

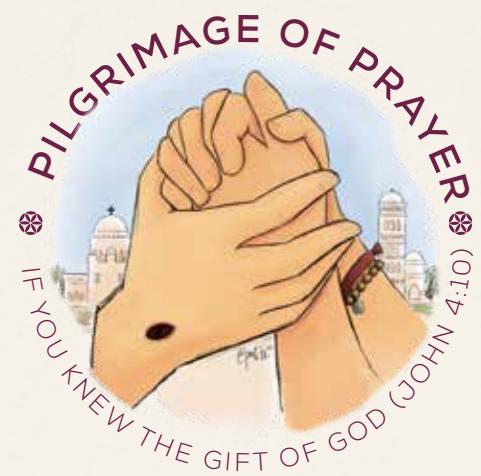
Day 24

Way of the Cross 6th & 7th Stations

For Personal Reflection & Prayer

- Who was someone that brought you close to God through their example? What inspired you about them?
- Is there a particular saint that I identify with? What is it about them that I see reflected in me or what I aspire to be?

Take these considerations to the Lord in prayer, asking for light and strength.



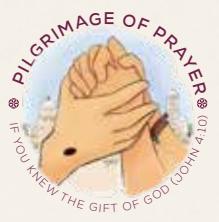
Offer a prayer inspired by the words of Scripture:

*Since we are surrounded
By so great a cloud of witnesses...
Let us persevere in running the race
Before us.*

Hebrews 12:1

Prayer of Pope Benedict XVI on St. Stephen

St Stephen is the most representative of a group of seven companions. Tradition sees in this group the seed of the future ministry of "deacons", although it must be pointed out that this category is not present in the Book of Acts. In any case, Stephen's importance is due to the fact that Luke, in his important book, dedicates two whole chapters to him. Luke's narrative starts with the observation of a widespread division in the primitive Church of Jerusalem: indeed, she consisted entirely of Christians of Jewish origin, but some came from the land of Israel and were called "Hebrews", while others, of the Old Testament Jewish faith, came from the Greek-speaking Diaspora and were known as "Hellenists"...



The most important thing to note is that in addition to charitable services, Stephen also carried out a task of evangelization among his compatriots, the so-called "Hellenists". Indeed, Luke insists on the fact that Stephen, "full of grace and power" (Acts 6: 8), presented in Jesus' Name a new interpretation of Moses and of God's Law itself. He reread the Old Testament in the light of the proclamation of Christ's death and Resurrection. He gave the Old Testament a Christological reinterpretation and provoked reactions from the Jews, who took his words to be blasphemous (cf. Acts 6: 11-14).

For this reason he was condemned to stoning. And St Luke passes on to us the saint's last discourse, a synthesis of his preaching. Just as Jesus had shown the disciples of Emmaus that the whole of the Old Testament speaks of him, of his Cross and his Resurrection, so St Stephen, following Jesus' teaching, interpreted the whole of the Old Testament in a Christological key. He shows that the mystery of the Cross stands at the centre of the history of salvation as recounted in the Old Testament; it shows that Jesus, Crucified and Risen, is truly the goal of all this history.

St Stephen also shows that the cult of the temple was over and that Jesus, the Risen One, was the new, true "temple". It was precisely this "no" to the temple and to its cult that led to the condemnation of St Stephen, who at this moment, St Luke tells us, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and seeing heaven, God and Jesus, St Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" (cf. Acts 7: 56).

This was followed by his martyrdom, modelled in fact on the passion of Jesus himself, since he delivered his own spirit to the "Lord Jesus" and prayed that the sin of those who killed him would not be held against them (cf. Acts 7: 59-60)...The killing of Stephen, the first martyr of Christ, unleashed a local persecution of Christ's disciples (cf. Acts 8: 1), the first one in the history of the Church. It was these circumstances that impelled the group of Judeo-Hellenist Christians to flee from Jerusalem and scatter. Hounded out of Jerusalem, they became itinerant missionaries: "Those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8: 4). Their persecution and consequent dispersion became a mission. Thus, the Gospel spread also to Samaria, Phoenicia and Syria, as far as the great city of Antioch where, according to Luke, it was proclaimed for the first time also to the pagans (cf. Acts 11: 19-20), and where, for the first time the name "Christians" was used (Acts 11: 26).

