

The Stations of the Cross

From the writings of Fr William Doyle SJ





About the author

Willie Doyle was born in Dalkey, County Dublin, on March 3, 1873. He entered the Jesuit Novitiate at the age of 18 after reading St. Alphonsus' book "Instructions and Consideration on the Religious State". Soon after his ordination in 1907, his superiors appointed him to the Jesuit mission staff. His fame as preacher, confessor and spiritual director spread far and wide, and he had a special gift to hunt out the most hardened and neglected sinners and to bring them back with him to the church for confession. He was also a pioneer in promoting Eucharistic adoration in parishes; was one of the first priests to advocate retreats for working men and set about the task of establishing a house for this purpose; he was an effective and novel fundraiser for the African missions; he founded the Poor Clare convent in Cork City and wrote several best selling pamphlets on religious vocations.

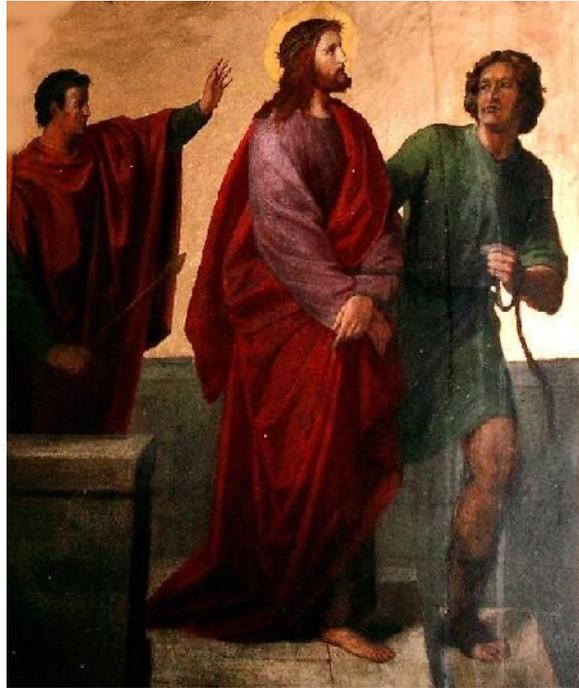
In the midst of such an active apostolate, he maintained an intense interior life and practiced great austerities, offering himself as a victim for the sins of priests. He was also renowned for his good humour and sense of fun, even in the midst of great trials and danger.

His greatest desire was to become a foreign missionary. His wish was answered by his appointment during World War I as chaplain of the 16th Irish Division, serving with 8th Royal Irish Fusiliers, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 6th Royal Irish Rifles and the 7th Royal Irish Rifles. Having fulfilled his priestly duties with outstanding courage for almost two years, he was killed in the Battle of Ypres on August 16, 1917, having run "all day hither and thither over the battlefield like an angel of mercy." This good shepherd truly gave his life for his sheep. Fr Doyle's body was never recovered.

These meditations on the Stations of the Cross are taken from Fr Doyle's writings and originally appeared in the book "A Year's Thoughts: Collected from the Writings of Fr William Doyle SJ", originally edited by Professor Alfred O'Rahilly and bearing an Imprimatur from Daniel Cohalan, Bishop of Cork, 1922. The images are used courtesy of St Raphael's Parish, Surrey, England (www.straphael.org.uk).

The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*



Around the judgement seat are grouped a motley crowd. Men and women of every rank, the high-born Jewish maiden, the rough Samaritan woman; haughty Scribes and proud Pharisees mingle with the common loafer of the great city. Hatred has united them all for one common object; hatred of One Who ever loves them and to their wild fury has only opposed acts of gentle kindness. A mighty scream goes up, a scream of fierce rage and angry fury, such a sound as only could be drawn from the very depths of hell. "Death to Him! Death to the false prophet!". He has spent His life among you doing good - Let Him die! He has healed your sick, given strength to the palsied, sight to your blind - Let Him die! He has raised your dead - Let death be His fate!

