

# Walking the Way of the Cross

## Introduction

As shadows fall, we gather, while still yet scattered. On our couches or at tables instead of in pews, not together but neither alone, we recall that profoundest of days when Christ bore the ultimate price for love for humankind. Then as now, fear lurked just outside as disciples took shelter and pondered the days ahead. Then as now, faith was and is the light in our darkness, as we place ourselves and those we love in God's care.

## Opening Prayer

God is with you.

**And also with you**

Will you pray with me?

**Creator God**

**Blessed is Your name**

**Here and everywhere**

**May your vision be realized and your plan fulfilled**

**In this world as in the next.**

**Provide us, we pray, with what this day will demand**

**Mercy when we fall short of our potential**

**And grace when we are disappointed by those we love.**

**Strength in the face of temptation**

**And guidance from darkness into your light.**

Deliver us from every evil and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy, keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ.

**Honor, glory and praise are yours, now and always. Amen.**

## 1) Jesus is Condemned to Death

Matthew 27: 11-26

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You say so.' But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus\* Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus\* Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?'" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.' Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?'" All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood;\* see to it yourselves.' Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

### Reflections

Jesus, we sit in Pilate's chair.

In courtroom, and conference room, and classroom

In our reaction to ideas that challenge us

In our habits that recklessly threaten the common good

When we feel wronged as others act out of selfishness or fear

When we "wash our hands" as injustice befalls those whose cares we deem as far from our own.

Teach us, we pray, to see your face in those whose lives we change

That our words and our actions might bring about the promised realm of peace.

**Holy God**

**Holy and Mighty**

**Holy Immortal One**

**Have mercy upon us**

## 2) Jesus Takes Up His Cross

Matthew 16:24-27

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

'For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.'

### Reflection

Jesus, some days we stand in a field of crosses  
In the waiting room, on the unemployment line, at the grocery  
In the relentless onslaught of the news cycle  
Between the impatience of the young, and the frailties of the old  
As anxiety threatens to consume us  
When we want to snap at those whom we love out of frustration or fatigue  
When we wish it went back to being "someone else's problem".

Remind us, we pray, that you know the crosses of our lives as if they were your own  
And to trust your hands to keep the weight from crushing us.

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

### 3) Jesus Falls the First Time

Isaiah 53:4-7, II

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

#### Reflection

Jesus, what are we to learn from these days?

What portend do we take from this, our exile?

What can the drive-through testing center, the hospital tent, the empty airport, teach us?

When a simple embrace can be deadly

And shortage, isolation and hardship loom long into the distance

What form does the Body of Christ need to assume?

Guide us, we pray, to understand how best to carry your love into places we dare not physically go

That all who work, or watch, or weep this night might know your comfort.

**Holy God**

**Holy and Mighty**

**Holy Immortal One**

**Have mercy upon us**

## 4) Jesus Meets his Afflicted Mother

Lamentations 1:1-4, 10-11

How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!  
How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations!  
She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal.

She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks;  
among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her;  
all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies.

Judah has gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude;  
she lives now among the nations, and finds no resting-place;  
her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress.

The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to the festivals;  
all her gates are desolate, her priests groan;  
her young girls grieve, and her lot is bitter.

All her people groan as they search for bread;  
they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength.  
Look, O Lord, and see how worthless I have become.

Is it nothing to you,\* all you who pass by? Look and see  
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me,  
which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.

### Reflection

Jesus, you taught us that with love comes risk of loss  
Watching a loved one suffer is about the hardest thing to face  
And yet, your mother loved you fiercely, and braved the crowds to see you stagger by.  
She had been warned by the Archangel that this day would come  
And nevertheless, she said, "Be it done to me according to thy word."  
Son of Mary, give us the courage to love despite the cost.

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## 5) The Cross is Laid on Simon of Cyrene

2 Timothy: 8-13

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

### Reflection

Jesus, as a man, your body approached its breaking point  
And a passerby--a stranger, really--was compelled by the soldiers to ease your burden  
Did he argue, or drag his feet, as we do?

Today our sisters and brothers bear new crosses of all sizes  
As work dries up, as supplies run low, as neighbors get desperate,  
as authorities demand we alter the patterns of our lives  
Encourage us to help shoulder the load, knowing it is your effort that we share

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## 6) A Woman Wipes the Face of Jesus

Matthew 25:31-46

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,\* you did it to me." Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

### Reflection

Jesus, our culture asserts that our neighbor looks like us, talks like us, thinks like us.

Flag and symbol, slogan and creed, teach us who is "in" and who is "out".

When crisis strikes, our instincts tell us "we take care of our own"

Thus we are confounded by the Gospel call to share your abundance, to disregard stature or brand,

To sacrifice prestige or even security for love of the stranger

Is it not the fast that we choose, to welcome the poor and comfort the afflicted

To follow the example of volunteers, social workers, and aides

When not even the cross was too great a price to pay for us?

