

Way of the Cross – Way of Faith

Introduction

His Holiness Benedict XVI, on October 11, 2011, promulgated a *Year of Faith* that extends from October 11, 2012 to November 24, 2013. The Pope invites us to focus on the fundamental experience of faith: “*Belief in Jesus Christ ... is the way to arrive definitively at salvation*” (*Porta Fidei*, n. 3). Encountering Christ Jesus is a decisive moment. It includes saying “yes” to faith, professing faith, and experiencing faith (n. 6-7). The Holy Father also describes faith as a journey (n. 10-13). In doing so, he is emphasizing the essential elements of Christian initiation and of living faith.

Among the key moments of the Liturgical Year, Lent and Holy Week provide a special opportunity to encounter the source of our communal and personal faith: Jesus, Christ and Lord. In addition to the liturgy itself, there are also devotions to help the Christian community experience and live this journey, recalling through prayer the choices before us. The Way of the Cross is a devotion that unites the life of Jesus with the lives of Christians. It sets before us a catechetical journey, and through prayer challenges us to change our lives.

During the Year of Faith, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, in collaboration with the Commissariat of the Holy Land in Canada, offers clergy and all the faithful this Way of the Cross in order to focus on faith. Our intention is clear: we propose a journey – by steps – on which the disciples of Jesus are challenged by their Master’s experience to encounter him and follow him. This way we also prepare ourselves for those moments of ultimate commitment in life.

In the *Way of the Cross – Way of Faith* we also recall the bonds of communion and solidarity that unite Christian communities in Canada with those in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East, especially the Church in Jerusalem. We join them in responding to the challenges of faith and peace, which Christians live so courageously today in the Holy Land. Recalling the Passion of Jesus is an invitation for us to recall the demands of reconciliation.

Ash Wednesday, February 13, 2013

+ Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton and
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Pastoral Introduction

Way of the Cross – Way of Faith is a pastoral resource to make us more conscious, personally and as a community, of the roots and foundations of the Christian experience. As disciples, we must never forget our first steps in following Christ Jesus: the initial and ongoing conversion, the confession of faith, the baptismal commitment. However, over time, we may find ourselves taking our faith for granted. This is when a chance experience or a new demand in our lives may be all that is needed for us to see the cross – our crosses – in a new light. Yesterday’s faith is never an excuse from setting out once again and embracing Jesus and his Gospel once more.

Way of the Cross – Way of Faith is designed for pastoral use during moments of parish prayer, as well as for groups or gatherings on Good Friday or to be part of public processions or vigils which have been the practice in some cities. It can be repeated throughout the year, whenever worshipers wish to experience the Way of the Cross as based on the challenges of faith. It can also serve as a personal meditation any time.

Each station includes:

- *Two verses from Scripture*, the first describing the event experienced by Jesus, the second proposing the feelings his disciples may have experienced;
- *A brief meditation* that evokes a challenge of faith and, over time, a further step towards conversion;
- *A prayer to Jesus or to the Father* by the community as it comes together and prays in making its journey in faith;
- *A hymn* to provide a transition from one station to the next, and which reminds the community that we can experience in song what it means to be faithful on the journey.

The leaders of this Way of the Cross are invited to make adaptations according to local circumstances and settings. It is intended to be a “working tool”. Once the text has been carefully read and pondered, the leaders are invited to adapt it and present it in a way that will instill renewed awareness and a spirit of prayer among the faithful.

Different voices can be used to lead this Way of the Cross. This can help show how each station has three dimensions: the Word of God, the meditation, and the prayer of those who are assembled.

The hymns chosen should speak about the life of Jesus, what it means to be a disciple, or what faith involves. The hymns that are listed are simply suggestions. Communities are invited to draw from their own repertoire and heritage.

Suggestions for hymns

Most of the hymns suggested here are from the *Catholic Book of Worship III (CBW III), Pew Edition, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000*. Each selection calls attention to the Cross and on the decision to live by faith with Christ and to follow his way. The reference number is provided for those hymns from CBW III.

