

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

A Walk Through the Stations of the Cross

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Hi. My name is Mary Lenaburg, and welcome to the Pray More Novenas Lenten Retreat. Today we're going to talk about the Stations of the Cross. We're going to go into a little bit of the history of the Stations, and how you can use it as a personal prayer time to enter more into our Lord's walk of Calvary. But first, we're going to call upon the Holy Spirit for our time together, and I ask you to join me as we say the Come Holy Spirit prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, the Stations of the Cross. I have done them every Lent since I was a small girl in Catholic school. Every Friday at 3 o'clock we would gather in our parish and we would walk the 14 Stations of the Cross. There would be incense and candles, and we would sing the traditional hymn *The Stabat Mater*, or *Mary's Lament*, all from the view of Our Lady, and how she was suffering along with our Lord. We would always begin with those most beautiful words that I think symbolize and represent Lent, this 40-day journey that we're now on: "We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You, because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world." That is always what is said during the traditional Stations of the Cross. The first part, "We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You," and then we kneel and genuflect, "Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world."

So if you're not familiar with the Stations of the Cross, the history of them is quite fascinating actually. They were popularized by the Franciscans in the 13th to 14th centuries. The custom of praying and meditating on the suffering of Christ goes back to the days following the resurrection for the new Christians, who wanted to remain close to our Lord, who wanted to remember everything that had happened. During the Middle Ages it was too dangerous for people to make pilgrimage to those holy places, and so the Pope asked the Franciscans to make some paintings, statues, drawings, some depiction of the 14 Stations of the Cross and place them in their churches, so that you didn't have to make the pilgrimage to the holy sites; you could do the pilgrimage personally within your church. And so they did that, and now you see in every Catholic church there are depictions of the Stations of the Cross.

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Now, what are those 14 Stations? We're going to talk about the traditional Stations of the Cross. There are 2 sort of versions that are commonly used: You have the traditional ones, began by the Franciscans back in the 13th to 14th century, and you have the ones that were established, the scriptural Stations of the Cross, that were established by Pope St. John Paul the Second in 1995, and those are taken directly from scripture. But we're going to concentrate on the traditional ones because those are the ones that I grew up doing, and those are the ones that are our parish still follows to this day.

So first we have Pilate condemns Jesus to die; then we have Jesus accepting His cross; Jesus falls for the first time; Jesus meets His mother, Mary; Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross; then Veronica wipes the face of Jesus; Jesus falls for the second time; Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem; the ninth station is Jesus falls for the third time; then Jesus is stripped of His clothes; He is nailed to the cross; He dies on the cross; He is taken down from the cross; and He is placed in his tomb. Those are the traditional 14 Stations of the Cross.

So how can we, by praying and meditating upon those stations, enter into the suffering of our Lord, Jesus Christ? What does that meditation do for us? Well, praying the Stations of the Cross shows you how to suffer. It is God's instruction manual for suffering. It gives us access to the strength, the endurance, and the hope of the resurrection when we find ourselves and our loved ones in terrible pain. We look to how Jesus entered into suffering during the Stations of the Cross, we look to His Via Dolorosa. That's what gives us hope and strength. Because, you see, Jesus suffered first to show us how to suffer, and to suffer well.

The Stations teach us how to suffer well, but they're not pretty to look at. This is not a pretty, flowery devotion. This is getting down into the nitty gritty of redemptive suffering. This is getting down into the hard of life. There's going to be sweat, there's going to be tears, there's going to be anguish as you walk through these Stations of the Cross, but then there's sweat and tears and anger in our regular life as we suffer. So it's a beautiful opportunity to look to our Lord for that strength and that example of how we are to conduct ourselves during those times in our lives. That we can endure, and forgive, and pray, and surrender, and accept help along the way. Suffering is not meaningless, but it can be transformed and redeemed. That is what the Stations of the Cross show us.

The stations offer us an opportunity to strengthen our souls and our spiritual muscles. We can grow some new muscles, you know, strengthen them. We know that suffering is a reality for all of us. As a Christian, we cannot escape suffering. It's biblical, it's in Acts, I think it's chapter 4:22: ***There will be trials and tribulations on your way to glory.*** If you're a Christian, you're going to suffer.

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

And so we have this beautiful meditative example, this beautiful prayer in the Stations of the Cross to show us how to endure it. We know that when we enter into suffering, we have a choice. We have a choice in how we respond.