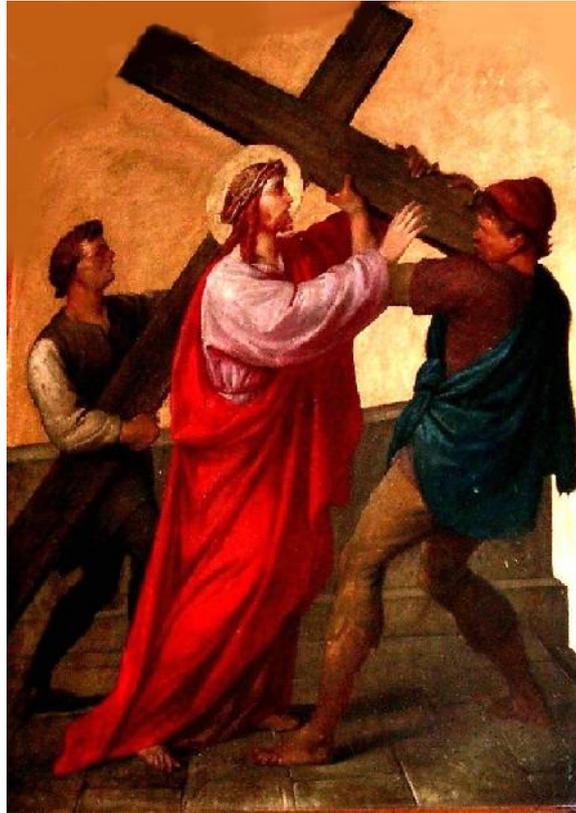
Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

The Second Station: Jesus Takes Up His Cross

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*



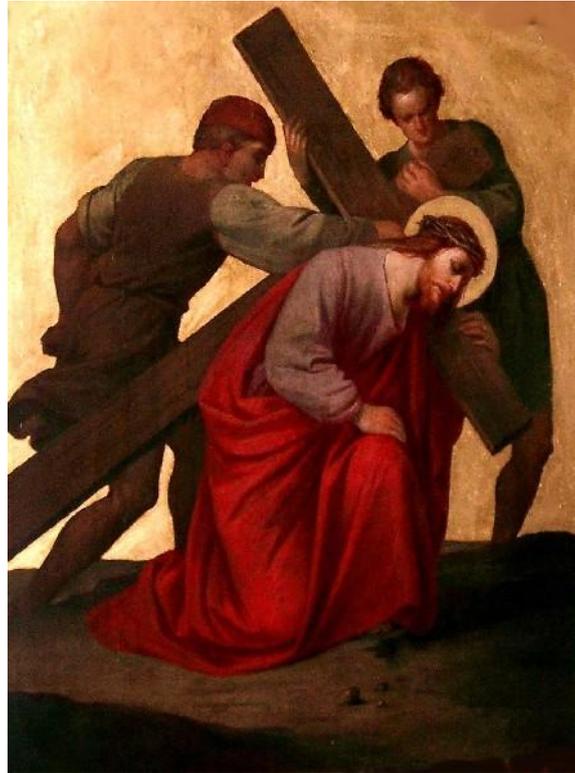
Away from the palace now a sad procession is winding. On the faces of the multitude a fiendish joy is written, they have had their wish and now issue forth to glut their eyes on the dying struggles of the suffering innocent One. Painfully He is toiling up the long narrow street, narrower still from the crowds that line the way; each step is agony, each yard of ground He covers a fresh martyrdom of ever increasing suffering. With a refinement of cruelty His enemies have placed upon His shoulders the heavy, rough beams which will be His last painful resting place.

Cruelly the heavy beam weighs upon His mangled flesh and cuts and chafes a long, raw sore deep to the very bone.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*



Bravely has our Lord borne the galling weight of His cross; bravely has He struggled on, tottering and stumbling, longing for a moment's rest, yearning for a respite however short. But rest He will not, that He may teach us how unfalteringly we must press on to our goal. But nature will have its way. His sight grows dim; His strength fails and with a crash our Saviour lies extended on the ground. Oh! if you have not hearts of stone let Him lie even thus, poor, crushed and broken thing. If you have but one spark of compassion left, one tender feeling of sympathy urge Him not on awhile, so spent, so weary. On a poor maimed brute you have pity - think of the sorrow of Him extended there.

Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Blessed Mother

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*

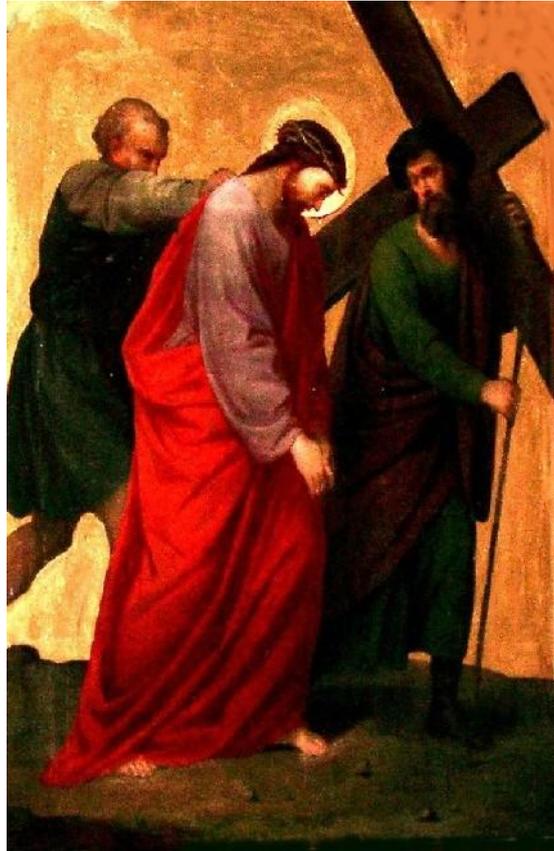


To sensitive souls the pain they cause others is far worse than any sufferings they may endure themselves. They may have much to endure, but to see others in pain causes them deeper grief. Jesus and Mary meet. Alone He could have suffered with joy so that she, His dearest Mother, might have been spared the agony of seeing all He must endure. With one look of pity Jesus reads the anguish of that cruelly lacerated heart; with one long gaze of infinite love and pity Mary sees the depth of her Son's woe, His long hours of torture, His utter weariness, His sorrow, His grief, His anguish. May she not help Him? At least lift for one moment that cross?

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

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

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*

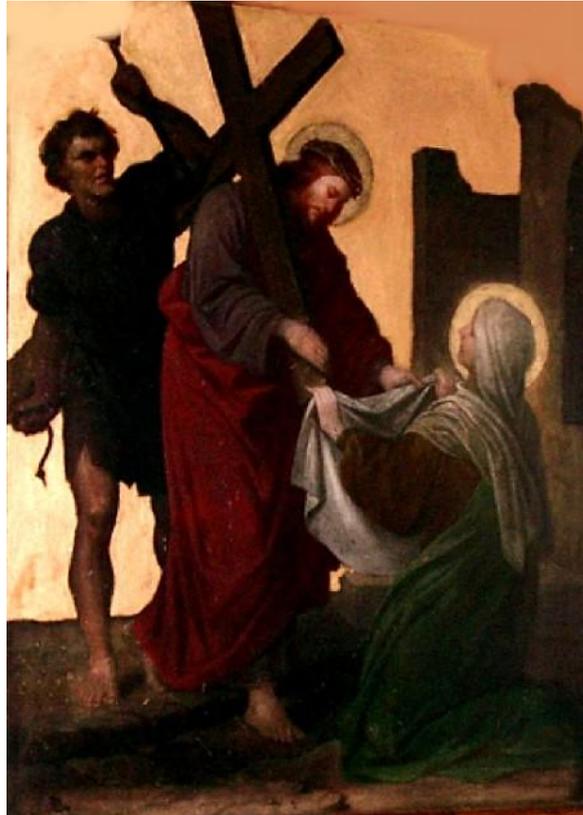


When God lays a cross upon us, some misfortune, some unexpected burden, instead of thanking Him for this precious gift, too often we rebel against His will. We forget that our Saviour never sends a cross alone, but ever sweetens its bitterness, lightens its weight by His all-powerful grace. With reluctance, with unwillingness, Simon bears the cross of His Master. At first his spirit revolted against this injustice, his pride rebelled against this ignominy. But once he accepted with resignation, his soul was filled with heavenly sweetness, he felt not the weight of the heavy beams, he heeded not the jibes of the multitude but pressed on after His Master, proud to be His follower.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*

