

Sky Valley Chapel Lent Devotional

The Via Dolorosa (The Way of Suffering or The Way of Sorrow) marks what has traditionally been believed to be the route that Jesus took from His condemnation to His burial. Along the way, there are 14 sites or stations which mark where biblical and traditional events may have occurred. Of course, very little of the original first century roads and sites still exist but the location of the events is of less importance than the deeper meaning of the route. Fortunately, we have not been commanded to walk **where** Jesus walked – but we are commanded to walk **as** Jesus walked. This devotional has been developed to highlight those insights that can be gained by contemplating the suffering of Jesus.

“Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.” – 1 John 2:6

Dates for each station have not been included so you can structure a prayer and devotional time that works for your schedule. If beginning on Ash Wednesday, it is recommended that at least one station is done every three days. If the devotional is begun after that, you may want to change how often you complete a station so as to end by Good Friday. Also, do not feel the devotional needs to be rigid. God may guide you to go through several stations in a shorter period and then linger on a station that particularly speaks to your heart so that you can grow closer to God in that material. Follow God’s promptings more than a schedule.

It is recommended that you prepare yourself each time you pray a station. Find a time and place where distractions and interruptions will be avoided or minimal. Be sure to stay focused or consider a solemn playlist that will focus on Christ’s sacrifice and create a meditative backdrop to your experience. There are Scripture readings for each station. It is recommended that you use a physical bible to read these (and the other verses that are included in a station) to avoid being distracted by using your phone or computer to read the passages. If you have difficulty finding any of the passages, the Table of Contents will get you to each book.

For each station, it is recommended that you follow these steps:

- Pray for God’s Holy Spirit to guide you as you open your heart and mind to Him.
- Read the passage and material connected with each station
- Take time to pray at each station. When you have no words to pray, simply sit silently in God’s presence, reflecting on the topic. If your mind tends to wander have a notepad nearby to write down distractions and then return to focusing on God.
- Pray for God’s continued guidance, presence, and blessing as you walk with Him.

Our prayer at the Chapel is that your time with God will be worshipful, reverent, and faith-building as you seek God’s presence during each of these stations.

Station 1 – The Flagellation of Jesus: John 19:1-3

This station remembers when Jesus was scourged, mocked and had the crown of thorns placed on His head. This marked the beginning of Jesus becoming our scapegoat. In Leviticus 16:21-22, we read, *“Aaron is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins – and put them on the goat’s head...The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place.”* Clearly, those surrounding Jesus throughout His Via Dolorosa were not acting in a confessional manner; but their wickedness and rebellion towards the King of the universe were on full display.

Jesus took upon Himself your sins, wickedness, and rebellion. At this station, take time to confess any sins that the Holy Spirit brings to mind. Place them on the thorn-crowned head of Jesus, knowing that through His suffering He has removed your sins from you.

Station 2 – Church of Condemnation: John 19:14b-17

This station represents when Jesus was condemned to death and took up His cross. To be condemned to death through crucifixion was intended to be excruciatingly painful and publicly humiliating. This is why it was not uncommon for the condemned to carry their own cross beam through the streets to the place of crucifixion.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus tells us *“If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”* This verse is not simply saying we should bear the annoying burdens of life with grace. Jesus is saying that we must die to our old, sinful selves each day. While we look forward to the empty tomb that is at the end of the Via Dolorosa, we do not get to resurrection without going through suffering and death. While at this station, ask God to point out places in your life where you still cling to sin and recommit yourself to dying to that sin.

Station 3 – Jesus Falls the First Time: Psalm 22:13-15

This station represents when Jesus fell for the first of three times. While the account of Jesus falling is not recorded anywhere in Scripture, it is not unlikely. Given that Simon will eventually assist in carrying Jesus’ cross, Jesus may have faltered or fallen along the way considering the weight of the cross beam and the beating and flogging He endured.

This is a good time to ponder the totality of what Jesus suffered on that day. When we sin, we often think of faltering and falling in spiritual terms. Jesus faltered and fell but not because He had sinned in any way. Instead, His weakness and suffering are what brings us empowerment and strength through the Holy Spirit. Remember that *“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God.”* – 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Station 4 – Jesus and His Mother: John 19:25

This station represents when Jesus encountered His mother Mary, along with Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. While the reading from John 19 is from later in the passion event, these women followed Jesus throughout His time of suffering – just as they had faithfully followed Him throughout the time of His ministry in the three years prior. While Mary, Jesus’ mother, may not have foreseen the exact circumstances, she was told by Simeon the prophet in Luke 2:35 that she would experience Jesus’ suffering.

