

The
WAY
of the
CROSS
for
PARENTS.

Susan Jones



TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS
Mystic, CT 06355

Introduction

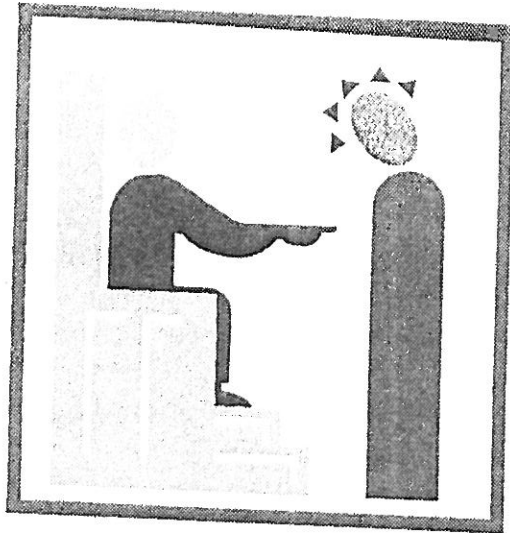
Parenting is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks we will ever know. Every day brings new experiences, new joys and fears, new reasons for all of us to share with each other, work together, pray together, and be affirmed by each other. This Way of the Cross is written especially for parents. By using this form of prayer, we join the sufferings, trials, burdens, and joys of family life with the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

May this booklet offer you a guide on your journey through the grace-filled season of Lent. May it give you consolation in knowing that as parents we all travel along the same road, although at different times and in different ways. And may the reflections found here help you not only to pray during Lent, but to make of your everyday lives a constant prayer that connects you with God, our divine parent, our model and source of strength.



Opening Prayer

Loving God, from the moment of our conception you know and care about everything we do, about all that affects us, and all our hurts and joys. Help us to turn to you for guidance as we lead our children—your children—along the path to your loving arms.



Our human struggles begin at birth.

The First Station

Jesus Is Condemned to Death

At the hands of Pontius Pilate your divine son was condemned to humiliation, to mental and physical torture, and finally, to death. Jesus had been called to lead people to new life; but did he have to die to accomplish this?

To lose a child to death at any age is a pain that knows no end—a kind of pain that many of us will never know. But there are other kinds of death that we witness as parents. We see our children go through a death experience when they are robbed of physical and mental health. We see them die internally when they are deprived of self-esteem, of basic human rights, of family and friends.



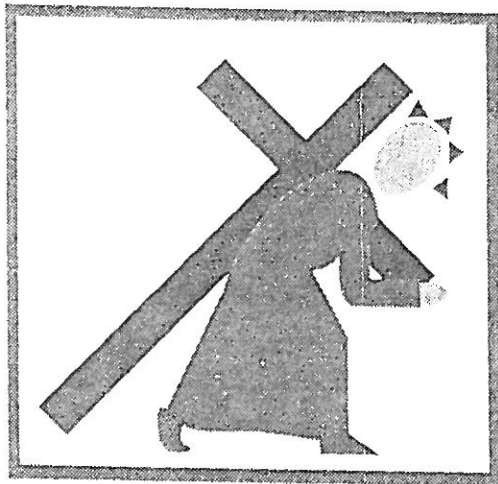
Loving God, you know the fear and agony we feel when we must watch our children suffer at the hands of life itself. Teach us to come to you for shelter, understanding, and strength when we feel helpless and alone.

The Second Station

Jesus Is Given His Cross

Your son had been whipped, mocked, embarrassed, and deprived of any semblance of human dignity. You could have lifted this cross from him, but you allowed him to live out his own life, to walk the path to his own death.

