

# *The Stations of the Cross*

Poetry by Paul Claudel



## THE FIRST STATION

Jesus is condemned to death

*It is finished. We have judged God and we  
have condemned him to death.*

*We did not want Jesus Christ with us any  
longer, because he troubled us.*

*Now we have no other king but Caesar! no  
other law but blood and gold!*

*Crucify him, if you wish, but rid us of him! Take him away!*

*Take him! Take him! Since it must be so,  
let him be sacrificed and give us Barabbas!*

*Pilate sits in state in the place called Gabbatha.*

*“Have you nothing to say?” says Pilate. And Jesus does not respond.*

*“—I find no evil in this man,” says Pilate, “but, since you wish it,  
Let him die! I give him to you; Ecce homo.”*

*Behold him, the crown on his head and the purple on his back.*

*One last time his eyes are turned on us,  
those eyes full of tears and blood!*

*What could we have done with him?*

*No way to keep him with us any longer.*

*A scandal to the Jews, to us he makes no sense.*

*The sentence is given in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin; nothing is omitted.*

*And you can see the crowd that yells and the judge who washes his hands.*



## THE SECOND STATION

Jesus receives his cross

*They give him back his clothing and the cross is brought to him.*

*“Hail,” says Jesus,*

*“O Cross that I have so long desired!”*

*And you, Christian—look, and tremble!*

*Ah, what a solemn moment—*

*That in which Christ for the first time accepts the eternal cross!*

*O consummation on this day of the tree in Paradise!*

*Look, sinner, and see to what your sin has led!*

*No more crime without a God below,*

*and no more cross without the Christ!*

*The misfortune of man is great indeed,*

*but we have nothing to complain of,*

*For God is now below, who has come not to explain but to fulfill.*

*Jesus receives the Cross as we receive the Holy Eucharist:*

*“We give him wood for his bread,” as the Prophet Jeremiah says.*

*Ah, how long the cross is, how huge and difficult!*

*How hard! How unyielding! and how heavy it is,*

*the weight of the useless sinner!*

*And how long to carry it, step by step, until one dies beneath it!*

*Are you going to carry it all by yourself, Lord Jesus?*

*Make me patient in my turn with the cross you want me to carry.*

*Because we must carry the cross before the cross carries us.*



## THE THIRD STATION

Jesus falls beneath the weight of the cross

*On the way! Victim and executioners together set off towards Calvary.*

*God, whom they drag by the neck, suddenly stumbles and falls to the ground.*

*What do you say, Lord, of this first fall?  
 And since, now, you know, what do you think of it?—this moment  
 When you fall, and when the ill-set load throws you down?  
 How do you find this earth which you made?  
 Ah! it is not only the good way that is hard.  
 The way of evil is also treacherous and steep!  
 You do not enter it straight on; you must learn it stone by stone,  
 And your foot often stumbles, though your heart perseveres.  
 Ah, Lord, by your sacred knees, those two knees that failed you,  
 By your sudden dizziness, and by your fall  
 at the beginning of the horrible Way,  
 By the successful ambush, by the earth you touched,  
 Save us from the first sin that we commit by surprise!*



## THE FOURTH STATION

Jesus meets his mother

*O mothers who have seen your first and only  
 child die,  
 Recall that night, the last,  
 beside the suffering little one,*

*The death that comes little by little, till one can no longer mistake it.  
 Put his poor shoes on, change his linen and his clothes.  
 Someone is coming who will take him from me and put him in the ground.  
 Goodbye, my dear little child! goodbye, flesh of my flesh!  
 The fourth Station is Mary, who has accepted everything.  
 Here she is at the street corner, waiting for the Treasure of all Poverty.  
 Her eyes have no tears, her mouth is dry.  
 She says not a word and she watches Jesus come.  
 She accepts. She accepts one more time. The cry  
 Is severely repressed in that strong, strict heart.  
 She says not a word and she looks at Jesus Christ.*

*The mother looks at her Son, the Church at her Redeemer.  
 Her soul goes out violently to him, like the cry of a dying soldier!  
 She is silent before God and offers him her soul to read,  
 There is nothing in her heart that refuses or holds back,  
 Not a fiber in her pierced heart that does not accept and consent.  
 And as God himself is there, she is present.  
 She accepts and she looks at this Son she conceived in her womb.  
 She says not a word and she gazes on the Holy of Holies.*



