

# Women of the Passion

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Journey to the Cross

**Good Friday Service**  
**St. George's Episcopal Memorial Church**

*Celebrant:* Blessed be our God.

*People:* For ever and ever. Amen.

*Celebrant:* Let us pray.

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

Hymnal #172



## STATION I – JESUS IS CONDEMNED

V: Women are bound in blood with Christ.

R: Jesus bleeds on the cross, blood is the cup of the New Covenant.

### READING

Several of us gather at Pilate's house when we hear Jesus has been taken there. Some nearly faint when Pilate sentences him to be crucified. After they lead him away to be flogged, we settle in to wait.

Early on, there had been some tension between the women of Jerusalem and the Galilean women. But we soon discovered that our shared love for Jesus erased all differences among us. Mary, the woman from Magdala, became my good friend. It is easy to see why Jesus so obviously loves her.

It is equally easy to see why Peter is jealous of her. Peter, like many of the other men, is unused to having to take women into account in any way. None of the men are as comfortable with us women as is Jesus. It was that ease that gave me the courage to approach him that day near Capernaum. I had been bleeding for twelve long years. I had spent all my money on physicians, and still I bled. Because the Law says a bleeding woman is unclean and any who touch her defiled, my family scorned me and I lived all alone at the edge of town.

But I had heard of the wonders Jesus worked. He was in great demand, so I thought, "I won't bother him. If I but touch his clothes, I will be well again."

So I came up behind him in the crush of people and touched the fringe of his garment. I knew instantly something had changed. My body felt lighter. The Jesus exclaimed, "Who touched me?" Peter, the man with him, said, "The crowd is pressing upon you. What do you mean, 'Who touched me?'"

But Jesus turned and scanned the crowd, insisting, "I felt power go out from me. I want to know who touched me."

I was terrified. I hadn't meant to offend. Trembling, I came forward and threw myself at his feet. Was I to bleed yet again? But his hand was gentle on mine as he helped me up. He said, "My daughter, your faith was the source of your healing. Be free, and go in peace."

I was astonished. He had touched me, and had not withdrawn to cleanse himself of the taint of me. I was filled with a powerful sense of joy. I resolved to follow him wherever I could. I've since tried to model myself after the Magdalene. She warned me people would accuse us of being immoral because we traveled and studied with Jesus. The injustice of it often made me angry but she just ignored them all with a serene confidence.

But now, when she heard the news of Jesus' death sentence, she went white to the lips. The grief in her face was terrible to behold. And I am ashamed to say that the first thought in my head was, "What will happen to us women when he is not here?"

But then I thought, "No matter what, I am bound in blood with this man. He made holy the blood that flows through me and holy is the blood that will be spilled here today."



## STATION II – JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS

V: You free all daughters of Sarah bent from the weight of sin.

R: As you bend under the weight of the cross.

### READING

I can't believe they really are going to kill this innocent man. Why, he changed my life. He cured me! After eighteen years of being bent almost double, eighteen years of terrible pain, eighteen years of being told it was because I was possessed of demons, eighteen years of being alternately shunned and preached at, he set me free.

It was the Sabbath and I had gone to the synagogue to pray. It was usually my only outing of the week, since I rarely risked the scorn of the streets. I noticed him teaching when I entered, and tried to listen without being noticed. To my dismay, he called to me.

I saw the other men look at me, and I shrank from their disgust. But he smiled and beckoned, and my fears dropped away. As I walked up to him, the other men drew back. But he didn't shrink away. Instead, he stood up and, to my surprise, put his hands on me.

It felt so good! No human being had touched me except to shove me aside or abuse me since I was eleven years old. That was when my back had begun to curve. By the time I was twelve, I was as bent as an old woman. Now, in my 29<sup>th</sup> year, a man was touching me with kindness.

If he had done nothing more than that, it would have been enough. But he didn't stop there. He said, "You are rid of your infirmity."