For this station, consider suffering you have gone through. Paul tells us that he wanted *“to know Christ, and the power of the resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in death”* (Philippians 3:10). While we often become encumbered focusing on the pain of suffering, instead, we can rejoice even in suffering because we look forward to the day when His glory will be revealed (1 Peter 4:13). Remember that Christ took upon Himself our suffering not so we could avoid it but so we could be victorious in spite of it.

Station 5 – The Assistance of Simon of Cyrene: Mark 15:21

Given the physical strain of flogging, beating, and the weight of the crossbeam – and probably wanting to get the crucifixion over with – the Roman soldiers enlist Simon of Cyrene from the crowd to carry the cross for Jesus to the place of crucifixion.

This station focuses on when Simon of Cyrene was compelled by the Roman soldiers to walk with Jesus. Given the large Jewish population in northern Africa, Simon was likely in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Essentially minding his own business, he is chosen to assist Jesus on His way to Golgotha.

Rarely do we see interruptions to our plans as being a part of God’s plan. However, quite often God redirects our steps to accomplish His will. It would not have been safe for Simon to refuse the Roman soldiers...but how often do we refuse to partner with what God is doing and instead simply go ahead with our own plans. In time, given the mention of this

incident in Mark, Simon probably counted it an honor and privilege to take up Jesus' cross – even though at the time it was not at all what he wanted to do. Consider at this station if there are ways in which God is working in your life that might be upsetting your plans while He accomplishes His.

Station 6 – The Image of Christ: 2 Corinthians 3:16-18

While the lore surrounding this Station comes from medieval times, still, the idea behind it can point to biblical truth. According to the story, Veronica (which means, “true image”) wiped the sweat from Jesus' face at this spot using a silk veil (the *Sudarium Veronica*). In doing so, the image of Jesus' face was imprinted on the veil. While the veracity of this story is difficult to determine, still, there are some biblical parallels.

Jesus, through the incarnation, “*made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*” (Philippians 2:7-8). In other words, Jesus imprinted the image of humanity on Himself in the incarnation. However, through faith in Jesus, we are given the Holy Spirit who transforms us into the image of Christ – we begin to look like Him.

At this station, consider the ways in which the Father, through the Holy Spirit, is transforming you into the image of Jesus, the Son. Praise God for what He has accomplished in your life and recommit yourself to be further transformed into an image-bearer of God.

Station 7 – The Gate of Judgment: Psalm 22:7-8

It is at this point in Jesus' Via Dolorosa that His route would have passed outside the city walls of Jerusalem and where, traditionally, Jesus fell for a second time.

While Jesus likely continued to hear the mocking all around Him as He fell here, He did not stop here. Rather, He continued on to accomplish God's will. Peter - someone who knows the pressures of this world to deny Jesus - said, “*For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people*” (1 Peter 2:15). As you linger in this Station, consider the ways in which you have been like Peter...both in denying Jesus but also in the ways in which God is calling you to stand against those who would mock Jesus. Pray that you would fear God more than fearing people and that He would give you the strength to be like Jesus and stand in the midst of those who would mock God.

Station 8 – Christ the Victor: Luke 23:27-31

At this Station, we remember that Jesus is the victor even when all seems to be lost. Jesus comforts the women that are following Him – the condemned to die comforts those mourning Him! We must remember at this Station that the judgment He has taken on Himself removes the judgment for those who have faith in Him.

Here we want to remember those in our lives who have not trusted in Jesus as their Savior. Take a moment to grieve for those who are still under the judgment of God because they are not in Jesus. Pray that the Holy Spirit would convict them of their sinfulness, of their need for God's righteousness, and of their impending judgment if they reject what the Holy Spirit has made plain to them (John 16:8).

Station 9 – The Third Falling of Jesus: John 4:34

Here we have another traditional event not recorded in Scripture. However, this Station marks the third time that Jesus fell. This station emphasizes how Jesus yielded His physical weakness to the will of the Father. As followers of Jesus, we should expect the same.

It may seem paradoxical that God's strength is shown in weakness. However, this makes sense when we realize that our strength will almost always tempt us away from recognizing and glorifying God's strength. So, like the Apostle Paul, we can say, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). At this Station, consider the ways in which God has used your weakness to promote His glory and strength. Praise Him for giving us the opportunity to promote His glory through our weaknesses.

