

**We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.**

Does this sound familiar?

If it does, then you have experienced a form of devotion called The Stations of the Cross.

I grew to appreciate The Stations of the Cross while attending Catholic public school. Every Friday in Lent, from Grades 1-8, I was in Church, re-living the passion of Christ, actively following Jesus on His path of suffering. I found it to be a deeply emotional activity, one in which I felt totally connected to Jesus and His suffering, and one that is still deeply rooted inside of me.

Its origin stems from early Christians journeying to Jerusalem to literally follow in the footsteps of Jesus, retracing His path from Pilate's house to Calvary, the site of His crucifixion. Along this Via Dolorosa or Way of Sorrows, they would pause to pray and to reflect. Eventually, these pilgrims brought this practice back to their home churches.

Many people associate The Stations of the Cross exclusively with the Roman Catholic Church but differing traditions, including the Anglicans and Lutherans, have also made The Stations of the Cross a Lenten practice.

While reading Station to Station by Gary Jansen¹ I learned that in 1991 Pope John Paul II proposed "The *Scriptural* Stations of the Cross" which are based solely on events from the New Testament. Veronica wiping the face of Jesus and Jesus falling three times were replaced by events recorded in the Gospels.

Reading this book gave me a different perspective on Christ's passion. Instead of meditating primarily on Jesus' suffering, The Stations also offer us the opportunity to reflect on, and learn from, how Jesus reacted to His suffering. I would like to share a few of Gary Jansen's ideas with you, using three of The Scriptural Stations.

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prays.

During a time of overwhelming anxiety and fear, realizing great suffering and death are imminent, Jesus reacts by turning to His Father in prayer. He accepts His future with grace, saying in effect, Thy will be done.

What role does prayer play in our lives? In times of sickness and suffering, we often turn to God, but if we turned to God in prayer on a regular basis, we would feel more connected to God. It's not that all our problems would go away, but by focusing our attention on God, our problems would be put in perspective.

¹ Jansen, Gary. *Station to Station An Ignatian Journey through the Stations of the Cross*: Loyola Press, 2017.

Our faith would be nurtured. Like Jesus, we would receive strength and peace to face the future, to accept God's will.

Jesus, betrayed by Judas, is arrested. He is calm.

When Jesus encounters Judas, He calls him friend, not traitor, and calmly tells him to do what he is there to do. He doesn't lash out at Judas either physically or verbally.

How do we respond when we are betrayed by a friend or family member? We might have been lied to, accused of something we didn't do, or unfairly criticized. Betrayal often causes us to feast on negative emotions. We become angry and often retaliate in a hurtful or vengeful way. We need to remember that even though our friends may desert us or disappoint us, God is with us. That relationship that we have nurtured through prayer will help us quiet our negative emotions and feel peace, knowing God is with us at all times.

Jesus is denied by Peter. He accepts others' weaknesses.

Jesus isn't an active part in this Station, but we know He later forgives Peter because He makes him the foundation of the church. In fact, many of the cornerstones of our faith have been flawed individuals, even murderers. Moses killed an Egyptian soldier; David was responsible for Uriah's death; Paul persecuted Christians and stood by while Stephen was stoned to death. Despite their sins, we know that God loved them and forgave them.

How do we respond to the flaws of others? Can we forgive a friend and love them despite their imperfections? Can we love others who seem incapable of loving us in return? Can we forget past hurts and "Let it Go"? Love and forgiveness will bring us not only closer to other people, but also to God.

Thus, Jesus' journey to the cross begins.

Praying you find time to pause and reflect along the way,

Bernadette