As he spoke, a warmth flowed from his hands through my shoulders and down my spine. The pain vanished. Then he put his hand under my chin and lifted my head. As he did so, I stood up straight!

Alleluias rang from my mouth as I looked skyward for the first time in years. I raised my arms over my head and praised God, for I knew whence had come this blessing.

But then a synagogue official came bustling up, and he was very angry.

“There are six days each week for manual labor. Come and be healed on one of those days. Do not come on the Sabbath,” he announced to the crowd that had gathered. And then he turned wrathfully to Jesus. I was horrified. I wanted no harm to come to this man on my account.

But Jesus just looked at him calmly, and said, “How hypocritical! Do you not untie your donkey or your ox and take it for water on the Sabbath? This woman, this daughter of Sarah, has been held in bondage for eighteen years. Why not release her on the Sabbath?”

And the officials were confused. But the people and I were not. We were filled with joy at his wonders and his words. I tried to kneel before him, but he stopped me, holding my hand. What we said then remains between the two of us.

But I will tell you this. I followed this man to Jerusalem, and I know, as I watch him take up his cross, that I will follow him anywhere, even to Calvary, and beyond.



### **STATION 3 – JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME**

V: You have heard our cries.

R: Even as you fall beneath the weight of our sins, you have mercy on us.

#### **READING**

When the women begin keening, my heart is in my throat. This is dangerous! The Romans won't appreciate our public grief over the death of a man they have named a criminal. They might arrest all of us too!

But these fears only last a second. Then my heart fills with admiration for the courage of the other women. I, too, lift my voice in protest and lament and walk with them behind the soldiers who surround Jesus and his terrible burden.

The men have all disappeared, but we women will not leave his mother, and she will not leave him. I can't blame her. I, too, am a mother. I followed him from southern Phoenicia and I, too, will follow him to the death.

I am a Greek, by birth a Syrophenician, by religion a Canaanite. The Jews call me a pagan. I am a foreigner in their culture, outside their God's covenant, and thus despised. But unlike many of them, I knew from the second I saw him that this was a very special man. He had come quietly to the region of Tyre and Sidon, not wanting anyone to know he was there. But I recognized him as a holy man, and in my great need, threw myself at his feet.

"Have mercy on me and my daughter, for she is possessed by a devil," I pleaded.

Jesus didn't say anything. But I wouldn't give up. My daughter's life was at stake. I would have stayed there until I died to get help for her. Finally some of the men with him said, "Give her what she wants. She is shouting at us. She will never go away."

Jesus turned to me and said, "Is it fair to take the children's food and throw it to their dogs?"

"Yes," I said immediately. "for the dogs eat the scraps from the family table."

Jesus smiled at me.

"Great is your faith. Be it done as you desire."

I leapt up and ran home. When I rushed into my daughter's room, she was sitting up in bed, smiling. The demon was gone! In joy, I praised God.

Now as my daughter and I walk along behind him, our grief rings out against the walls of Jerusalem. My daughter gasps as we see him fall. His mother is standing at a turn in the street and her hands reach out, just as they must have done countless times when he was an infant learning to walk. He pushes himself up and staggers on. Would that I could give my life to spare his!





## STATION IV – JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER

V: Body of my body, blood of my blood.

R: The blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation.

### READING

I am standing next to his mother when he sees her. He had risen from his fall, and walked only a few steps when he raised his head, as if she had called out to him, though she made no sound. I think my heart will break at the look of gentle compassion that appears on his face at the sight of her. She reaches out her hand and touches his cheek, cupping it with that tender gesture of mothers from the beginning of time. Their eyes, so alike, meet and hold. Neither of them weeps, although Mary's entire body looks broken with grief.

The soldiers are uneasy, looking away. None of them are very old, and I suspect they can't help but think of their own mothers. Finally one of them puts his hand on Jesus' back, almost gently, and says in a gruff voice, "Keep moving."