## THE FIFTH STATION

Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus  
to carry his cross

*The moment comes when they cannot go on,  
 when they can no longer advance.*

*It is here that we find our place, when you  
 permit us, too,*

*to be of use, even by force, for your Cross.*

*Thus Simon of Cyrene, who was summoned to this piece of wood.*

*He takes it up firmly and walks behind Jesus,*

*So that nothing of the Cross drag on the ground, and be lost.*



## THE SIXTH STATION

A holy woman wipes the face of Jesus

*All the disciples have fled, Peter himself denies  
 him vehemently!*

*A woman throws herself into the thick of the  
 insult and the center of death,*

*And finds Jesus and takes his face between her hands.*

*Teach us, Veronica, to brave human respect.*

*For those to whom Jesus Christ is not just an image, but a reality,*

*Become disagreeable and suspect to others.*

*Their mode of life is opposite, their motives are no longer the world's.*

*There is something in them which always puzzles,  
 something which is always elsewhere.  
 For every Christian is the true though unworthy image of the Christ.  
 And the face they present is the faint reflection  
 Of the face of God in their hearts, frightful and triumphant!  
 Let us look once more, Veronica,  
 At the cloth you gathered up, at the face of the Holy Viaticum,  
 That holy linen veil where Veronica hid  
 The face of the Harvester in the day of his drunkenness,  
 So that his image would cling to it eternally,  
 That image which is made of his blood, his tears, and our spittle!*



## THE SEVENTH STATION

Jesus falls to the ground a second time

*It is not the stone beneath his foot,  
 nor the rope pulled too sharply,  
 it is the soul that suddenly stumbles.  
 O middle of our lives! O voluntary fall!*

*When love no longer has a center, faith no longer a foundation,  
 Because the road is long and the end is far away,  
 Because you are alone and there is no consolation.  
 Slowness of time! disgust which grows in secret  
 From the inflexible commandment and from this companion of wood!  
 This is why you spread out both arms at once, like a swimmer.  
 Now you fall not on your knees, but on your face,  
 The body falls, indeed, but this time the soul consents.  
 Save us from the Second sin that we commit willingly, out of boredom.*



## THE EIGHTH STATION

Jesus comforts the women of Jerusalem

*Before he climbs the mountain for the last time,  
Jesus raises his finger and turns towards the  
people who accompany him,  
A few poor women in tears*

*with their babies in their arms.*

*And we, let us not only look, but let us listen to Jesus, for he is there.*

*It is not a man who lifts his finger in the midst of this poor crowd.*

*It is God who suffered for our salvation.*

*This man was God almighty, it is true, then!*

*There really was a day when God suffered this for us!*

*What, then, is the danger from which we have been saved  
at such a price?*

*The salvation of all: is it so simple an affair*

*That to accomplish it the Son is obliged to tear himself  
from the bosom of the Father?*

*If this is what happens in Heaven, then what is Hell?*

*What will happen when the wood is dead,  
if this is the way when the wood is green?*



## THE NINTH STATION

Jesus falls the third time

*I have fallen again, and this time, it is the end.  
I would lift myself up but there is no way.  
For they have pressed me like fruit, and the  
man I carry on my back is too heavy.*

*I have done wrong, and the dead man with me is too heavy!*

*Let us die then, for it is easier to lie flat than to stand upright,*

*Easier to die than to live, to be on the cross than under it.*

*Save us from the Third sin which is despair!  
Nothing is entirely lost while we still have death to drink!  
And I have done with the wood, but the iron remains!  
Jesus falls a third time, but it is at the summit of Calvary.*



## THE TENTH STATION

Jesus is stripped of his clothes

*Behold the threshing-floor  
where the heavenly grain is beaten.  
The Father is laid bare,  
the veil of the Tabernacle is torn away.*

*Hands are raised against God, the Flesh of Flesh trembles,  
The Universe, touched at its source, shakes to its very depths!  
Now that they have taken the tunic and the robe without seam,  
We raise our eyes and dare to look at Jesus in his nakedness.  
They have left you nothing, Lord, they have taken all,  
The clothing that clung to your flesh, as today  
They tear the cowl from the monk and the veil  
from the consecrated virgin.  
They have taken all, he has nothing left to hide himself.  
He has no more defense; he is naked like a glass,  
He is bared to all and uncovered.  
What, is this your Jesus! He is laughable.  
He is covered with wounds and filth,  
he is in the power of strangers and police.  
Tauri pingues obsedurunt me, Libera me, Domine, de ore canis:  
Fierce bulls encompass me about, free me, Lord,  
from the mouths of the dogs.  
He is not the Christ. He is not the Son of Man. He is not God.  
His gospel is a liar and his Father is not in heaven.  
He is insane! He is an impostor! Let him speak! Let him be silent!*