**Holy God**

**Holy and Mighty**

**Holy Immortal One**

**Have mercy upon us**

## 7) Jesus Falls a Second Time

Isaiah 63:9

In all their distress.  
It was no messenger or angel  
but his presence that saved them;  
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;  
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

### Reflection

Jesus, who recognized and cast out the demons of many  
See us now, jonesing for a meeting, detouring past the liquor store, staring at a credit card.  
In anxious times, old habits return, temptations linger, resolve falters  
Left to our own devices, we are easy marks.  
Gentle savior, turn us to you  
Incline us to healthy distractions, trusted mentors, helping others  
And most importantly, remind us of your unconditional love  
Your outstretched hand, ready to lift us back onto trembling feet again.

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## 8) Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

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?”

### Reflection

Jesus, it feels like the days you describe are here.

There is no safety in a loved one’s embrace

No reassurance in a neighbor’s touch

We huddle indoors, often alone, worrying and waiting for the next bad news

Help us learn and heal, even as we worry and grieve

Give us the strength to support one another in the days ahead

Remind us that fasting from contact does not mean fasting from kindness

Let our words and actions in these moments remind the world of you.

**Holy God**

**Holy and Mighty**

**Holy Immortal One**

**Have mercy upon us**

## 9) Jesus Falls a Third Time

Hebrews 4:15-16

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

### Reflection

Jesus, we see our neighbors stumbling around us.  
Many are sick, some seriously.  
Others are afraid, taking selfish actions in their fear.  
Still others are foolish, choosing not to see the impact of their choices.  
Give us the strength to let go of that which we cannot control  
Help us find comfort in new patterns and altered routines  
Give us patience as we all adapt to ever-changing circumstances  
And mostly, help us find serenity in knowing we've done the best we can.  
Save us from the sin of despair.

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## 10) Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

John 19:23-24

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."

### Reflection

Jesus, you allowed yourself to be dehumanized for us  
Reduced to a "social problem" and debased as a warning to others  
Help us to never lose sight of the real lives behind the statistics  
Each as precious to you as the next.  
Never let us grow callous or numb to a pair of frightened eyes  
Remind us they are your own.

V. Will you strive for justice and peace, and uphold the dignity of every human being?

**R. I will, with God's help.**

**Holy God  
Holy and Mighty  
Holy Immortal One  
Have mercy upon us**

## II) Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Luke 23: 33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

### Reflections

Jesus, suffering knows no logic, no justice.

We see kind people endure brutal affliction

While others seemingly face no consequences for their callous actions

From the detention center, the quarantine, the reservation

We recall how you, born without sin, died a criminal's death.

Give us the strength to persevere in a broken world

That one day we, too, may rejoice with you in the company of saints.

**Holy God**

**Holy and Mighty**

**Holy Immortal One**

**Have mercy upon us**

## 12) Jesus Dies on the Cross

John 19:28-30

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." 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.

*We pause for a time in silence*

### Reflection

Jesus, what is there left to say  
to a god who would be humbled before all creation, even unto death, for love of us?  
What offerings could we bring to this crude altar, what sacrifices would compare?  
We stand with empty hands, offering nothing but our fragile flawed selves.

*We pause for a time in silence*

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## 13) The Body of Jesus is Taken Down

John 19:38-40

After these things, 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. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

### Reflection

Jesus, in these days we know too well the fragility of life  
Be it one or a thousand, each soul is precious to you.  
Remind us to treat one another with dignity, no matter the circumstances  
Following Joseph's example, let us respect all those you love.

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## 14) Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

Matthew 27: 59-61

So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

### Reflection

Jesus, your earthly body, having completed its work, was taken from us  
Grief robs us of words, and we turn to silent acts of care  
A delivered meal, flowers, a look, a touch that can speak volumes  
We have faith that you are with us in times of joy and sadness  
Embody us to bring your healing love to all who mourn.

V. Eternal rest grant unto them

**R. And may light perpetual shine upon them**

V. May they rest in peace

**R. May their souls, and the souls of all the faithful departed, by thy mercy, rest in peace.**

Holy God

Holy and Mighty

Holy Immortal One

Have mercy upon us

## Concluding Prayers

Jesus, as darkness fell, your tribe of followers waited, as we wait, for the next chapter to begin.

Turn us now, again, to one another, with grace and compassion  
To ease each other's burden, to care for those whom the world forgets  
For as you willed it, there is no greater love than this, to lay down one's own life  
For the sake of neighbor and friend  
We lift the yoke, today and always, and soldier on in memory of you.

### **Creator God**

**We thank you for the life of Jesus your Son  
Who walked among us, transformed us  
And showed us the pathway to true joy.  
Even as we remember his death  
We celebrate his resurrection,  
And even as we await his return in glory  
We strive to bring about your realm on Earth.  
To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit  
Be glory, honor, and praise, tonight and always. Amen.**

The spirit of the living God be upon us this night.  
**And on our absent sisters and brothers. Amen.**

*We depart in silence*

[Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Prayers & Reflections ©2020 Christian M. Paolino