His mother's hands fall back to her side, wet with blood from his face. She looks after him, then slowly puts the reddened hand to her face.



## STATION V – THE CROSS IS LAID ON SIMON OF CYRENE

V: Have mercy on me, for I am heavily burdened.

R: Let all my fear lose itself to your will.

### READING

I am standing with my husband, Simon of Cyrene, wondering what all the noise is about. We have just come into the city and have barely caught our breath, when suddenly a Roman soldier hails my husband.

“You!” the soldier says. “Come here.”

I am shocked. We are not common people. Simon is an important man in our community in Ethiopia. We have come to worship at the Temple as our people have from the time of Solomon. Why, we list one of Solomon’s wives among our ancestors! And this Roman soldier treats my husband like a slave.

They grab Simon and pull him into the street. As they do so, I see this poor wretch bent under the weight of a crossbeam. The soldiers order Simon to take the beam from him. I am afraid and very angry – how dare they thrust Simon into this mess! Women are crying and carrying on, as if this is an important man, not some common criminal. Simon is the important man, not this other man. We are not part of this!

But Simon, who can’t bear to see a donkey suffer, gently takes the beam from the poor man, saying as he does so, “I will bear your burden for a short while, sire.”

The bloody man lifts his head, and nods.

“Sire? Why on earth would Simon call this criminal ‘Sire?’”

But then I see Simon's face, and I know something important is happening. Simon is a proud man, not given to honoring people without cause. And here he is bowing to this bloody wreck of a man as he takes the beam from him.

I open my mouth to protest, but Simon, who knows me all too well, looks up and says, "All is well. Come follow us."

Marveling, I do so, wondering how all this will end.



## STATION VI – A WOMAN WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

V: Woman and man, all are made in the image of God.

R: Show us the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

### READING

I wait for him by my door. I know he will have to pass by here on the way out to Golgotha. They all do, all the ones condemned to be crucified. And so I wait, hoping I can give him some tiny bit of comfort.

I know they have beaten him. In some awful way, it is Roman kindness, for the weaker he is when they hang him on that cross, the shorter his ordeal will be. I hear the keening of the women long before I see them. The Roman soldiers turn the corner at the bottom of my street and there he is. A richly dressed black has been pressed into carrying the crossbeam – probably because the soldiers are afraid Jesus will die before they can kill him!

Jesus is already staggering on the steps of the narrow street, and my heart breaks at the sight. As he slowly nears my door, I see in horror that they have put a crown of thorns onto his head – some of the soldier's idea of fun. The thorns have pierced his scalp and blood courses down his face, nearly blinding him. As the soldiers push past, I remove my veil and shove myself towards him

To my surprise the soldiers let me through. I bend beside him and put my veil to his face to wipe away the blood. He puts his hands over mine, holding the soft cloth to his face for a few seconds. Then he hands it back to me with a sigh and a small smile. A soldier grabs my shoulder and sets me aside, and Jesus continues on his slow painful way up the sloping street.

Tears begin to run down my face and I lift my veil to wipe them away. As I look at my veil, I nearly scream, for there looking back me is the true image of his face. I hold it to my heart and weep.



## STATION VII – JESUS FALLS A SECOND TIME

V: From the little she had, she has put in everything.

R: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

### READING

Even with the help of the one called Simon, he soon falls again. As he does, a great groan goes up from the women, and our keening grows louder.

How different he is this day from the day I first encountered him in the Temple. I had gone to give my tiny mite into the Temple treasury, hoping it could help some other person in need. As I turned from doing this, I found him smiling at me.

“Look,” he called out to the men with him. “This poor widow’s gift is worth far more than all the other contributions, for they gave of their abundance from the money they had left over, while she gave all the money she had from the little she has to live on.”

At first I was embarrassed to have all these men looking at me. But then I realized he was not making fun of me but instead was doing me an honor. I had heard about this man’s teachings, but I had been too shy to get near enough to hear him. I had never had time to study very much, and I was afraid I was too stupid to understand this great man’s teachings. But as I heard more that day, I realized that many of his teachings were like this – simple stories of everyday people used to illustrate important points. So I stayed to listen, and listening, discovered new depths in myself.

