

The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death. Think about the absurdity of this. The infinite, all-powerful, all-good Creator of the world, who has nothing but love for His creatures is put on trial by those creatures and condemned to death. This was the epitome of kangaroo court. It makes us hang our heads in shame and sorrow that our own Father, who desires nothing but the ultimate good for us, who provides for us, is condemned to death. Pilate was savvy enough to know that the whole thing was a farse, that Jesus was handed over out of nothing but pride, envy, and hatred, that there was no reason to condemn Him. He wanted to release our Lord but he was too attached to his worldly position; he was more attached to his personal desires than he was to truth, to justice, to what is right, to his duty; this is what led him to being controlled by fear and thus being part of the biggest, grossest injustice in all of human history.

What should we say? Well, at least it's over with? It is not over with. Our Lord has continued to be put on trial ever since then, especially in our own times. He is tried and condemned every time someone grinds their teeth at His teaching, every time someone rejects His sacraments. Previous articles talked about the so-called Enlightenment and the false beliefs that came out of that period and are now prevalent today. This was perhaps the biggest trial and condemnation of our Lord since Pilate. The widespread atheism of today is the result of putting our Lord on trial and condemning Him. Is this really the way? The way to goodness, fulfillment, and happiness? Jesus continues to experience condemnation in His Mystical Body, the Church. Perhaps you have experienced it, maybe when you have had to stand firm in the face of hatred towards what is right and good and true. In such times, remember Pilate and be strengthened so as to choose to hold firm. As you do, you will come to know our Lord better, what He did for you, and this will deepen your love for Him. Participation in His life – especially His Passion – is a necessary part of forging union with Him.

There is much to think about in this first Station. Look at the Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priest, and scribes who handed Him over. Why? Out of pure arrogance, envy, and self-interest. Take time to allow this to settle in your mind because we are all susceptible to these very same things and have most likely yielded to them at times. Why condemn Jesus? Because He goes against my desires. The atrocity that this rabid insistence on my desires led to, helps to develop a repulsion to these sins. Look again at Pilate and see the effects of worldly attachments, see how they lead us into a fear of losing them and thus control us, even when we know better. Let this atrocious example settle in your mind so as to develop an aversion to these vices.

Finally, what should we say about poor Judas, His own Apostle who betrayed Him? As Bishop Sheen brought out, Judas thought he knew better than our Lord, thought he knew the way. Judas thought in only worldly, pragmatic terms – hey we need the bigshots, the prideful. How often we are tempted in the same way.

The Second Station: Jesus takes up His Cross. Imagine being badly beaten, whipped to within an inch of your life, mocked and ridiculed, having thorns driven into your skull, and then carrying the instrument of your own death to the site of your execution. Is there anything more degrading? Why did He do it? Because like a good Father, He wanted to make atonement for me. He did it for me.

The 3rd Station Jesus falls the first time; the 4th Station, Jesus meets His afflicted Mother, 5th Station Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry His Cross, 6th Station Veronica wipes the face of Jesus. There is much to ponder in each of these individual Stations but consider them first as a whole. What do you see? Jesus falls, there is difficulty. Mary comes. Then what? Help comes. These Stations bring to mind a great gift that our Lord gave us – His own Mother as our Mother. What do we see being illustrated in these Stations? Difficulty comes, Mary comes, help comes. God permitted this act of Simon helping to carry the Cross. One cannot help but think that part of the reason He permitted it was so as to provide some small modicum of relief to His Mother. No one will ever have a deeper participation in the sacrifice of Christ than Mary. She suffered intensely. Perhaps it is that our Lord, knowing this, sought to provide her with some relief and so provoked others to have Simon help carry His cross. Mary comes, help comes.

