

Appendix 5 — Stations of the Cross

Praying the Stations of the Cross (or “Way of the Cross”) is a popular devotion among Catholics. Praying the stations may be done at any time of the liturgical year, but it is most fitting during Lent, when we focus on the reality of what Jesus did for us and prepare to celebrate his resurrection at Easter. The stations involve a series of prayers and meditations on the suffering and death of Jesus.

The person praying the Stations of the Cross moves, figuratively, through fourteen scenes that depict events in Jesus’ Passion on the Friday of his crucifixion. These fourteen scenes are generally depicted on the walls of Catholic churches in the form of artwork, which may be paintings or various forms of sculpture or simply fourteen crosses. They are often numbered with Roman numerals. You will also encounter Stations of the Cross out-of-doors at retreat centers and sometimes along the driveway or pathway into a shrine.

The minimum, essential thing to properly practice this devotion (when you “do the Stations”), is to (1) name and contemplate the scene at each station, and (2) pray a brief, heartfelt prayer. It is also common but not critical to sing one verse of *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* (“At the Cross Her Station Keeping”) while moving from one station to the next.

The traditional fourteen stations are:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Jesus is condemned to death | 8. Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem |
| 2. Jesus takes up his Cross | 9. Jesus falls the third time |
| 3. Jesus falls the first time | 10. Jesus is stripped of his garments |
| 4. Jesus meets his Mother | 11. Jesus is nailed to the Cross |
| 5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus | 12. Jesus dies on the Cross |
| 6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus | 13. Jesus is removed from the Cross |
| 7. Jesus falls the second time | 14. Jesus is placed in the tomb |

In current times, a fifteenth station is sometimes added to contemplate Jesus’ resurrection as the source of our salvation.

There are many booklets of different prayers available to assist praying each station, with prayers and themes appropriate for a variety of age groups. The stations can be prayed at home or in church. Most Catholics who pray the Stations of the Cross do so as part of a group during Lent when their parish offers this devotion. A person is also welcome to come into the church when no one is there, walk from station to station as appropriate during the devotion, and pray aloud or silently. The spiritual impact of doing so is outstanding—if the mind and heart truly enter the scene that is depicted.

The Stations is a way to travel a spiritual pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and imagine walking the path along which Jesus actually carried his cross. Tradition asserts that the Blessed Virgin used to visit daily the scenes of Christ’s Passion. St. Jerome speaks of the crowds of pilgrims from all countries that used to visit the holy places in his day, around the year 400.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, the Stations of the Cross began to be depicted in artwork on the walls of churches in Europe for those who could not make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and the number of stations for devotion and meditation varied. In some churches more than thirty stations were involved. The particular fourteen stations generally used today have been consistent in Roman Catholic tradition since 1731. Nine of the stations are gospel scenes, and five are from Christian tradition.

Regarding piety and popular devotions, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: “The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church’s sacramental life, such as the Stations of the Cross, the rosary, wearing medals, etc.” (1674)

Vatican Council II, in its *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* says: “Popular devotions of the Christian people, [that] conform to the laws and norms of the Church, are to be highly recommended Such devotions should ... harmonize with the liturgical seasons. They should be in accord with the sacred liturgy, be in some way derived from it, and lead the people to it, since in fact the liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them.” (13)