That’s why, when he fell again, I looked away, unable to bear the sight of his humiliation.

This man changed my life.

The least I can do is be with him as they take his.



## STATION VIII – JESUS ADDRESSES THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

V: All who pass by, look and see: is there any sorrow like my sorrow?

R: Daughters do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

### READING

When he painfully pulls himself up from where he has fallen, he sees our grieving group of women. His look causes us to fall silent. Then he speaks, his voice soft with pity.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are coming when people will say, “Blessed are those who are childless, blessed are the wombs that have never given birth, and the breasts that have never nursed.”

The words fall among us like burning brands. The crowded narrow street grows quiet as he speaks, and his voice seems to pick up volume as it bounces off the stone walls.

“Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us.’ And to the hills, ‘Cover us up!’ For if this is what they do when the wood is green, what will happen when the wood is dry?”

“What does it mean?” a woman whispers.

And I think, he is the green wood, still alive and with us, and these fools are killing him. If we can do this to this Godly man, what hope is there for us when we can no longer see him, or touch him, or hear him? And visions of women burning, of girl children going up in smoke, fill my horrified eyes and I fall to my knees, moaning.

Around me, the women move on, the sound of their grief washing up like waves against the uncaring walls of the city.



## STATION IX – JESUS FALLS A THIRD TIME

V: Our bond with you strengthens our bond with one another.

R: You never abandon us to walk alone.

### READING

When they arrested Jesus, the men urged us all to go into hiding, fearing the Romans would do a general sweep of the area in an effort to catch all of us who followed him.

But his mother refused to leave. Hearing this, I told my husband Cleopas to go with the others. I would stay. Cleopas protested, fearing for me. But I told him that I would be safe, for the Romans would never suspect mere women of being dangerous. We agreed to meet later, in the upper room of the house where we had shared Passover Seder with Jesus the day before.

As I watched Cleopas leave I realized it was the first time we had been apart in years, certainly since we had decided to follow Jesus. For the past year, we had traveled with him as he taught, watched over him as he slept, marveled at the miracles he performed, and wondered at the things he told us. Most of all, we loved him. Our bond with one another had been strengthened by our bond to him.

It is that bond that endangers Cleopas. He has been seen with him too often. But my womanhood renders me invisible to the Romans, to many of my own people as well. Women are simply part of the background, regarded by Jewish and Roman authorities alike as non-persons, unimportant, negligible. We “Marys” often had talked of this amongst ourselves, and reminded one another that our namesake, the prophet Miriam, had also been thrust into the background.

So we know we stay here in relative safety, as long as we don't create too much of an uproar, or irritate powerful men. But we are all used to living with such strictures. They are part of being a woman, like water is part of the sea.

That's why, as we walk through the streets behind Jesus and the soldiers, our lament rising above the heads of the shoppers and the merchants in their doorways, one part of my brain is busy gauging the reactions of the Romans. Are they getting angry? Are we pushing our luck too far? Deep as my grief is, for his mother's sake I know I have to stay alert for any change in their mood that might endanger her.

Each time he falls, my heart breaks anew. When he came face to face with his stricken mother, I felt as if I were choking on wormwood and gall. And now, just as we approach the city gate, he falls yet again. My heart lurches, for he does not move. Is he dead? Is it over? Hope and grief was in my soul. But then one of the soldiers grabs a bucket from an old woman mopping a shop, and pours the dirty water over him.

As he stirs, his mother groans. It isn't over yet. He rises and walks unsteadily out through the gate. We follow, walking towards Golgotha.





## STATION X – JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

V: May our children sit beside you, and drink of your cup?

R: Do you know what you are asking?

### READING

As we walk through the city gate, and onto that dreary hillside, I think I might faint. This cannot be happening!