Mary's suffering during our Lord's Passion also brings to mind, illustrates, real virtue – especially the highest virtue: charity (1. love of God, 2. love of neighbor). Imagine seeing these people act with such cruelty towards

your most beloved, towards someone you love more than yourself. We would be strongly inclined towards ill-will, hard feelings, vengeance, and even hatred of them. Mary, however, loved those who treated her Son so cruelly; while by no means approving what they did, at the same time she only desired what was best for them, their conversion. How often people think they have nothing to bring to Confession. Who among us can claim this kind of virtue? And if we cannot, then we have something for Confession. While it's true that no purely human being can ever match Mary's virtue, her example should help us realize that we have plenty of distance to go to reach the heights of perfection, and thus spur us on towards what is needed to enter Heaven.

Think also about the holy woman, St Veronica. Our Lord is surrounded by mindless, savage brutality. Out of this steps a simple woman with nothing to offer but a cloth for our Lord to wipe His face with. Unlike Pilate, she is not controlled by fear and is thus able to express compassion. Our Lord accepts her small act of kindness and shows His gratitude by leaving His impression on her veil. Do we think He has changed, that He will not do the same for us when we do whatever we can for Him, no matter how small it may seem? Do coming to Stations or paying a visit to Him or getting to Confession or teaching kids the true faith seem like small things, trivial to the point of not even being worthwhile to bother with? Remember the 6th Station.

The 7th and 9th Stations: Jesus falls the 2nd and 3rd times. This article cannot, by any means, do the Stations justice so in the space available, let us consider just one aspect of these 2 Stations together. Our Lord asked one of the mystics of the Church (I *think* it was St Bridget of Sweden, but I don't remember for sure) if she knew why He fell the 2nd and 3rd times. Of course she asked our Lord why and He said that it was because as they continued on the path to Calvary, Simon let more and more of the weight of the Cross fall on Him. This is a teaching, or perhaps we should say a call, that our Lord wants to impart to us. Every trial, tribulation, difficulty, and suffering that we have is an opportunity to experience and "carry" the cross with our Lord, an opportunity to exercise (and thus grow) in virtue. Fix this firmly in mind, otherwise we will fail badly in becoming like Christ. He gives each of us many opportunities to fill the part of Simon of Cyrene.

The 8th Station, Jesus meets the weeping women of Jerusalem. We return here again to almost unimaginable virtue. Imagine yourself in our Lord's position. Most likely we'd be so consumed with our own suffering and perhaps anger that we'd be unable to think of others. But not our Lord; *He consoles them*. We should marvel at this holy forgetfulness of self and aspire to imitate it. Recall our Lord's words: come to Me all you who are burdened and weary and I will give you rest for My burden is light and My yoke is easy. This is how those words are fulfilled, through this holy forgetfulness of self. Taking Stations 7, 8, and 9 together, it is perhaps easier to do what these Stations teach us when we are younger. When we get older we get over-burdened with the responsibilities of life and they begin to command too much of our attention. When that happens, we have lost something we need and the burden becomes heavy. A good remedy to pull out of this loss is our Lord's words: the Spirit gives life, the flesh is of no avail. These words would make a good motto for life.

The 10th and 11th Stations: Jesus is stripped of His garments (10) and Jesus is nailed to the Cross (11). See here, once again, a good and loving Father. See His humiliation, see the extent of His sacrifice, all done for me so that I might live. How do I respond? There are two responses seen at the foot of the Cross. One group (Pharisees and others) actually relish His suffering. It is not even enough for them to see His physical anguish; they also mock Him while He dies. Imagine your own death and what it would be like to have people enjoying it and even mocking you as you die, and the additional pain you would feel because of its effect on your family as they have to watch this ridicule. Is that what I want to be part of? On the other side is our Holy Mother, John the Apostle, and St Mary Magdalene who simply offer themselves to suffer with Him. With whom do I stand? I answer that question with every thought, word, and deed every day of my life. One of the things our Lord said while on the Cross was: I thirst. Only a brute with a dead soul would interpret this only in a bodily way. As He hung upon the Cross, our Lord thirsted for our response of love to His tremendous sacrifice.

Stations 12, 13, and 14. Jesus dies on the Cross. We pause. My God what have I done. He's taken down, laid in the tomb, and the stone rolled into place. There seems to be a terrible finality to it all. But our Lord would once again have mercy on us by rising from the dead.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn