Pilate and ask for his body. In doing so, they perform an act of human compassion: taking down a condemned man from the cross and laying him to rest with dignity and reverence.

There should never be bodies left unclaimed or unburied. Mothers, relatives and friends of the condemned should never be forced to abase themselves before authorities in order to recover the battered remains of their loved ones. Even in death, the human body retains its dignity and must not be desecrated, hidden,

destroyed, withheld or denied a proper burial. Not only the body of an honorable individual, but also that of a convicted criminal deserves respect.

O Jesus, you were unjustly arrested, tortured, tried, condemned and put to death, yet your body was returned and reverently laid to rest, grant that in our age, which so often fails to honor the living, we may at least preserve reverence for the dead.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Teach us compassion.*

That we may feel the suffering of prisoners: *Teach us compassion.*

That we may stand in solidarity with political prisoners: *Teach us compassion.*

That we may understand the anguish of the families of hostages: *Teach us compassion.*

That we may mourn those who have died beneath the rubble: *Teach us compassion.*

That we may show respect for all the dead: *Teach us compassion.*

XIV Station

Leader: 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

From the Gospel according to John (19:40-42)

[Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus] took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Reader: From the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi (Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 61-62)
Let every creature in heaven, on earth, in the sea and in the depths, give praise, glory, honor and blessing to him who suffered so much, who has given and will give in the future every good, who alone is good, who alone is almighty, who alone is omnipotent, wonderful, glorious, and who alone is holy, worthy of praise and blessing through endless ages, for he is our power and strength. Amen.

Reflection: It all began in a garden — Eden — that was entrusted to our first parents as both gift and responsibility, yet lost through their failure to trust in God. It all begins anew in a garden, where Jesus was laid to rest and where he rose again: the place where the old creation, frail and subject to death, is transformed into a new creation that shares in the very life of God.

This garden is the threshold through which Jesus descended to the realm of the dead and the gateway to Paradise, which is no longer earthly and passing, but heavenly and everlasting. Here the final act of compassion toward Jesus was carried out; here the last tears were shed over the body of the crucified Christ. And here took place the first encounter with the risen Lord, now living forever — recognized only when he calls us by name or opens our eyes, and never to be held back by our grasp. Here Mary Magdalene received her mission to proclaim that death has been conquered: Jesus of Nazareth has risen; he is the Lord, the living One who dies no more.

Since that hour, through baptism, we too have been buried with Christ in that same garden, sustained by the sure hope that he who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through his Spirit dwelling within us (cf. Rm 8:11). We give you thanks, Lord, for you have bestowed upon us a firm foundation for our hope of eternal life.

Leader: Let us pray, saying:

R. *Come, Lord Jesus.*

To walk with us again in the Garden: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

To dry the tears from our eyes: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

To give us sure hope: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

To roll away the stone that weighs upon our hearts: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

To give us a glimpse of Paradise: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Concluding invocation and blessing- Leader if Priest or Deacon not available

At the conclusion of this Way of the Cross, let us make our own the prayer by which Saint Francis invites us to live our lives as a journey of ever-deepening participation in the communion of love that unites the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, give us miserable ones the grace to do for you alone what we know you want us to do and always to desire what pleases you. Inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, may we be able to follow in the footprints of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and, by your grace alone, may we make our way to you. Amen. (Letter to the Entire Order, 50-52). Let us conclude with the ancient biblical blessing (cf. Num 6:24-26), with which Saint Francis was accustomed to bless the friars and all the people, so much so that it came to be regarded as his own blessing (cf. Blessing for Brother Leo).

Leader: May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May he show His face to you and be merciful to you.

May he turn his countenance to you and give you peace. R: Amen

Priest or Deacon: The Lord be with you.

R: And with your spirit.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

R: Amen.

May he let his face shine upon you and show you his mercy.

R: Amen.

May he turn his countenance toward you and give you his peace.

R: Amen.

And may the blessing of Almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on you and remain with you for ever.

R: Amen.