When he fell that third time, I thought, "It is over. He is dead." And for a second, a mad hope possessed me. Maybe the suffering could end like this, instead of on that terrible travesty of a tree.

My two sons, James and John, had gone away with the other men, but I suspect John will soon return. He will never let Jesus die alone, even if it means risking his own arrest. Both my boys have been with Jesus from the time he called to them while they were mending nets with my husband Zebedee in our family fishing boat on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

He is their cousin, but we all knew he was something very special, meant for bigger things than carpentry or catching fish. When I began to understand just how big, I went to him and requested a favor.

"What do you want?" he had asked me.

"That these sons of mine may sit beside you, one your right hand and one on your left, when you are in your kingdom."

"You do not know what you are asking," he said gently. And turning to my sons, he asked, "Can you drink the cup that I will drink?"

And they replied, "Yes, we can."

“So be it,” he said. “You shall drink my cup, but positions of power are not mine to give. They are awarded by God our Creator.”

After that, Jesus teased my sons, calling them the “Sons of Thunder.” Some suppose he’s referring to my husband, but our whole family knows he’s referring to me, Salome. I *am* ambitious for my boys, but I also know that wherever this man goes, I want my sons to go. For good or ill, this is their destiny. And that of my husband, and me.

And now, as I watch him standing on the windswept hillside, I am realizing just how bitter this cup we all must drink will be. I keep remembering him as a little boy, this bright-eyed nephew full of life and joy. His smile would light up the entire house, and his laughter would send us all off in fits of giggles. Now all the laughter is drowning in tears.

The Roman soldiers set about their task methodically. Some of them begin preparing the cross while others strip him of his garments, dividing them among themselves, casting lots for his cloak. His poor abused body looks so frail as he stands there exposed to the jeers of the crowd. One soldier offers him some wine mingled with gall, but after one taste he turns his head away.

I take his mother’s hand, and someone takes mine. It is John, come to be with us at the end.



## STATION XI – JESUS NAILED TO THE CROSS

V: Our hearts feel every blow of that hammer.

R: Your wounds are of our making.

### READING

As I watch them strip him and pull him down onto the cross, I long to scream, “Stop this madness! This is an innocent man! A good man!”

I know. He saved my life.

I was a maid in the household of an important merchant in Jerusalem, and young and foolish. I had been betrothed since I was a child to a man I had never seen. But the merchant’s son convinced me he loved me, and I allowed him to come to my bed. His mother found us. She called me an adulteress and locked me in my room. I was terrified. Although the Law clearly states that both the man and woman are to be put to death, my lover is important in the community. I knew nothing would happen to him. But the Law says a betrothed virgin is to be stoned to death.

At daybreak they dragged me to the Temple. There was a man sitting there, surrounded by people. The Temple officials threw me onto the ground in front of him. I knew I was already a dead woman. They said, “Rabbi, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. The Law says we should stone her. Tell us, what do you say?”

I was confused. Who was this man? Why were they asking him? What were they up to? The man ignored them, drawing with his finger in the dust near my face. But they kept at him, and he kept ignoring them. I finally calmed down enough to focus on what he was doing. There in the dust he had written the unspeakable name of God. What did this mean?

But the Temple officials persisted until he looked up and said quietly, "Let the one among you who has not sinned be the first to throw a stone."

Then, bending down, he drew some more in the dust, smiling sideways at me. One by one, those who had accused me silently slipped away, until he and I were alone.

"Where have they gone?" he asked me. I said nothing, shaking my head in bewilderment.

"Tell me, has no one condemned you?" he then asked.

"No one, sir," I said softly.

"And neither do I," he said. "Go now and sin no more."

And then he helped me to my feet, smiled at me, turned me towards the door and gave me a gentle push.

"Go," he said with a smile.

And I did. I went and got my belongings, and set out to find the company of Jesus. He had given me back my life. I would now give it to him.