Beginning of the Stations

Take up Your Cross (353)
When Jesus Comes to Be Baptized (350)
Come and Journey with a Savior (476)
We Walk by Faith (495)
No Greater Love (599)

Between the stations: Choose one or two hymns, using the refrain, one verse, and again the refrain. Another option could be to use acclamations or melodies inspired by Taizé.

Be with Me, Lord (357)
Have Mercy on Me (364, 1-10)
Behold the Wood (379)
The Lord Jesus Christ (436)
Eye Has Not Seen (482, 1-4)
Acclamations for the Stations of the Cross (355/356)
Jesus, Remember Me (380)
O Lord, Hear my Prayer (491)
Salvator Mundi (370) Taizé

Following the dismissal

Great God of Mercy (361)
Jesus, Lord (365)
O Cross of Christ (368)
Tree of Life (373)
The Lord is Now Exalted (377)
When I Behold the Wondrous Cross (382)
O Jesus, Lord, Increase Our Faith (411)
Only This I Want (516)
Lift High the Cross (435)

The service begins in prayerful silence

P:! *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

R:! *Amen.*

Opening Reflection

Dear brothers and sisters,

We have come together to experience the Way of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and the faith journey of our communities. Let us be aware of the gift of faith, the challenges we will encounter, and our need to remain faithful and to persevere in the faith.

Our celebration fosters an awareness of our faith as a community. It was in Jerusalem that Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for us and the multitude. It is in Jerusalem that the first Christian community was born. It was from Jerusalem we received the Gospel and the testimony of the Apostles that allow us today to live our faith.

We keep watch with Christ. We pray for faith and peace in our country and in the land of Jesus: Peace for every society and all people. Peace among the world's religions. Peace among the three faiths that believe in the One God and believe in the God of Abraham. May the Spirit sow peace in our hearts!

Opening hymn

Station 1: Jesus is condemned to death

“So Pilate released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.” (Matthew 27.26)

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” (Matthew 5.11)

Meditation

The verdict has been rendered, unjust, and with no recourse or reversal possible. Nobody is at Jesus’ side to defend him; the Son of man stands alone. The powerful have decided: this trouble-maker will be removed from the face of the earth.

Today in the Middle East, and elsewhere in the world, the innocent are once again condemned. Justice is trampled as men and women are brought down simply for standing up and speaking out. Who hears their voices?

As for us, in our communities and in our way of living, do we also tend to condemn and shun those who think differently? Who threaten our interests? Who appear to step out of line? The time has come for us to stand less with Pilate, and more with Jesus.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we have sentenced you to die on a cross. Our acts of cowardice, our fears and our disowning have had the final word. Have pity on us as you travel this road of suffering. Carry us with you, and lead us to the Father who remains our true justice. Amen.

Station 2: Jesus carries his cross

“So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.” (John 19.17)

“Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘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, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.’” (Mark 8.34-35)

Meditation

As Christians, we all struggle. We each have struggles in our daily life, including in our faith life. For some of us, it is a struggle to believe. For others, it is a struggle with a particular vice. For some, the struggle is to obey God’s will speaking through the Church. No matter the source of these struggles, as disciples this is the reality we must face.

The cross is an invitation to freedom. Jesus, carrying the cross, invites us to join him by carrying our cross. What is our reward? Freedom! Freedom comes when we enter fully into a vibrant, dynamic and life-giving communion with Jesus. Today is an opportunity for us to make a new start, to say “yes” again to Jesus, to decide to take up our cross and follow him. The cross is our source of freedom.

Our unconditional “yes” to the Cross deepens our freedom in Christ.

Prayer:

Jesus, we come to you and give you our “Yes”. We are sorry for all the times we have rejected the Cross. We are sorry for rejecting your invitation to join you. In humility, we ask you to be the centre of our life. Show us how to carry our cross, so we may live your freedom throughout our life. Amen.

