

The Way of the Cross with Survivors

Hosted by Awake, February 2024

The First Station: Jesus Is Condemned to Death

Reflection by Cammy

Jesus, you were brought before the high priest and religious leaders for telling the truth and your Word tells us: "They all condemned you as deserving to die" (Mk 14:64-65). They went on to spit on you, beat you, publicly strip you of your garments, and ultimately crucified you. What incomprehensible injustice! Yet, you chose to enter this suffering and death, so that our suffering and death could be redeemed through your Paschal Mystery. Jesus, you identify with those who have been sexually abused and betrayed by religious leaders in the unjust violation of our bodies and souls. When I cried out to You before the Blessed Sacrament lamenting the mass confusion and rejection I felt after telling the truth to a priest whom I completely trusted, I felt an intense and unbearable physical pain in my heart for a few seconds, and I somehow knew it was not a heart attack, but it was Your heart suffering intimately with mine. I sensed You were saying, "when he did it to you, he did it to Me." It is not only the sexual abuse that injures, but also the response by too many in the Church, that adds crushing insult to the injury. Help me, and all survivors, trust that we will also share in your quickening Resurrection life and healing rays of justice on this earth, as we too, tell the truth and walk through the dark valleys of death, in facing the effects of our injuries and the continual uncovering of dark sexual abuses of so many daughters and sons in your Church.... for You are with us.

For all who have been wounded by abuse in the Catholic Church, let us pray.
Jesus, heal us through your beauty.

The Second Station: Jesus Takes Up His Cross

Reflection by Jennifer

I take a deep breath when I consider the cross of being abused by a Catholic priest that was laid across my shoulders. It is heavy and at times has been crushing, having very nearly buried me. A cross of pain so intense it can still take my breath away at times, of feeling sick at the sight of saints and images I once loved, of not being capable of practicing the faith I would have died for. I never would have imagined that this would one day be mine to take up. Sometimes I just cry and ask why? I think of you, Jesus, taking up your cross heavy with our sins. You prayed in the garden that not Your will be done, but Your Father's. I'm humbled by your absolute obedience and trust. Thank you for taking up your cross for us, Jesus. I will try to remember your beautiful act of love for me when you took up your cross on the days when mine is heaviest.

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The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

Reflection by Linda

Lord Jesus, you have suffered so much already. Your strength has given out as you fall under the weight of this horrible, but salvific cross. You know the cross I carry of being abused as an adult for 19 years, the entrapment, loneliness, the incredible deep shame that I carry yet today. I, too, fall under the weight of this cross but you help me carry it. Your journey to Calvary was one of love where you embraced your cross. Jesus, help me to embrace mine, to accept your love and compassion, and to continue on with hope.

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The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

Reflection by Amy

When looking at art depicting this station, I see the sorrow in Mary, who is also our Mother. I can see the pain and agony in her eyes for her son. Jesus is also making a connection with her to acknowledge her presence. My hope is that in that moment, he found comfort knowing she was there with Him. The Hail Mary prayer was used during my abuse. It took time and much healing to hear and say that prayer again. It also took time to look at any images of our Blessed Mother. As I began to heal, I could sit with her, pray with her and turn to her in times of sorrow and great need. Mary will meet us wherever we are in our healing journey to love and protect us with her unconditional love, just as her Son does.

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The Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

Reflection by Megan

This cross is heavy; I am disfigured and broken beneath it. And now another person has been pulled in to help carry it. I feel relief, but can't yet rest in it. I feel even more exposed, vulnerable as someone else comes close, picks up its weight, sees my changed face, and willingly bears the wounds next to me. Did You feel those things as you allowed Simon to see you so closely and feel the weight in his own arms? Will I experience the relief of help without shame and fear? Can I rest with You a moment as You show me how to receive the help and continue on?