And now these fools are going to kill him! I hear a terrible groan from his mother and look up. Oh, dear God! They are not tying him to the cross; they are nailing him to it! My heart feels every blow of that hammer. As they jerk his feet together and begin driving the nails through that precious skin, his body moves convulsively upward. And I fall, driven to the ground by grief.



## STATION XII – JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

V: And I know if my grief were a river.

R: The whole earth would drown.

### READING

I watch them stretch his naked body out on the cross. Even in this moment of complete vulnerability, he is magnificent! As I look at him through eyes blurred with tears, he is no longer just one man, but seems instead to embody all of suffering humankind. Could any human endure such a burden?

I would die in his place without a moment's regret. That they should touch one hair on that adored head, hurt one inch of that beloved body, sickens me with grief and rage. I have loved him forever, it seems, even though I met him only three years ago, when he was teaching near my home in Magdala. I knew from the moment we first spoke that he had loved me from before I was born.

I would have loved him even if he had not cured me of my affliction, taken from me that deep-seated sadness that had clouded my days ever since I had achieved menarche. For me, becoming a woman had meant confinement in a prison of sadness. I seemed always to walk in darkness. I yearned to end this soul-eating pain.

Then I met him, and the sun rose in my life. With a glance he removed the pall of sadness that had dragged my life in the dust. With a touch he lifted me into a realm of spiritual brightness that dazzled my eyes and delighted my soul.

He called me "beloved disciple," and when the inevitable rumors began, I went crying to him. He gentled my tears away and said, "Mary, feel my hand on your face. I am touching the image of God. Nothing they say can change that, not in my eyes, and certainly not in the eyes of the One who made you.

“And know this,” he said. “Though they may try, they will never be able to cast you into the darkness. My peace is upon you forever.”

“My peace is upon you forever...” I cling to those words as they stretch him out upon that dreadful cross. I brush tears from my eyes, and see more clearly what they are about to do. Oh Holy One, help us! They are *nailing* him to the cross!

I turn to shield his mother from the sight, but it is too late. She lets out a guttural sound, like that of a woman in labor. I put my arm around her shoulders, and feel her slight body shudder with every blow of that accursed hammer.

When they pull the cross upright and drop it into a hole in the rock, I think the jolt will tear his arms from his body. And for a terrible interminable time we wait, as he slowly weakens. Finally, I hear him give himself up to his father. Without looking, I know he is gone from me.

And I know if my grief were a river, the whole earth would drown.



### **STATION XIII – THE BODY OF JESUS IS PLACED IN THE ARMS OF HIS MOTHER**

V: Do not call me Naomi, which means Pleasant.

R: Call me Mara, which means Bitter: for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

#### **READING**

As I waited in pain for him to be born, now I wait in pain for him to die. I cannot take my eyes off him, for every second that passes takes him farther from me. Where is my bright angel now?

I would be the God-Bearer, the angel said. Well, I did my part. And now here he is, this Child of God, dying in a dismal dusty place.

Anger washes through me, followed by new waves of grief. For days I've been an ocean, wracked by storms of emotion that threaten to drown my soul, kill my faith. This is too much to ask of me, Beloved! I believed your promises. I believed them when I pushed him into the world with only Joseph and the animals as midwives. I believed them when the shepherds and the kings came. I believed them when my angel warned Joseph to take us into Egypt. And I believed them when, at the Temple, he disappeared. I feared You had already taken him from me then, much too soon. We searched for him for three whole days, days like years. When we found him teaching in the Temple, he said he had to be about Your business.

But Joseph and I persuaded him to wait a bit a longer. And when the time came, it was still too soon by my heart's reckoning. But I had vowed to do Your will, and so I helped him any way I could. Many times that meant stepping aside, occasionally it meant helping others understand, and nearly always, it meant biting my tongue when I feared he'd gone too far, too fast.

But this! Oh Beloved, is this necessary! Must our child suffer so? We are not worthy of such pain. Take him! Take him now before I go mad with rage and pain.