So instead of wasting our breath with the “Whys”, how about we enter into the “How.” “How am I going to do this, Lord? How am I going to suffer well? How am I going to get through this time?” Because, you see, the Stations speak to how Jesus responded to His own suffering. We look at how He responded in the Garden of Gethsemane, right. Pilate condemns Him to die, He’s in the Garden of Gethsemane, and what does He do? He prays. He goes to our Lord. He falls for the first time. What does He do? He gets back up. He endures. He meets the women who mourn. What does He do? He encourages them. He says “Glory is coming. Do not mourn for Me. Mourn for those that do not know Me.”

So look to see “What did Jesus do when He was beaten, and mocked, and crucified?” There were tears and blood, but there was also strength and compassion, and sorrow and resilience, and gratitude, love and forgiveness. This is how He responds every time. Think of the scene when Veronica wipes His face. She was terrified. If you remember, if you’ve ever seen *The Passion of the Christ*, there’s this scene where Veronica comes out and she simply shows compassion and mercy, and wipes His face. And He looks at her and He leaves her with an impression on her linen cloth. His gift, the compassionate Lord.

Do you show compassion to a neighbor who is suffering? Will you go and wipe their face? The cross is not only what God can do with our sin, but it’s also a symbol of true sacrifice. Of what it means to lay down our life for another. What does it mean to lay down your life for another? For me, it meant 22 years of being home and caring for my disabled daughter every day, saying no to what I thought was to be my life, and yes to entering into the suffering of my child, and the denial of my own desires for the good of her. That’s what it’s like as a mother, right? We put others in front of ourselves. It shows humility and forbearance.

What does it look like for you to lay down your life for another? Enter into this meditative prayer of the Stations. And if you don’t know exactly what it’s supposed to look like, ask our Lord to show you. We are reminded to trust, because when it looks like there’s no hope, then our greatest hope exists. When it looks like there is no hope, what happens? The temple falls, our Lord dies, and in 3 days we experience the greatest moment of salvation history as He rises from the dead, ensuring for us an opportunity at eternal life with Him. There is always hope, my brothers and sisters. No matter how dark the day is, no matter how hard the suffering is, there is hope in Christ.

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

The Stations of the Cross remind us not to look away from the challenges of life, but to stop and consider and come eye-to-eye with both the worst and the best of ourselves. Remember in the Stations of the Cross Jesus falls 3 times. He falls 3 times. But what does He do each time? He gets back up, and He endures, and He shows strength. There's a moment after He falls the second time where Simon of Cyrene is pulled from the crowd and is ordered to help Him. And he comes along our Lord, and he puts his arm around Him, and he holds the cross, and they cling to it together. And it looks like, from the outside, that Simon of Cyrene is helping Christ, but really it's Jesus helping Simon to know His true worth, His true value. To be bold and courageous enough to be a witness to Christ and the hope of Christ, to step out and proclaim that what is happening to Jesus is wrong. Simon comes in and is now part of the Stations, he's part of Jesus' story forever. Who is it God is asking you to be Simon of Cyrene to? Who is it He has placed in your path to come alongside of? To help them hold their cross and carry it together? Who are you to be Christ to? There's someone in your life right now, in your day-to-day work that keeps coming to your heart. Answer that call. Be Simon of Cyrene.

There are so many different pieces to the Stations of the Cross. You have Pilate, the one who stands in judgment. You have the women of Jerusalem who are mourning, weeping, because they're losing their God. He's going to be murdered. You have Mary, the mother of God, who has never left her Son's side, who is sorrowful and mournful, who bears the mother's mourning heart. You have Veronica, who shows compassion and wipes the face of Christ. You have Simon of Cyrene who walks along beside Him. You have Joseph of Arimathea who assists taking down Jesus from the cross, who was there to help, to offer assistance and charity in a time of need. And then you have Jesus, who is savior of the world.

Who are you in the Stations of the Cross? Will you be the one to judge, like Pilate? Will you mourn with another, like the women of Jerusalem? Will you be the compassionate one to wipe another's face, like Veronica? Will you mourn, like Mary? Will you assist, like Simon of Cyrene? I encourage you to really step into this meditation, to pray with it, to walk with it during this Lent, to really dig in, to put yourself there along the path of the Via Dolorosa, and allow our Lord to show you how to endure. Allow Him to imbue you with strength, and wisdom, and grace, and mercy, so that you might serve Him better. I hope you have a wonderful and fruitful Lent, and I thank you so much for joining me today. God bless you all.