Station 3: Jesus falls the first time

“The servant of the Lord has borne our infirmities and carried out our diseases.” (Isaiah 53.4)

“Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26.41)

Meditation

When Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, he experienced fasting and hunger. He was able to thwart the tempter by acknowledging that the true bread is God and his Word.

As disciples of Jesus, there are times when we are led to believe our hunger is appeased by worldly bread alone. But time and time again, disillusionment follows in the wake of such false hopes. How quickly bitterness sets in when, forgetful of God, we seek the easy life in worldly bread alone and invite others to do likewise.

God’s word reveals the true stakes of the moment. It reveals the direction we should take. We are not only to get up after we have fallen, but more importantly, to deepen our faith and keep watch with greater discernment.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, may your presence and your word inspire our vigilance and prayer when the time comes to make choices and be steadfast. Amen.

Station 4: Jesus meets his mother

“This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Luke 2.34-35)

“And looking at those who sat around him, Jesus said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’” (Mark 3.34-35)

Meditation

As Jesus is being led to the *Place of the Skull*, to his death, he catches a glimpse of his mother. As Mary watches the sufferings of her Son, their eyes meet. What thoughts must have flooded their minds? For Mary, surely there were memories of the Angel’s visitation, of Jesus’ birth, and of his young life? Yet in this moment now, the crowd separates mother and child. Although her motherly instinct is to save her child and give comfort, she can only watch.

Does this seem strange, even absurd? No, because his suffering and death have a greater purpose. Jesus suffered, and Mary submitted, because of love – a love which brings forth life even in the face of death. Jesus’ life was poured out for love of you and me.

Prayer

We thank you, Jesus, for enduring such intense suffering. We thank you for meeting your mother in her great anguish, all for love of us. Amen.

Station 5: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross

“As they led Jesus away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.” (Luke 23 26)

“Servants are not greater than their master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.” (John 15.20)

Meditation

On the way to Golgotha, a great number of people followed Jesus, but Simon of Cyrene was not one of them. The Gospels mention that Simon was coming from the country. Possibly he had never heard about Jesus before. The Roman soldiers forced Simon to carry the cross against his will, but he embraced it to help Jesus.

We who call ourselves followers of Jesus must constantly be aware that to follow Jesus is to live according to his commandments. Our love for our neighbours is genuine if we are helping them carry their crosses.

Prayer

Jesus, we are bent under the burdens of our own crosses and may not see the unbearable sufferings of others around us. Give us the courage and strength to be of help to those whose needs are greater than ours. Amen.

Station 6: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

“He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.” (Isaiah 53.2-3)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.” (John 15.1-2)

Meditation

Veronica, by wiping the face of the suffering Christ, shows great courage. Her deed is more than a small gesture; it is an act of solidarity.

To live with Christ is to have courage and wisdom to do the right things every day. Even if the crowd around us thinks differently and humanly speaking it seems risky. We are called to respond courageously now. The opportunity to do what is right may not come again.

Prayer

Jesus, in your great humility you allowed Veronica to wipe your face. Keep our eyes open that we may see your image in the face of every person we meet. Help us live our lives righteously, so that we will not have to hide our faces in your presence. Amen.

Station 7: Jesus falls the second time

“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.” (Isaiah 53.5)

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. . . For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (Matthew 9.12-13)

Meditation

In the desert, Jesus rejected any power that could come through falsehood. He accepted to adore God and his holy will. In many of our trials as Christians, we are seduced by appearances and entrapped by false idols. Our personal wounds, and our wounds as a community, reveal what is in our hearts. Our failures speak eloquently of our bad judgment. Our offences show how entangled we are in snares of our own making.

Our false views about God and humanity are challenged when we remain faithful to Jesus and his teachings. His loving gaze, filled with healing compassion, plants us firmly in true faith. It is never too late to renew our trust and set off again toward the final destination.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, the idols of our time entice us. May we be led to true adoration and worship through your faith in the Father and your trust in his will. Amen.