But stay! Do not take him yet...This is the body of my body, the blood of my blood. I will devour him with my eyes, eating his body, drinking his blood. I will carry him within me forever.

His soft summons of "Mother" reaches me as if in a dream. I move as close to his feet as the soldiers will permit, John beside me.

"Ema," my dying son says to me, indicating John, "Behold your son."

And to John he says, "Behold your mother."

His voice is almost too faint to hear.

"I am thirsty," he rasps. I turn in silent appeal. The young soldier at the foot of the cross hesitates. Then, with a slight shrug, he puts a sponge soaked in cheap wine onto his lance and hoists it to Jesus. He wets his lips, and speaks again, his words tearing into my heart like knives.

"It is finished."

Then he cries out to You, Beloved.

"Abba, into Your hands I commend my spirit."

He drops his head and his eyes meet mine. And as I watch, the light dies.

{Silence}

I hear a scream and wonder who it is. The sky darkens, thunder rumbles, and a great silence falls. My body feels numb. It seems as if the darkness lasts forever. After a time, however, light returns. Shaken, the soldiers begin taking my child down from the cross. One of them, a centurion, I think, motions to them to give me the body.

I sink down on a rock, and with a curious gentleness, the soldiers hand him to me, draping him across my lap. I cradle him, my babe now man. His head lolls against my breast and his soft hair strokes my chin. I gently close his eyes and with my veil wipe the blood off his face.

I have no tears left. My eyes are spent with weeping, my soul is in tumult, my heart is poured out in grief because of the downfall of my people.

John says something to me, and I look up, my eyes blazing.

"Do not call me Naomi, which means Pleasant. Call me Mara, which means Bitter; for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."

John looks shocked, but what do I care? What are all the prophecies to me now? What do I care for all the fine words of me? My child is dead!

Agony forces my head back and I scream at the heavens, "My Baby! I want my baby back!"





## STATION XIV – JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

V: Sorrowful Mother, all humanity shares your loss.

R: Bless us all, Womb of Humanity, and renew our journey into new life.

### READING

I press my broken son to me, as if I can absorb him once again into my body. Oh Beloved! Have mercy on me! Pour Your tender mercies down upon me and help me! Help me! I have no strength left.

And once again, You send my bright angel. I feel the warmth at my back, the angel's hand upon my bent head, and hear the familiar voice: "Mary, Blessed of all Women, do not be afraid, for God is pleased with you."

And I remember the Promise: "All will be well. All manner of things will be well."

I allow them to take my son's body from me. They are telling me it is time to prepare him for burial. Salome has brought spices, and Joseph of Arimathea has gotten permission to bury him in a nearby tomb. And so I go through the ritual motions. As I once laid his sweet body so tenderly in a cradle, I now lay his broken body tenderly in the tomb. The smell of the sweet herbs fills the air. For one last time, I kiss his mortal face, then gently cover it with the sheet of fine white fabric. My hand caresses the soft cloth, and I smile. Would that I had had such fine cloth to clothe him while he lived.

But I have no bitterness left. My heart already is looking ahead. We walk outside, and James and John push the great stone over the entrance. I stand looking at the tomb.

How long, Oh Beloved, how long? As my dear friends move about me, peace settles on me. I am again one with Your will. Let it happen as You say.

## Prayer to Conclude the Stations

*All:*

**Jesus our Teacher,**

Remind us always when we walk in darkness,  
Especially in the darkness of sin,  
That in your death there was the promise of light.

**Jesus our Brother,**

Comfort us with your powerful mercy,  
And give us strength to reach out in love,  
Even to the unloveable.

**Jesus our Savior,**

Remind us that we do not live or die for self alone.  
Rather, we live and die for you.  
That is why you came among us, why you died,  
and why you live again.

**Jesus, Child of God,**

Remind us that we all, women and men, are Children of God.  
Give us courage to welcome  
the unimaginable event that awaits us all.  
And at the end, give us peace.