Station 10 – Jesus our High Priest: John 19:23

This station remembers when Jesus was stripped of His garments. Scripture tells us that the garment that Jesus wore was seamless much like the High Priest's garment (Exodus 28:32). In this way, Jesus represented us as our High Priest.

However, rather than the High Priest laying the sacrifice on the altar, Jesus **IS** the sacrifice. Stripped of His clothing, Jesus is the one who is naked. Yet, He is not the one who is ashamed. Rather, we are the ones who should be ashamed since He clothed Himself in our

sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). At this Station, consider the shame of your sins, how Jesus clothed Himself in that shame, so that we might be clothed in the righteousness of God.

Station 11 – Jesus Crucified: Mark 15:25

So much of Scripture intersects at this Station. It is believed that Jesus was crucified near or at the location that Abraham offered up his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:9). But of course, while Abraham and Isaac were a picture of what would happen between the Father and Son, Abraham could never take the place of the Father and Isaac could never take the place of Jesus. So, in the Genesis account, Isaac is spared.

However, when Jesus is lifted up on the cross, He becomes the One to whom anyone can look to remove the judgment of sin. This is reminiscent of the bronze snake on a pole that Moses created to avert God's judgment on Israel (Numbers 21:6-9), which was a foreshadowing of Jesus on the cross, who would take away the sins of the world (John 3:14-15).

At this Station consider how Jesus has taken upon Himself your sins. Praise God for His great mercy and grace that is so evident in Jesus.

Station 12 – The Death of Jesus: Luke 23:44-46

At this Station, we remember the death of Jesus. This is perhaps one of the great paradoxes of our faith. God – who is Himself life – in the person of Jesus dies. His death brings us life. Death is conquered by death. This was foreshadowed through the Passover lamb, who would be killed and its blood spread on the doorposts of a home (Exodus 12:1-13). Jesus' death secures our victory over sin and death (Hebrews 2:14).

Take time at this Station to thank God for His gracious salvation that is ours through Jesus, our Savior. Thank God that Jesus took on our shame so that we might be restored to Him. Thank God that Jesus took on our guilt so that we might be forgiven. Thank God that Jesus took on our enslavement so that we might be made free. Thank God that Jesus took on our hopeless estate so that we might receive hope.

Station 13 – Standing for Jesus: John 19:38-40

Both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were quite aware of Jesus and His ministry – Nicodemus, of course, even visiting Jesus under the cover of darkness to speak with Him (John 3). Throughout John's Gospel we are presented with people who had an opportunity to either give testimony of Jesus as Lord or to reject Him. Both Joseph and Nicodemus remind us that the road to following Jesus is not always as straight a path as we might imagine. Both of them feared the impact that openly following Jesus was going to have on them. However, by the time they get to the crucifixion of Jesus, they have made the purposeful decision to align themselves with Jesus rather than those who opposed Him.

While you are at this Station, consider how willing you are to proclaim Jesus as Lord with your actions and your voice despite the impact it might have on your influence, vocation, and/or reputation. Are there places where you need to step out of the cover of darkness and align yourself more publicly with Jesus? Pray here that God would give you the courage and boldness to be His ambassador.

Station 14 – The Burial of Jesus: Luke 23:53-56

Given that few if any of the disciples expected the resurrection to happen, this is likely the lowest point in their following Jesus. The burial of Jesus seems like such a finality in these moments. It feels like such a defeat. It feels so hopeless. Yet, despite these feelings, these disciples faithfully cared for Jesus' body. Perhaps even more startling, they did not lose faith, as is evident in their continuing to observe the Sabbath. How often in our following of Jesus do we find ourselves in a similar place? A place where what seemed to have such promise, such excitement, has come crashing down. A place where we look around and wonder where we go from here. In those moments, do we continue to faithfully serve our Savior, or do we give up? Do we continue in the disciplines of our faith, or do we sever our ties to God because our lives are not ending up the way we anticipated?

May this Station be a reminder of our inability to ever fully grasp the magnificent, glorious plan of God. May this Station be a reminder that even when the day seems darkest, that God is at work in and through our lives. May this Station be an encouragement to us to never give in to the temptation to halt in our walk of faith.

Because as you leave this Station, you will be reminded that the risen Savior is no longer in the tomb (Matthew 28:6). "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).