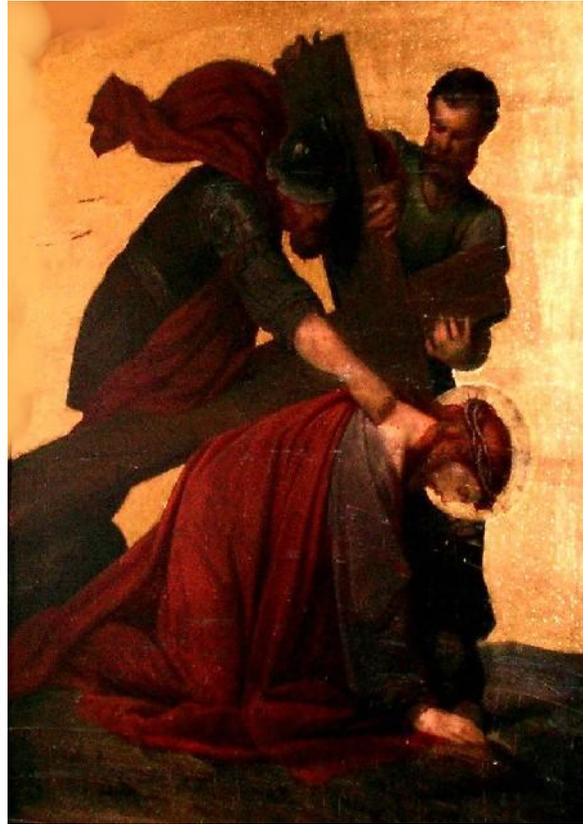


As the sorrowful procession moves slowly on, a woman, who with anxious gaze has watched its approach, steps forward and wipes the sacred face of Jesus. It is a simple action, yet reveals the kindly thoughtfulness of a charitable heart. Gladly would Veronica have done all in her power to lessen the sufferings of the Lord, to ease the dreadful burden which was crushing Him, to show some mark of sympathy and compassion. That little act of love touched the broken Heart of Jesus; He wipes the clotted blood and streaming sweat from His Face, leaving His sacred image stamped on the veil of Veronica; but deeper and more clear cut did He impress on her heart the memory of His passion.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls a Second Time

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*

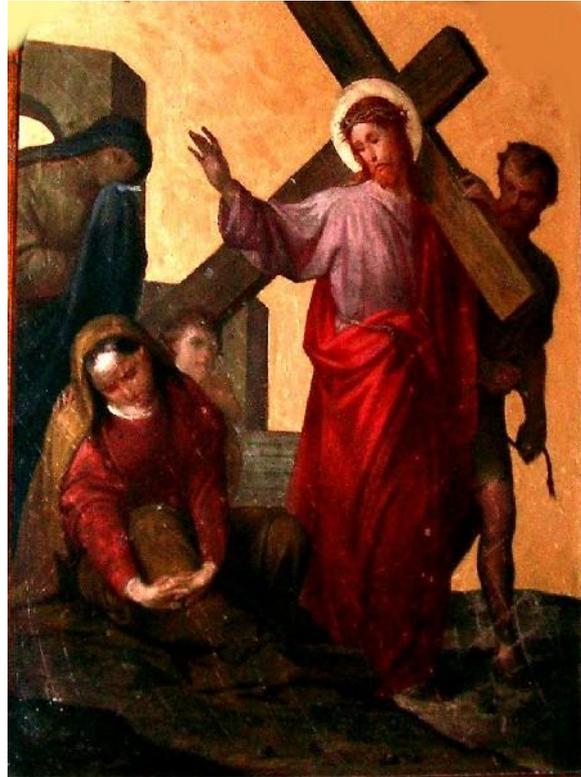


Jesus falls a second time, crushed beneath the weight of His awful sufferings which are fast draining His strength. Exhausted and spent He lies upon the rough-paved ground, a cruel resting place for His bleeding, lacerated body. Vainly He tries to rise, for love impels Him on to the consummation of the sacrifice, but His tottering limbs will not support Him and once again He falls upon the ground. Again the soldiers with fiendish brutality drag Him to His feet with coarse jibes and mocking laughter, with kicks and blows they drive Him on, pulling Him now forward, now back, striving if possible to add to the sufferings of the patient victim.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

