



THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Discovering Mercy
with Saint Longinus



REV. J. FRANCIS SOFIE, JR.



The Way of the Cross

Discovering Mercy with Saint Longinus

By Rev. J. Francis Sofie, Jr.



Nil Obstat: Reverend Msgr. Michael L. Farmer, V.G.

Imprimatur: † Most Reverend Thomas J. Rodi
Archbishop of Mobile
May 11, 2017

ISBN 10: 0-8198-8373-5

ISBN 13: 978-0-8198-8373-5

Cover design by Rosana Usselman

Illustrated by Ancilla Lee, FSP

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

“P” and PAULINE are registered trademarks of the Daughters of St. Paul.

Published by Pauline Books & Media, 50 Saint Pauls Avenue, Boston, MA 02130-3491

Copyright © 2018, J. Francis Sofie, Jr.

Printed in the U.S.A.

www.pauline.org

Pauline Books & Media is the publishing house of the Daughters of St. Paul, an international congregation of women religious serving the Church with the communications media.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

23 22 20 19 18

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Prologue	3
Stations of the Cross	5
Saint Longinus: A Historical Note	37
A Prayer to Saint Longinus	39

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a Way of the Cross from the perspective of Saint Longinus (pronounced *Lon-JAI-nis*). Tradition identifies him as the centurion in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus (see the historical note on page 37 for more information). Each Station recounts the scene as Longinus would have heard and understood it. Of course some details are imaginative, and some Scripture quotations are given even though the Gospels had not yet been written at that time. Some liberty is used with the exact placement of details, since the aim is not so much relaying details in complete chronological order as praying the Stations so as to accompany Jesus in his suffering. As each station unfolds and Jesus' journey to Calvary continues, we can see how Longinus' heart softens as he ponders and tries to understand who Jesus is. As we pray along with him, we can ask for an increase of faith and that those who do not yet know Jesus may come to believe in him too.

This Way of the Cross can be prayed by individuals or with a group. In a group setting, two readers could take part as indicated in the text. The response can be prayed by the group.

PROLOGUE

Most people do not know me by name, but they know me for what I did two thousand years ago. I was a Roman centurion at the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, and I opened his side with my lance. I am Longinus.

I am living proof of the grace of divine mercy that flows from the Cross of the Savior. I began the journey to the Cross of Jesus as a non-believer, but at his Cross divine mercy filled my soul.

At each step of that journey with him, my calloused heart softened, until I fell to my knees as I opened my heart to him, whose heart I opened with a lance. My life was never the same. My life shows that grace can penetrate the hardest of hearts. Never stop praying for those whose hearts seem closed. Grace and mercy can penetrate and transform any heart. It transformed mine.

Join me in a journey with Jesus, who from his Cross floods the world with grace and mercy. Isn't that what the world needs? Isn't that what we ourselves need? Grace and mercy!

Come and let me share with you about the Man who showed me mercy.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS



FIRST STATION



Reader 1: The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death.

Reader 2: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

Response: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Longinus: I was in the courtyard of the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, when I first saw Jesus. I was assigned to what I thought would be just another crucifixion detail. I had participated in so many executions. I had no idea this one would change my life forever.

Dressed in bloodied clothes, Jesus had been beaten severely, more severely than any condemned man I had ever seen. The soldiers had smashed

thorns on his head to resemble a crown (see Jn 19:1–2). Streaked with blood from the thorns, his face had been hit so much that one of his eyes was swollen shut. There he stood, though I wondered how he could stand at all.

Seeing Jesus, Pilate, shouted to the people: “*Ecce Homo!* Behold the Man!” (see Jn 19:5). Pilate wanted to release Jesus, but the crowd demanded his crucifixion. I was bewildered. What had he done that warranted death on a cross? I asked a fellow soldier. He barked that Jesus had claimed to be the King of the Jews.

At that moment Jesus looked at me with compassion, and it was as if I could hear him saying: “Come to me and in me you will find what you have sought your whole life: forgiveness and peace.” [Pause.] Pilate then pronounced the sentence: “Let him be crucified!” (see Lk 23:24).

Reader 1: Let us kneel and pray.

Response: Lord Jesus, in this station you look on me as you once looked on the Roman centurion. You invite me to enter your heart in order to receive the gift of forgiveness and peace. Send your Holy Spirit to strengthen me that I may truly surrender to you my sins and my attachment to sin. I want nothing more than to be wholly yours. Come, Lord Jesus, with your forgiveness and peace. Amen.

SECOND STATION



Reader 1: The Second Station: Jesus accepts his Cross.

Reader 2: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

Response: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Longinus: Lost in thought, I pondered Jesus' gaze; his eyes revealed so much mercy. After a few moments, I remembered my duty: Jesus' crucifixion. I ordered two soldiers to pick up the cross beam. The Cross was heavy, even for the two soldiers. I wondered how Jesus, in his weakened condition, could carry it all the way to Calvary.

As the soldiers approached Jesus with the cross beam, his eyes were fixed on the Cross. Seeing that Jesus' hands were bound together, I instructed a soldier to cut them free. Then Jesus did something I had never witnessed: he actually reached out to receive the Cross, as though he *wanted* it. He not only embraced the Cross, but he also kissed it. Then I ordered the attending soldiers to tie his arms to the cross beam.

Who is this Man? Why did he do this? What does this all mean?

Reader 2: Let us kneel and pray.

Response: O Jesus, in this station, as you embrace your holy Cross, you embrace all those who will be saved by your death and resurrection. You gave your life for me that I may be one with you. Sin took us from your embrace of love, and through your arms outstretched on the Cross, you draw us back to yourself. Lord Jesus, may I never reject your love by deliberate serious sin. May I grow each day in your infinite love and fathomless mercy. Amen.

THIRD STATION



Reader 1: The Third Station: Jesus falls the first time.

Reader 2: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

Response: Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Longinus: It was apparent that Jesus was struggling with each step; he stumbled a few times but regained his footing. I witnessed the determination in his face. Something drove him to complete this journey to Calvary. I had led others to crucifixion who had cursed with each step. But not Jesus. He was as quiet as a lamb. He never opened his mouth in

complaint. From time to time, I heard him saying: “Father, this is for you,” and, “Father, this is for them.” That seemed to give him the strength to keep going.

With his arms tied to the cross beam on his shoulders, Jesus could not stop himself from falling the first time on that rough road. After he fell, he looked up, and I saw his face covered in dirt. The other soldiers laughed at him, but I could not. I heard him saying: “Abba, Father, lift me up; I must continue for the sake of humanity, which needs the grace I alone can merit.” With determination he stood again and continued on to Calvary.

Reader 1: Let us kneel and pray.

Response: My dear Lord, in this station you merit for me the grace of perseverance. You fell on your face, and because of your love for me, you got up again to continue your journey to the Cross. I am humbled by your great love. Have mercy on me and on the whole world. Amen.