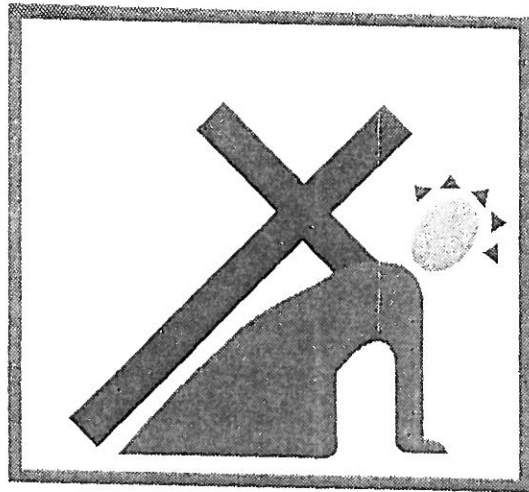
Our children carry many crosses during their lives. Sometimes they are weighted down with disease, disabilities, and prejudice. Sometimes they face loneliness and depression. Sometimes they buckle under minor disappointments or defeats. As parents we are so often tempted to take these crosses away from them; but we know that we cannot.



We must each carry our own cross.



God, source of our strength, help us to remember that you are always with our children. Give us the courage and wisdom to do all that is within our power, then let go and place our children in your caring hands.



There is no progress without risk.

The Third Station

Jesus Falls the First Time

The sandy road was strewn with pebbles; but to your son, already exhausted from the night's ordeal, they might just as well have been boulders. In time these stumbling blocks became too much for him and he fell to the ground.

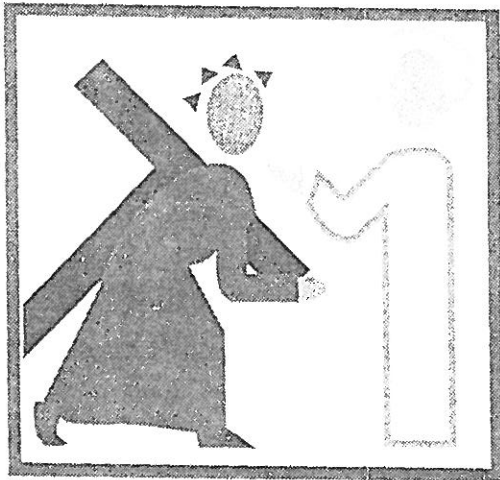
All parents remember the mixture of delight and trepidation with which they watched their toddlers begin to explore the world around them. For the toddler, each step, each new place explored, brought giggles, knowledge, and a reason to keep on going. But for parents each coffee table, each stair, each unsure step had the potential to be harmful. And then it happened: They fell!



God of expectation, you created for us a marvelous universe. We have many opportunities to explore it, to experience it, to stumble through it. Help us protect our children even as we allow them to take the risks that offer them the joy of fully living.

The Fourth Station

Jesus Meets His Mother



We give our children life, love, and wings.

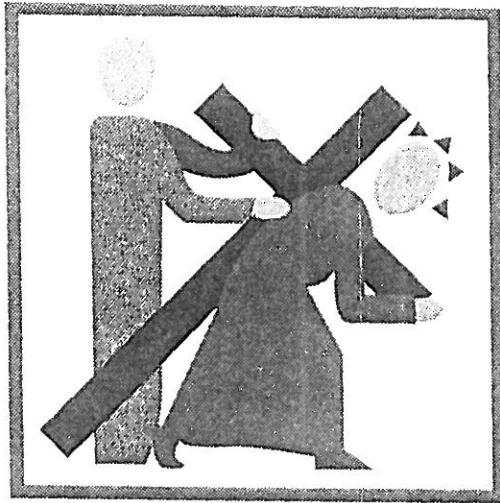
How did Mary maintain her composure when she saw her son on his way to Calvary? Was she tempted to say to him, "Look what this is doing to me?" Did she want to tell him that she hadn't raised him to die like this?

So often we want our children to use our experiences to make their choices in life. Logic would have it that since we have lived longer we must know better. But we have our own lives to live, and we must let our children experience their own failures and success, even when they get hurt doing it.



Lord, you gave us each a free will. Help us when we are tempted to take away free will from our own children. Let our words and actions reflect the confidence we have in them, and may they always be assured of our love and support.

Simon Helps Jesus to Carry His Cross



We can't always be there for our children.