*The servant of Annas slaps him and the unbeliever kisses him.  
They have taken everything. But the scarlet blood remains.  
They have taken everything. But the wound that cries out remains!  
God is hidden. But the Man of Sorrows remains.  
God is hidden. But my brother who weeps remains!  
By your humiliation, Lord, by your shame,  
Have pity on the vanquished, on the weak overcome by the strong.  
By the horror of that last covering that they took from you,  
Have pity on all those who are torn!  
On the sick child, on the poor wounded one,  
On the bereaved husband, on the son beside his dying mother,  
And on that terrible love that we must tear out of our hearts!*



## THE ELEVENTH STATION

Jesus is nailed to the cross

*And now God is no longer with us.  
He is on the ground.  
The pack have seized him by the neck  
like a deer.*

*You have come, then! You are really with us, Lord!  
They are sitting on you, they have their knees on your heart.  
That hand which the executioner twists,  
is the right hand of the Almighty.  
They have tied the Lamb by the feet,  
they have bound the Omnipresent.  
They mark with chalk on the cross his height  
and the width of his arms.  
And when he tastes of our nails, we will see his face.  
Son eternal, whose limit is your own Infinity,  
Here you are among us, in this narrow place you have desired.  
Here is Elias in the death which stretches him at length,*



*Here is the throne of David and the glory of Solomon,  
Here is the bed of our love with you, strong and hard!  
It is difficult for a God to fit himself to our measure.  
They pull, and the half-dislocated body cracks and cries.  
He is held as in a wine-press, he is frightfully boxed in.  
That the Prophet might be proven right  
who predicted it in these words:  
“They have pierced my hands and feet.  
They have numbered all my bones.”  
You are taken, Lord, and you can no longer escape.  
You are nailed to the cross by your hands and your feet.  
I will no longer look to the skies with the heretic and the fool.  
This God is enough for me, who is held by four nails.*



## THE TWELFTH STATION

Jesus dies on the cross

*He suffered just now, indeed, but now he will die.  
In the night, the great cross trembles with the  
breath of God.  
Everything is there.*

*There is nothing more but to let the Instrument do its work,  
which at the juncture of his Double nature,  
At the source of the body and the soul and the hypostasis,  
inexhaustibly expresses and draws out  
All the potential that is in him for suffering.  
He is all alone, like Adam, when he was alone in Eden.  
He is for three hours alone and tastes the Wine,  
The invincible ignorance of man in the absence of God!  
Our host is weighed down and his head droops little by little.  
He no longer sees his Mother and his Father forsakes him.  
He tastes of the cup and the death that slowly poisons him.*

*Have you not had enough of that bitter wine, mingled with water,  
That you raise your head suddenly, and cry: I thirst!  
You are thirsty, Lord? Are you speaking to me?  
Do you still have need of me, with my sins?  
Am I what is lacking before all things can be fulfilled?*



## THE THIRTEENTH STATION

Jesus is taken down from the cross and  
given back to his mother

*Here the Passion ends  
and the Compassion continues.  
The Christ is no longer on the Cross,*

*he is with Mary who has received him:  
As she accepted him, the promised one, so she receives him,  
consummated.  
The Christ who suffered in the sight of all is once more  
hidden on the breast of his mother.  
The Church takes her beloved in her arms.  
That which is from God, that which is from the mother,  
and that which man has made,  
All this is with her beneath her mantle forever.  
She has taken him, she sees, she touches, she prays,  
she weeps, she wonders!  
She is the shroud and the unguent,  
she is the sepulcher and the myrrh,  
She is the priest and the altar and the vessel and the Cenacle.  
Here the Cross is finished and the Tabernacle begins.*



## THE FOURTEENTH STATION

Jesus is laid in the tomb

*The tomb where the dead Christ,  
having suffered, is placed,  
The hole, opened up in haste,  
that he may sleep his night there,*

*Before the pierced one is resurrected and ascends to the Father.  
It is not only this new sepulcher, it is my flesh,  
It is man, your creature, who is deeper than the earth!  
Now that his heart is open and his hands pierced,  
There is no cross among us to which His body is not accustomed,  
There is no sin in us without its corresponding wound in Him!  
Come then from the altar where you are hidden from us,  
Savior of the world!  
Lord, how your creature is open, and how deep!*