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The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Anonymous Reflection

Your bloodied and battered face, O Lord, reminds me of the wounds I have sustained through the abuse I have suffered: the maltreatment by my abuser, the betrayal by people I thought were my friends, the hierarchy treating me like the perpetrator instead of the victim. But just as you received kindness on the road to Golgotha, I am reminded that there are people on my healing journey offering quiet acts of kindness. In these acts of kindness, I see the image of your face, just as you saw your face upon Veronica's cloth. For these people and their kindness, I am deeply grateful.

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The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time

Reflection by Lisa

As Jesus falls again, I try to imagine His thoughts during this moment. He has already fallen once, and He knows He will still fall again. It must have been so painful to both His body and spirit. Sometimes the painfulness of my healing feels like the way of the cross, and when I fall down it is easy to get discouraged. Experiencing a long day of depression or an unexpected reaction to a situation seems like I have fallen back into old ways that I thought I was past. Jesus, please show me how you found the strength to get back up again. Jesus, please help me get up again. Jesus, I want to believe this way of the cross will become my way of healing.

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The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Reflection by Jessica

I've long been a little fascinated by these women. The women who dared to approach You, dared to look at You and Your suffering full in the face and to offer the only comfort they could - their own presence, their determination to be with You, and their willingness to let You see their suffering. Help us learn to look as courageously at Your suffering now, the suffering of Your body, the Church, and to let Your presence give us comfort.

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The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time

Reflection by Wendy

I have fallen so many times, more times than I can count. As a little kid, I'd hop onto my red banana seat bike, barreling down the street as fast as I could go. I would jump off my bike, catapulting myself into the grass and watching as the bike would continue, riderless, just long enough for me to watch it collapse into a heap on the street. The falls didn't stop when I grew up. I have bodily scars that will forever remind me of some physical event I conquered. Healing happened automatically on the surface of my skin, without me even knowing it. The sexual abuse I experienced at the hands of a priest when I was 17 is a fall I haven't healed so easily from. These wounds unfortunately are not on the surface, they go deep. I didn't plan to hop into this abuse. I tried to jump but some powerful force, unidentifiable at the time, held me down as I watched myself fall repeatedly. How could I stop it? Why am I not able to jump out of this? I long for the healing to happen automatically, without my participation.

Jesus fell many more than three times; of this, I am sure. He was prepared to get up from the three most devastating falls because he, like me, suffered and fell often before that. Jesus falling three times does nothing to make my suffering lighter or more bearable. It simply and profoundly reminds me that we all fall, we all get up, we fall again and eventually we heal - with AND without knowing it. This is resurrection for a survivor like me.

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The Tenth Station: Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

Reflection by Dorothy

Jesus, your public stripping showed that to them, you were nothing. You were despised, ostracized, blamed, shamed and humiliated on your way to the most scandalous of deaths. Your crime? You stood up to power with truth and were a threat to the corruption and lies. Yet, you told the truth anyway. When I exposed the priest who abused me, speaking truth to power, I became nothing to them. I was despised, ostracized, judged and held equally accountable. Like You would have done it all over again, even if I was the only person on earth, I, too, would choose to have my vulnerability exposed publicly and be stripped and ostracized, experiencing shame to bring the light of truth into the darkness of evil. The scandal is reflected by a long history of silence and lack of transparency.

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The Eleventh Station: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Reflection by Anne Marie

I was just a little girl when these evil people did to my body what was done to you on that cross. I still bear the scars outwardly and inwardly. Yours was a mere hours and days. Mine was over and over again for more than six years. The agony of my condemned and crucified body lives on in my brain. Closing my eyes only brings nightmares - unfathomable. I was never given a choice. No one could hear me but the sinister abusers. My voice was choked out; no one could witness or comfort me. Even you had that.

I was again condemned by the "Pilates court" of my time just a year ago. They don't care – it was so long ago, there are really none to comfort me. I am the "silent scream." I am the hatred they spewed into my most private parts that you knit together in the darkness of my mother's womb – even she did not care or comfort me.