The Eighth Station: Jesus Consoles the Women of Jerusalem

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*



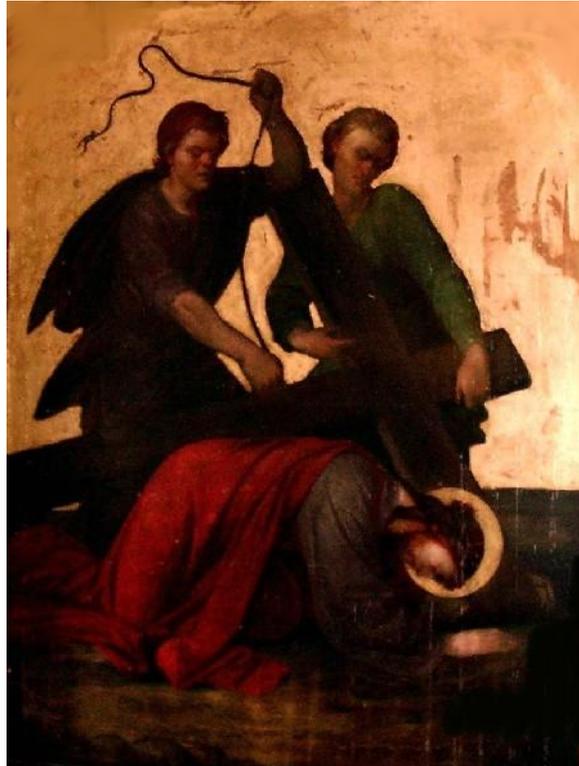
The disciples of Jesus have deserted their Master, and fearful for their own safety, have abandoned Him to His fate. Peter who would die for Him, Matthew who left all to follow Him, are far from Him now and dread to be pointed to as His friends. Yet Jesus is not alone. A few, a faithful few, remain beside Him still: poor, weak women, but strong with the courage of love. The brutal crowd surge round, inflamed with hate and lust for blood; but they offer Him the tribute of a woman's heart - the silent tears of sympathy.

"Weep not for Me," He says, "weep rather for those who unlike these My executioners will one day crucify Me again with full knowledge of what they do."

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*

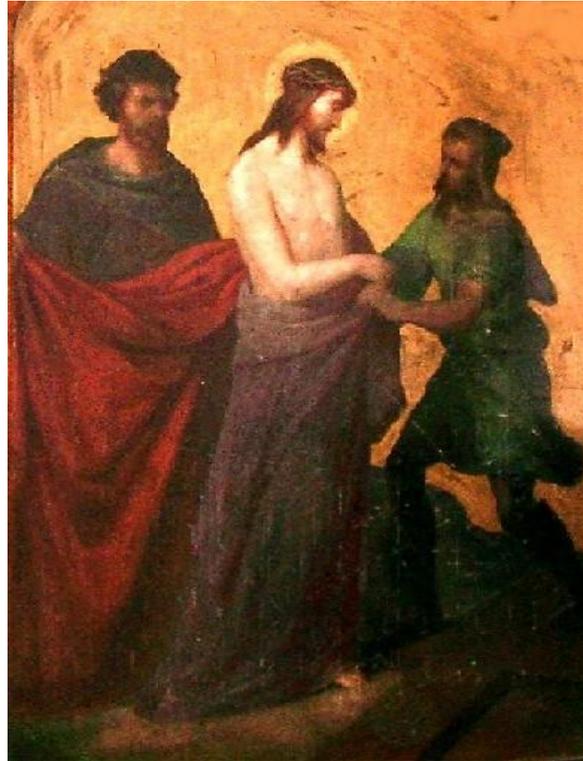


The hill of Calvary is almost reached, the hour of the great sacrifice is at hand. Still the heart of Jesus thirsts for suffering to show His great, His all devouring love for us. Again He falls! With limbs all bruised and broken, with a body all one raw, red, quivering sore, each step He took was agony. But to fall thus helpless on the ragged ground, to be kicked and beaten as He lay with nerveless limbs all paralyzed with pain must have been to His high-strung, delicate frame a thousand-fold martyrdom. The executioners were alarmed. Was death going to rob them of their victim and cheat them of the joy they promised themselves as their victim writhed in the agonies of death?

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*



At last He stands upon the hill of shame to pay the price of our redemption. In the eyes of His Eternal Father, a sinner laden with the crimes of a wicked world; before men, the most abject and abandoned of creatures. A brutal soldier advances. He lays his hand upon the garment of Jesus and roughly tears it from His sacred shoulders. The cloth has sunk deeply into the gaping wounds left by the recent scourging, and driven deeper still by the weight of the cross and the oft-repeated blows. With a horrid, rending sound the wounds are torn open afresh, the sacred blood gushes forth anew and bathes His limbs in its ruddy stream. It is a moment of awful agony.