Station 8: Jesus meets the daughters of Jerusalem

“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 if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?’” (Luke 23.27-28.31)

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” (Matthew 5.7)

Meditation

These daughters of Jerusalem were perhaps friends or even disciples of Jesus. But they did not share Mary’s profound relationship with her Son Jesus, and so they wept. They may also have wept because the Master had healed their families or forgiven their sins and guilt, which had weighed so heavily on them. Now he was to die.

This death would take from them the person they most cherished. They could not accept this. However, more than ever, Jesus now offers them hope. He reveals his divinity in veiled terms. He is the *green wood* which the flame cannot burn, just as death cannot destroy him. His journey is one that means giving his life to others out of love, love for you and me.

Prayer

We thank you, Jesus, for taking this suffering upon yourself, and giving hope to these women and to each of us. All of this for love of us. Amen.

Station 9: Jesus falls the third time

“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.” (Isaiah 53.6)

“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” (Luke 15.7)

Meditation

Jesus unmasked the tempter on the roof-top of the Temple. So we learn to discern the evil in our trials. It is not easy to refuse to manipulate God. We also must learn to avoid or move away those stones on which we are likely to stumble and hurt ourselves. *“Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14.27)*

We are called to be children of God, living as brothers and sisters, humble and simple. We can have faith, and we can change, despite all our contradictions, doubts and obstinacy. All we need do is be faithful and obedient to the Gospel, individually and as a community. This is the gift we are invited to accept, again and again.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, may your absolute trust in the goodness and presence of the Father give us light and courage. Amen.

Station 10: Jesus is stripped of his garments

“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.’” (John 19.23-24)

“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.” (Matthew 25.35-36)

Meditation

After draping a purple cloak over his shoulders, the soldiers take away Jesus’ last visible sign of human dignity. He became like a beast led to the slaughter house; a poor, homeless person who has lost all sense of identity and must beg for recognition.

Today Jesus says to us: I was naked, and you clothed me. I was unrecognizable, and you received me as one of your own. I hungered and thirsted to be part of your community, and you welcomed me among you.

Prayer

Father, make us a community of disciples with generous hearts. Help us, through your Son, to eliminate the illusions and walls that prevent men and women from regaining their true dignity. Amen.

Station 11: Jesus is nailed to the cross

*“And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him.”
(Mark 15.23-24)*

“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3.14-15)

Meditation

Jesus is fastened to the cross, *tied* to this instrument of pain and infamy. Together with so many generations of disciples before us, we try not to see all the suffering. Yet it is in him we can find peace and comfort from all human anguish. In him resides the power to *untie* the chains of death and evil.

In you, the Crucified, we find the strength to confess our sins, the joy of being forgiven, and the strength to pardon those who have done us harm.

Prayer

Father, assist us as we strive to free ourselves from vain pursuits and false attachments. Let your forgiveness descend upon us, so that we may resolutely follow the road of freedom that your Son has opened up for us through his obedience, even to death on the Cross. Amen.

Station 12: Jesus dies on the cross

“It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last.” (Luke 23.44-46)

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15.13)

Meditation

In the desert, Jesus’ adversary was Satan. In his agony and the throes of death, Jesus struggles with God. To Jesus, it seemed he had been locked away and abandoned by the Father. He experienced the silence of God that afflicts so many disciples when they suffer tremendous trials or face the hour of death.

Jesus’ victory is our own. It is the victory of being able to say in one breath: *“My God, why have you forsaken me?”* and *“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”* The disciples learn with Jesus to keep whole and intact the mysterious communion that unites us with the Father. Even when we feel abandoned, we are to hold onto God while also forgiving others as they reveal their inner hearts and the depths of their sin.

Prayer

Father, by receiving the dying breath of your Son, you already bless the offering of our death and our life. Help us to know you in truth and to discover our true selves. Amen.

Station 13: Jesus is removed from the cross

“After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus though a secret one because of his fear of the Jewish authorities, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.” (John 19.38)

“Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” (Luke 9.26)

Meditation

It is painful to imagine ourselves at this moment, watching Jesus’ dead body being removed from the cross. The cross is triumphant. It is the path of our salvation. Why then is Jesus dead?

He died to open up for us the gates of an abundant life, today and for all eternity! We have been made aware how our sins, our deliberate choices against God’s will, lead us to separation and distance from God.

God the Father, in his unconditional love for us, did not leave us without hope. He sent Jesus, his Only Son, into our world as fully human and fully God, so we can experience the freedom of being with Jesus. Jesus’ death brings us freedom. We rob ourselves when we decide not to follow Christ in all of our life.

Prayer

Jesus, we want to know you more. We hear the words that describe our “need” of you, but we are not always sure what they mean. Jesus, show us how we need you. We believe in you, Jesus. We believe in your plan for us. We believe in your love for us. Jesus, help us to know you more, and teach us how to follow you every day. Amen.

Station 14: Jesus is laid in the tomb

“Now there was a garden in the place where Jesus 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 lead Jesus there.” (John 19.41-42)

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12.24)

Meditation

The end of the road: a dark tomb dug into the forgetfulness of the earth. The grain of wheat is dead, buried, hidden from our eyes. What have become of Jesus' promises? *“I am the life,”* he said repeatedly. But where is this life now?

In the Middle East, Christians are dying today because of their faith. Others are going into exile, uprooted from the land of their ancestors. Entire communities are threatened to be lost in the dark night of history. Are these Christians in our thoughts and in our prayers?

In Canada and throughout the world, the Church has experienced suffering and darkness. But is not the Church following in the footsteps of our Master? God is at work in the night of the earth and of our lives; he will make all things new again. Do we believe this?

Prayer

O Lord Jesus, where have you gone, God of the promise? Where do we stand, we who gave you so little thought and support? Now is the hour of darkness, the moment of silence and absence. Lord, keep alive the flame of faith in us, while we stand watch and await the light of your dawn. Amen.

CONCLUDING PRAYER*

(Complete version)

Lord, you speak words of peace to your people, and to all who turn to you in their hearts.

We pray to you for the peoples of the Holy Land and the Middle East.

Help them break down the walls of hostility and division, and build together a world of justice and solidarity.

Lord, you create new heavens and a new earth. To you we entrust the young people of these lands. In their hearts they aspire to a brighter future; strengthen their resolve to be men and women of peace, and heralds of new hope to their peoples.

Father, you make justice spring forth from the earth. We pray for the civil leaders of this region, that they may strive to satisfy their peoples' rightful aspirations and educate the young in the ways of justice and peace.

Inspire them to work generously for the common good. Help them to respect the inalienable dignity of every person, and the fundamental rights which have their origin in the image and likeness of the Creator, and in which each and every human being is made.

(Short version)

Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of the one human family, we pray for the followers of all religions. May they seek your will in prayer and purity of heart; may they adore you and worship your holy name. Lead them to find in you the strength to overcome fear and distrust, to grow in friendship, and to live together in harmony.

Merciful Father, may all believers find the courage to forgive one another, so that the wounds of the past may be healed, and no longer be an excuse for further sufferings in the present. May this happen especially in the Holy Land, the land you have blessed with so many signs of your Providence, and where you revealed yourself as the God of Love.

To the Mother of Jesus, the ever blessed Virgin Mary, we entrust the men and women living in the land where Jesus once lived. Following her example, may they listen to the word of God, and have respect and compassion for others, especially those who differ from them.

May all be inspired to oneness of heart and mind, working for a world that will be a true home for all its peoples!

-Peace to all! *Shalom! Salam!*

R:/ Amen.

*** Pope John Paul II, during his visit to the Golan Heights, Syria, 7 May 2001**

DISMISSAL

Let us stand together and welcome God's peace and blessing:

P:/ May Almighty God bless us, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

R:/ Amen.

Closing hymn