## The Solemn Collects

*Stand as you are able.*

Dear People of God: Our heavenly Father sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved; that all who believe in him might be delivered from the power of sin and death, and become heirs with him of everlasting life.

We pray, therefore, for people everywhere according to their needs.

Let us pray for the holy Catholic Church of Christ throughout the world; That God will confirm his Church in faith, increase it in love, and preserve it in peace.

*Silence*

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Let us pray for all nations and peoples of the earth, and for those in authority among them; That by God's help they may seek justice and truth, and live in peace and concord.

*Silence*

Almighty God, kindle, we pray in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with your wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth, that in tranquility your dominion may increase, until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Let us pray for all who suffer and are afflicted in body or in mind; That God in his mercy will comfort and relieve them, and grant them the knowledge of his love, and stir up in us the will and patience to minister to their needs.

*Silence*

Gracious God, the comfort of all who sorrow, the strength of all who suffer: Let the cry of those in misery and need come to you, that they may find your mercy present with them in all their afflictions; and give us, we pray, the strength to serve them for the sake of him who suffered for us, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Let us pray for all who have not received the Gospel of Christ; That God will open their hearts to the truth and lead them to faith and obedience.

*Silence*

Merciful God, creator of all the peoples of the earth and lover of souls: Have compassion on all who do not know you as you are revealed in your Son Jesus Christ; let your Gospel be preached with grace and power to those who have not heard it; turn the hearts of those who resist it; and bring home to your fold those who have gone astray; that there may be one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Let us commit ourselves to God, and pray for the grace of a holy life, that, with all who have departed this world and have died in the peace of Christ, and those whose faith is known to God alone, we may be accounted worthy to enter into the fullness of the joy of our Lord, and receive the crown of life in the day of resurrection.

*Silence.*

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Let us pray in the words our Lord Jesus Christ gave to us

Our Father who art in Heaven  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our trespasses  
    as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,  
    And the glory, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### **Communion**

Come forward via the center aisle and return to your seats along the side aisles. All are welcome to partake of communion. If you would prefer a blessing, cross your arms over your chest.

Let us pray.

*All:*

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, we pray you to set your passion, cross, and death between your judgment and our souls, now and in the hour of our death. Give mercy and grace to the living; pardon and rest to the dead; to your holy Church peace and concord; and to us sinners everlasting life and glory; for with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

*Please leave the church in respectful silence.*

The readings for each of the stations come from *Women of the Passion: A Journey to the Cross* by Katie Sherrod. You can purchase a copy of this book, which includes three additional meditations and an introduction, from Amazon.com or Booksurge.com.

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The artwork for each Station of the Cross is by Bruce Onobrakpeya. They are on display at the African Art Museum in Tenafly, NJ. Find below the Museum's blurb about this amazing set of linocuts.

This rare set of linocuts was printed in 1969 in several editions of about fifty by Bruce Onobrakpeya, an Urhobo man who has become Nigeria's most famous – and arguably best – artist.

Onobrakpeya came of age in the 1960s, the period when Nigeria won independence from Great Britain. Trained in schools with western-style courses of study, Onobrakpeya had to face the problem of creating an artistic persona that was both contemporary and African. This dual identity accounts for the presence of Hebrew soldiers dressed in nineteenth century English uniforms against a background of African patterns and images.

Our complete set of the fourteen stations of the cross was purchased in 1974 for the African Art Museum of the SMA Fathers by Fr. Kevin Carroll, a distinguished scholar of the art of the Yoruba of Nigeria. Fr. Carroll is the author of *Yoruba Religious Carving* (1967), and *Architectures of Nigeria* (1992). The Kevin Carroll collection of Yoruba sculpture, beadwork, and textiles, is one of the proudest possessions of the Society of African Missions. The Fr. Kevin Carroll archive is in the SMA mission house at Cork, Ireland.