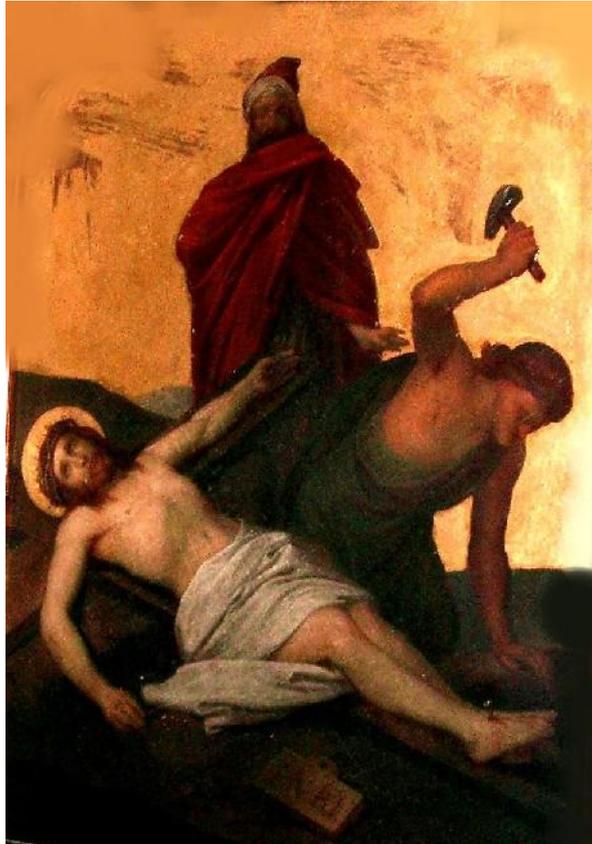
Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

The Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*

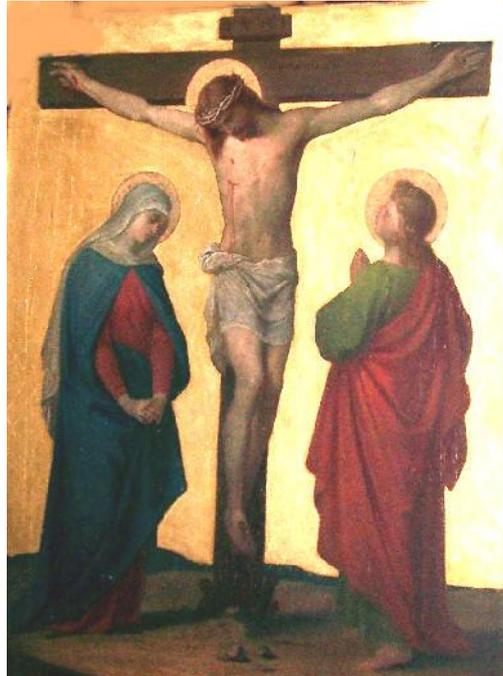


Upon His last resting place Jesus lays Himself down. No soft bed, no easy couch to ease the agony of His aching limbs, but a hard, rough beam must be His place of death. Meekly He extends His arms, those arms ever open to welcome back the repentant sinner, and offers His hands to be pierced as the Prophet had foretold. A long, blunt nail is placed upon the palm: a heavy, dull thud, the crunch of parting flesh and rending muscle, the spouting crimson blood which covers the face and hands of the hardened soldier and Jesus is fastened to the cross. Come, sinner, gaze upon your work for you have nailed Him there! Your sins it was which flung your Saviour down, your sins which drove the iron deep into His sacred flesh.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*



Upon the cross He hangs now, the most abject and despised of all men, the butt for vile jests, a common mark for all to hurl their jibes at. There He hangs, in agony no human lips can tell, no mind conceive, an impostor, a vile hypocrite, a failure. "He came to make Himself a King! See, we have crowned His brow with a royal, sparkling diadem. He sought a kingdom! From that elevated throne let Him look upon the land which will never be His now. He threatened our Scribes with woes and punishments, let Him look to His own fate and if He has that power which some say was His, let Him come down now from the cross and we too shall believe in His word."