Did you think of me when they were nailing you to your cross? Did you think of what would happen to me and tell the Father: "This is for my Anne Marie"? Did you see my fear? Did you hear my cries?

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The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Reflection by Maria

"My God, my God; why have you forsaken me?" I remember crying out a frozen, silent cry of disbelief that this was happening to me, in the very place and with the very person that was supposed to be holy and perfect. I was a child, powerless and alone. My innocence died that day. Hope and faith, for me, remained dead for nearly fifty years. One day, not long ago, I had yet another flashback of helplessly lying underneath my abuser. This time, as I turned my head away from him, my silent cry welling up in me, I saw a different man laying next to me on the ground. My little body was stretched out, as it was that day; His was too, but this man was on a cross. He was looking right at me, his tired eyes fixed on mine. It was then I knew, in the depth of my soul, I had not suffered alone. Jesus was suffering on His cross as I was suffering on mine. He was pinned down and in pain, just as I was. When Jesus came into my brokenness at that moment, laying next to me, I knew in every fiber of my body that He dies on this cross for every broken child, for every silenced voice, for every soul in despair. Jesus dies, that we may live.

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The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

Anonymous Reflection

Jesus, You were lifeless at that moment when others tended to your scarred and severely wounded body. The aftermath of abuse leaves me lifeless sometimes. Even though so many spectators were present during your trial and torture, Jesus, so few came to care for your lifeless body. This, too, is the isolation of abuse.

Who are these people who carefully and gently touch our hearts, and tend to the souls of wounded bodies, minds, and spirits? Surely not the faint of heart! Thank you, Lord, for sending me "a spiritual burial team" who wrap my heart with compassion, take me down from my own cross of trauma and depression, tend to my wounds, and face the aftermath. Touch and heal our bodies, our minds and our souls so that we may join You in that place of perfect peace that You desire for each of us.

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The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

Anonymous Reflection

In a final act of humanity, the body of Jesus is taken to its final resting place. His life has shown us the meaning of his gift of himself for us. A huge stone is placed over the tomb separating his body from the continuing life of every day: "then [Joseph of Arimathea] rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed." (Matthew 27:60). It is an undeniable sign that a life has ended. It is a sobering sign of the permanence of death. As I contemplate this closure on his life, I am reminded that I, too, suffered a death when I was abused. A huge stone of guilt, shame, and anger sealed the tomb holding my previous life of innocence. Let my heart burn within me, as I realize how you had to suffer and die to enter into your glory, for me. You saw a beauty in the cross and embraced it as a sought after treasure. Thank you for this way of the cross. Teach me the lessons contained in my cross. Teach me the lesson of humility that makes me content with who I am, where I am, and what I am. Share with me the fortitude that accompanies even the smallest cross. With your aid I, too, can rise from a tomb of abuse to a life lived for you. Grant me the graces I need to take up your cross and be a servant of your mission.

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The Fifteenth Station: Jesus Is Raised from the Dead

Reflection by Mary

Due to sins committed against my body when I was young, and even more, against my soul, I lived most of my life in the darkness of a tomb, my heart surrounded by stone walls. It was lonely, and I descended into a private hell. When I was tempted toward the ultimate darkness, taking my life myself, I heard a voice say, "The darkness you seek is so dark; the peace you truly desire will not be peace." I worked hard for many years to find light, a way out of my prison. Eventually I surrendered, and Jesus gently and slowly opened the tomb I had built for protection. He reached into my darkness, and lifted me into His light. The Resurrected Christ revealed to me the freedom and grace that come from rising from the dead with Him, above the circumstances of this world; to experience true life, in the light of His love.

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Concluding Prayer

Jesus, beautiful savior, we trust you are with us, even in our darkest moments.
Help us to feel your presence as we walk our own way of the cross,
And bring us to the healing of your resurrection.

In your name we pray,
Amen.