Above all, St Stephen speaks to us of Christ, of the Crucified and Risen Christ as the centre of history and our life. We can understand that the Cross remains forever the



centre of the Church's life and also of our life. In the history of the Church, there will always be passion and persecution. And it is persecution itself which, according to Tertullian's famous words, becomes "the seed of Christians", the source of mission for Christians to come. I cite his words: "We multiply wherever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed..." (Apology 50, 13): Plures efficimur quoties metimur a vobis: semen est sanguis christianorum. But in our life too, the Cross that will never be absent, becomes a blessing.

And by accepting our cross, knowing that it becomes and is a blessing, we learn Christian joy even in moments of difficulty. The value of witness is irreplaceable, because the Gospel leads to it and the Church is nourished by it. St Stephen teaches us to treasure these lessons, he teaches us to love the Cross, because it is the path on which Christ comes among us ever anew.

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20070110.html





Let us Pray the Way of the Cross Together

6th & 7th Stations

Armenian Chapel, el-Wad Road, Simon of Cyrene Chapel

We adore you Oh Christ and we praise you,

because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

VI

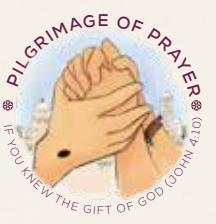
Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

From the Book of Psalms 27:8-9

He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Meditation

“Your face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not your face from me” (Ps 27:8-9). Veronica – Bernice, in the Greek tradition – embodies the universal yearning of the devout men and women of the Old Testament, the yearning of all believers to see the face of God. On Jesus’ Way of the Cross, though, she at first did nothing more than perform an act of womanly kindness: she held out a facecloth to Jesus. She did not let herself be deterred by the brutality of the soldiers or the fear which gripped the disciples. She is the image of that good woman, who, amid turmoil and dismay, shows the courage born of goodness and does not allow her heart to be bewildered. “Blessed are the pure in heart”, the Lord had said in his Sermon on the Mount, “for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). At first, Veronica saw



only a buffeted and pain-filled face. Yet her act of love impressed the true image of Jesus on her heart: on his human face, bloodied and bruised, she saw the face of God and his goodness, which accompanies us even in our deepest sorrows. Only with the heart can we see Jesus. Only love purifies us and gives us the ability to see. Only love enables us to recognize the God who is love itself.

Prayer

Lord, grant us restless hearts, hearts which seek your face. Keep us from the blindness of heart which sees only the surface of things. Give us the simplicity and purity which allow us to recognize your presence in the world. When we are not able to accomplish great things, grant us the courage which is born of humility and goodness. Impress your face on our hearts. May we encounter you along the way and show your image to the world.



VIII

Seventh Station: Jesus falls for the second time



From the Book of Lamentations. 3:1-2,9,16

I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light. He has blocked my way with hewn stones, he has made my paths crooked. He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes.

Meditation

The tradition that Jesus fell three times beneath the weight of the Cross evokes the fall of Adam – the state of fallen humanity – and the mystery of Jesus' own sharing in our fall. Throughout history the fall of man constantly takes on new forms. In his First Letter, Saint John speaks of a threefold fall: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. He thus interprets the fall of man and humanity against the backdrop of the vices of his own time, with all its excesses and perversions. But we can also think, in more recent times, of how a Christianity which has grown weary of faith has abandoned the Lord: the great ideologies, and the banal existence of those who, no longer believing in anything, simply drift through life, have built a new and worse paganism, which in its attempt to do away with God once and for all, have ended up doing away with man. And so man lies fallen in the dust. The Lord bears this burden and falls, over and over again, in order to meet us. He gazes on us, he touches our hearts; he falls in order to raise us up.



Prayer



Lord Jesus Christ, you have borne all our burdens and you continue to carry us. Our weight has made you fall. Lift us up, for by ourselves we cannot rise from the dust. Free us from the bonds of lust. In place of a heart of stone, give us a heart of flesh, a heart capable of seeing. Lay low the power of ideologies, so that all may see that they are a web of lies. Do not let the wall of materialism become unsurmountable. Make us aware of your presence. Keep us sober and vigilant, capable of resisting the forces of evil. Help us to recognize the spiritual and material needs of others, and to give them the help they need. Lift us up, so that we may lift others up. Give us hope at every moment of darkness, so that we may bring your hope to the world.