

Lesson 21: The Way of the Cross

Please click twice to watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoQR30np5us>

Since the earliest centuries of the Church, Christians have made pilgrimages to Jerusalem in order to retrace the steps of Jesus during his suffering and death (the *Via Dolorosa* or “Way of Sorrow”). Around the fifteenth century, Christians began the practice of prayerfully meditating on the Passion of Christ by reproducing that pilgrimage in miniature in what eventually became known as the Stations of the Cross.

Why meditate on Jesus’ suffering? Most people want to avoid suffering, not spend time imagining it! But suffering is a reality that everyone has to deal with in life. In Jesus, God entered into our suffering in order to save us. By walking with Jesus, we join our suffering to his, knowing that he will lead us through it into the new life of the Resurrection.

1. Jesus is condemned to death:

The soldiers brought Jesus before Pontius Pilate, who was the governor of that territory. Pilate, however, did not want to judge him, because it seemed to him that Jesus had done nothing wrong, and so he sent him to King Herod, who instead hated Jesus, because he proclaimed himself Messiah and King, and Herod did not like that there was another King to compete with him. So he teased Jesus, making him cover with a cloak those purple, which was the color with which the sovereigns were dressed, in fact, and then sent him back to Pilate. But he was still undecided, and so he asked the crowd if they preferred to condemn Jesus or the bandit Barabbas to death, and the crowd chose to save Barabbas, even though he was a criminal.

2. Jesus is loaded with the cross:

Jesus was stripped and the Roman soldiers put a heavy wooden cross on his shoulders, forcing him to carry it along the road, towards a mountain that rose just outside the city, Mount Golgotha. That was how those condemned to death were punished.

3. Jesus falls the first time:

Jesus was weak and tired, and he could not support that heavy cross. In addition, the soldiers beat him and he was wounded. At one point he fell under the weight of the cross, but immediately got up, painfully, and resumed his journey.

4. Jesus meets his mother:

As Jesus walked carrying the cross, crowds started to insult him and making fun of him. At one point in the crowd also appeared Mary, the mother of Jesus, who cried desperately to see what was happening.

5. Jesus is helped by Simon the Cyrenian:

Since Jesus was having difficulty carrying the cross, the soldiers forced a man to help him. His name was Simon the Cyrenian, and for a while he helped Jesus carry the cross on his shoulders..

6. Saint Veronica wipes the face of Jesus:

A kind girl, Veronica, saw Jesus suffering so much, and while the soldiers were not looking she approached him and gently wiped his face with a cloth, collecting tears and sweat. Legend has it that the face of Jesus remained impressed on that cloth, as in a photograph.

7. Jesus falls for the second time:

Jesus fell a second time, more and more exhausted, more and more painful, but once again he got up, to move forward, towards his destiny. And all this just for our sakes.

8. Jesus comforts women:

Even though he was suffering so much, even though he was hurt and bleeding and could not take it anymore, Jesus still found the strength to console the women who, seeing him so battered, wept desperately. Even though he was suffering, it was he who strengthened them, encouraged them, put himself aside even in that terrible moment. Because when you love someone, you can forget your pain to make others feel better, even in the darkest moments.

9. Jesus falls for the third time:

Once again Jesus fell, amid the laughter of the crowd, and once again stood up, slowly, with the last remaining forces.

10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes:

Arrived near Golgotha, the soldiers completely stripped Jesus and played a game of dice for his clothes.

11. Jesus is crucified:

Jesus finally arrived at the top of Mount Golgotha. The soldiers made him lie on the cross and nailed his hands and feet to the wood. Jesus, instead of shouting and complaining, said, turning to God the Father: "Father, forgive them because they do not know what they do." And it was true, because those foolish men who laughed seeing his pain had no idea what they were doing, who were killing the Son of God, who came to Earth only for our sake!

12. Jesus dies on the cross:

Exhausted by suffering, Jesus eventually died on the cross. Shortly before, however, he turned again to God the Father, asking him: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Now he was tired, desperate, upset by so much pain, so much ferocity by those who had come to save, and his heart, though big and strong, wavered for a moment. At three o'clock in the afternoon, while Jesus exhaled his last breath, the sky became black and the veil of the temple of Jerusalem tore with a sinister sound. As if the Earth itself was crying for that terrible death.

12. Jesus is taken down from the cross:

When evening came and the crowd was dispersed, a man named Joseph of Arimathea asked Pontius Pilate to take Jesus down from the cross. Pilate gave him permission, and so Joseph lifted Jesus, wrapped him lovingly in a sheet, and took care of his body torn by wounds.

13. Jesus is placed in the tomb:

Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus into a tomb, placed it there and then closed the entrance with a large stone, as was customary.