



CONTEMPLATING THE
Way of the Cross



A Personal Encounter with Our Crucified Lord

Mary Leonora Wilson, FSP

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Written by Mary Leonora Wilson, FSP



Nihil Obstat: Reverend Thomas W. Buckley, S.T.D., S.S.L.

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Introduction

C*ontemplating the Way of the Cross* is inspired by the rich spiritual heritage of the founder of my religious order, the Daughters of Saint Paul. Blessed James Alberione established the Pauline Family back in the 1900s. We are truly a “family” of religious congregations, secular institutes, and lay cooperators: ten in all—living in the spirit of Saint Paul. Like Saint Ignatius before him, Blessed Alberione recommended that when we pray we place ourselves in the scene of the Gospel we are contemplating.

Praying with the imagination is a wonderful way to contemplate the Gospel stories, especially the life of Christ. Imaginative prayer involves using the gift of our imagination to *experience* the Lord’s presence in the Scriptures by entering into the story; it’s very relational. When we place ourselves in the scene, we imagine that we are there, living the word with all our senses: seeing,

hearing, and pondering all that is happening. Since learning this time-tested method, I have used it while praying the Way of the Cross, and it has reaped great fruits in my spiritual life.

As you pray this Way of the Cross, I invite you to pray it imaginatively. When you pray in this way you need only visualize the Gospel event as if you were there; let it unfold before you and be part of the scene. Use all your senses. Who is there? What is happening? What is the mood? Be aware of the smells, the sounds, the energy, the reactions, and your own feelings. Get involved in the story and let your imagination take you where it will.

Praying imaginatively is not just about remembering how it might have been, or constructing a mental picture, nor is it about historical accuracy. It's about *being there now* and letting God speak to you, stir you, strengthen you, enlighten you, and comfort you. Imaginative prayer is an invitation to the Holy Spirit to bring the Word to life in us at a deeper level, so that it may become always more personal and transforming.

Before you begin to pray the following Stations, spend a few quiet minutes asking the Holy Spirit to sanctify your imagination and to

guide you through the Way of the Cross together with Jesus and Mary. When you begin, bullet points are given to help you set the scene in your imagination. As you read, imagine yourself with Jesus, Mary, and the others who were present. Watch their interactions and be aware of your own reactions. If you are praying the Stations alone, you might feel inspired to replace or add to the reflections or prayers with your own. Follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in you.

The Way of the Cross is a testimonial of Christ's unquantifiable love! May your contemplation of the Passion of Christ open to you the Heart of Christ and intensify your love for him. Many graces await the one who prays with Scripture. Each time I contemplate the Way of the Cross, new treasures of understanding and grace are laid open before me, a deeper awareness of Jesus' immeasurable love, greater love for God and for my brothers and sisters, new intimacies with Jesus, and a more intense resolve to live for him, "who has loved me and given himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). I pray that your own prayer is blessed by the One who calls you friend—the Friend who laid down his own life for you.



*“Come, all you who pass by the way,
look and see
Whether there is any suffering like my
suffering.”*

—LAMENTATIONS 1:12



*Lord Jesus,
let me follow you in life,
embracing the crosses that come my way,
uniting them with your own sorrowful
passion and death.*

*I want to keep my eyes fixed on you,
who suffered for love of me,
atoning for my sins and healing all
my wounds.*

*Strengthen me with your grace in every
difficulty,
and at the end of this earthly sojourn,
in your mercy,
welcome me into eternal bliss. Amen.*



FIRST STATION

Jesus Is Condemned to Death

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R. Because by your holy Cross you have
redeemed the world.

*Though he was harshly treated, he submitted
and opened not his mouth;
Like a lamb led to the slaughter
or a sheep before the shearers,
he was silent and opened not his mouth.
Oppressed and condemned, he was
taken away.*

—ISAIAH 53:7–8

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine
the scene:

- ✦ Jesus stands silently, in my place, before Pilate.
- ✦ He is surrounded by those who wish to condemn him unjustly out of jealousy.
- ✦ Pilate recognizes Jesus' innocence. Nevertheless, he sentences Jesus to be crucified.



My dearest Jesus, you stand in front of Pilate drained of blood. Your body and face are marked by the agony you have just endured—first, in the garden of Gethsemane, then at the mock trials, the gruesome scourging, the cruel crowning with thorns. Only your will keeps you alive right now, your will to drink the chalice completely (see Mt 20:22). Jesus, you remain alive because of your great love for the Father, for us, for me. O, the magnitude of your love! From my place in the crowd I watch what is taking place. Most of the people around me jeer and clamor for your death—the same people who witnessed your miracles and holiness of life. The crowd is fickle. I see the blood dripping from your face and limbs, and my heart feels like it's being torn from my breast! I fall to my knees upon seeing you so reduced and yet still surpassing all of us in dignity, humility, and courage. Pilate declares, "Behold, the man!" (Jn 19:5). A weak man, Pilate tries to please everyone at the cost of righteousness. He judges wrongly and

condemns. Though treated unjustly, you, dear Jesus, are silent. Pilate's unjust condemnation brings to awareness the times I have condemned others without evidence or sufficient reason.

Jesus, you are my example and my strength. Please help me to love you with indomitable love, fidelity, and courage. Replace my pride with humility so that I may never judge or condemn others.



At the cross her station keeping,*
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last.

Holy Mother! pierce me through;
In my heart each wound renew
Of my Savior crucified.

* *Stabat* is Latin for “standing” and here it means to stand by Jesus in his suffering. The word is used in the title of the medieval Latin hymn about the Blessed Mother’s suffering at the crucifixion, *Stabat Mater*. Two stanzas from this hymn are included after each station in this book. —Ed



SECOND STATION

Jesus Takes Up His Cross

V. We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

R. Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

*The LORD laid upon him
the guilt of us all.*

—ISAIAH 53:6

In a moment of prayerful silence, I imagine the scene:

- ✦ Jesus' shoulders are ripped and torn, so brutally scourged.
- ✦ The heavy, rough Cross is laid upon Jesus' wounds.
- ✦ As Jesus cries out in pain, the crowd yells, "Crucify him!"



Jesus, *Rabbouni*, my Teacher and Master, you embrace the cross and let yourself be led meekly, like a lamb to the slaughter. People are shouting insults, throwing stones, and uttering blasphemies. The frenzied cries of “Crucify him!” pierce my soul with anguish. The crowd has become irrational and wild. Fear rises within me, but my eyes focus on you, and I see how calm you are. I counter the cries of the crowd with, “Lamb of God, have mercy on us!” Jesus, you look at everyone around you, including me, with a gaze filled with forgiveness. Then you begin moving forward, carrying the cross. You are totally surrendered, one with the Father. To the very end you teach me how Love behaves. I run to you, desiring to help you bear the weight. “Let me help you, Jesus!” You shake your head, and I understand that you have come for this reason. You desire to drink this bitter chalice to the very last drop for our redemption. Your eyes encourage me to use my strength to help my brothers and sisters with their crosses. I continue to walk with you toward Golgotha in surrender and adoration, my eyes full of tears and my heart renewed in love.

Lord Jesus, in your suffering, as in all of your life, you are my Teacher. Let me never take my eyes off you but learn from you how I should live. Teach me the way of forgiveness and compassion.



Oh, how sad and sore distressed
Was that Mother highly blest
Of the sole-begotten One!

Holy Mother! pierce me through;
In my heart each wound renew
Of my Savior crucified.