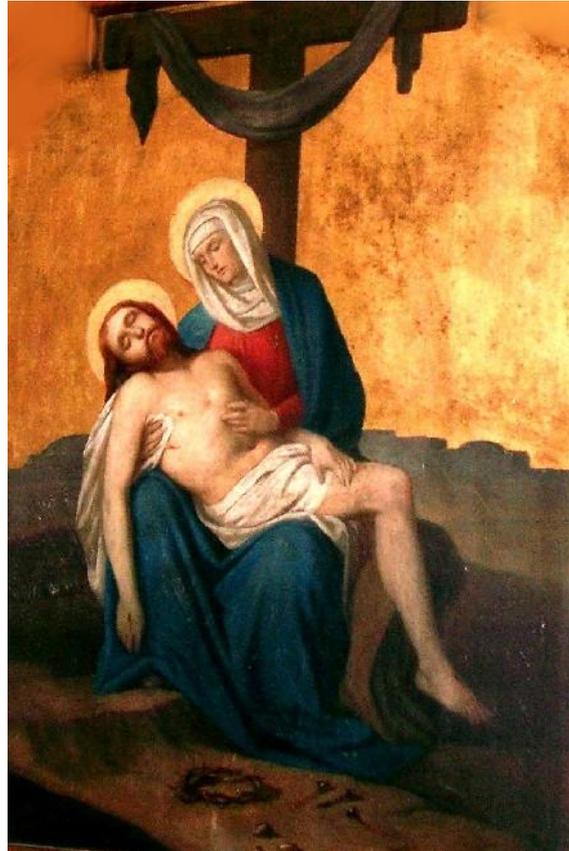
Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus is Laid in the Arms of His Mother

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*

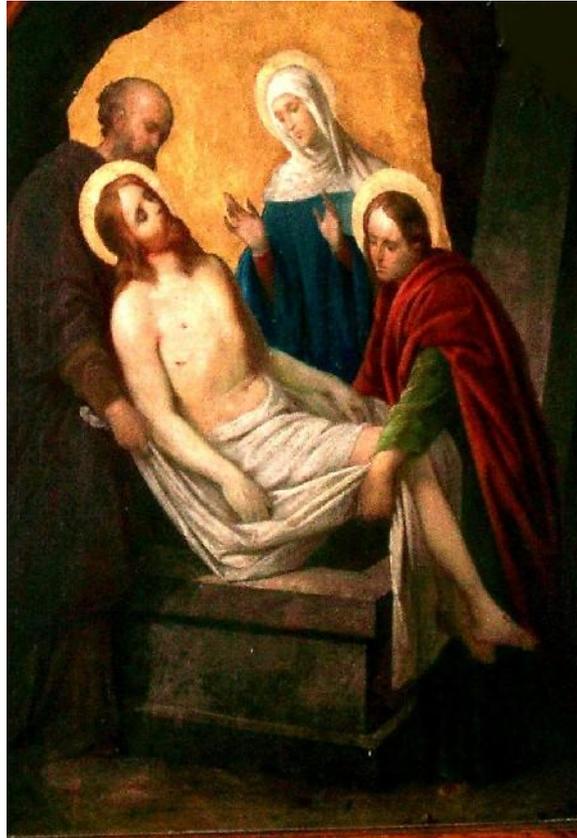


Mary stands at the foot of the cross to receive in her arms the lifeless body of her Son. Once more His head is resting on her bosom as it used to do long years ago when a little child He nestled to His Mother's breast. But now that sacred head is bruised and swollen, stamped with the cruel mark of the mocking diadem; His hair all clotted with the oozing blood, tangled and in disorder. Even she, upon whose heart is stamped every lineament of her Son's dear face, can scarcely recognise His features now. On every line is marked the anguish of long drawn agony, of torture and agonizing pain, of woe, unutterable woe, of sorrow, suffering and abandonment.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you
Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*



The final scene of the awful tragedy is drawing to a close. Reverently the faithful few bear the dead Christ down the hill of shame, that body from which all the care of loving hands cannot remove the marks of the cruel scourge, the rending nails, the lance's gaping thrust. Into the tomb they bear Him, the burial place of a stranger, best suited to Him Who during His life had not where to lay His head. Reverently they lay Him down; one last, fond embrace of His own Mother before they lead her hence, and then in silence and in sorrow they leave Him, their dearest Master, to the watchful care of God's own angels. Sin has done its work! Sin has triumphed, but its very triumph will prove its own undoing.

Our Father...
Hail Mary...
Glory be...