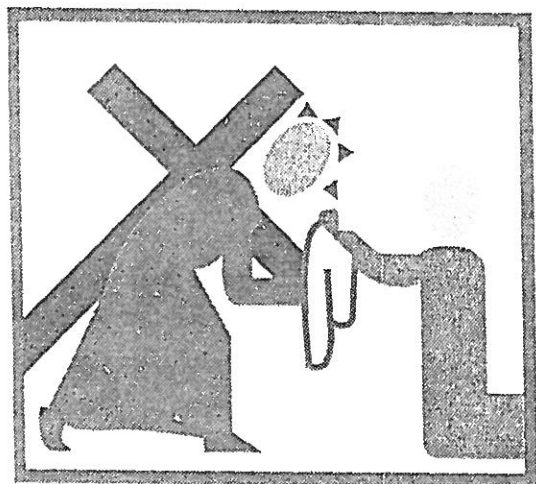
Simon was not a relative, not even a friend or follower when he was picked by the soldiers to help Jesus. He just happened to be in the right place at the right time. (*He probably didn't think so.*) How grateful Mary must have been to see that, when there was nothing she herself could do, someone else could ease Jesus' burden.

When our children are very small their world revolves around us, and ours around them. They are sure we have all the answers, and they have little need to venture outside the family unit. As they grow older they spend more time away from us and they must learn to turn to others for help.



We ask you, Lord, to put people like Simon in our own children's lives. We can't always be with them, and we know there will be times when they are in need of a friendly face, a helping hand.

Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus



We are grateful for the help of others.

How torn Mary must have been! It is another woman, a family friend perhaps, who is able to reach Jesus and wipe his bloody, sweaty face. It must have pleased her to see someone take the risk and help her son, but oh, how she must have longed to be the one to comfort him in his hour of need.

There are times when our children are in trouble, when they need to talk or they need help, and we must stand by and let others be there for them. There are times when they are bruised and broken, and the task falls to others to comfort them.

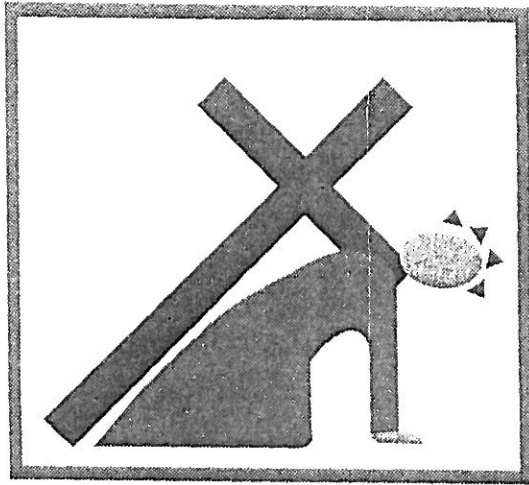


Faithful God, in your wisdom you send others to be our guides, our mentors, our soulmates. Teach us to follow your example and to be grateful for the wonderful people our children choose to call friends.

Jesus Falls the Second Time

The hill gets steeper. Your beloved son looks more exhausted with each step he takes. Many of the people who shout angry words at him are the very same ones who, days ago, welcomed him with cries of "Hosanna." How quickly they have changed their loyalty!

Our hearts break as we watch our children's trust in others turn to disappointment. Sometimes it is fickle friends who break promises when something better comes along. Sometimes it is well-meaning relatives and teachers—or we ourselves—whose discipline, devoid of love and compassion, attacks the child rather than the action.

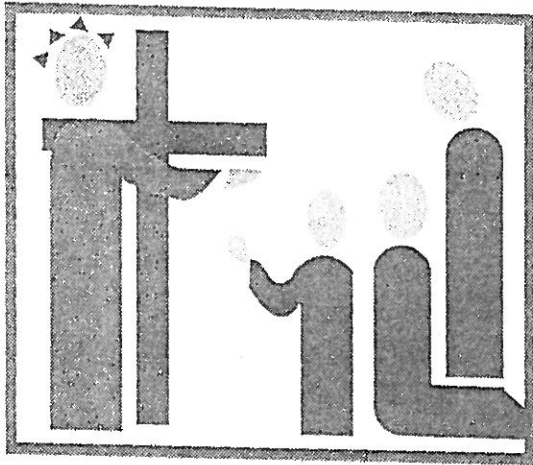


No one said life would always be fair.

Compassionate God, your forgiveness knows no end. Your love is showered upon us even in our most unworthy moments. Help us to be examples of correcting without destroying, of punishing without emotional manipulation, of forgiving and forgetting, of unconditional love.

The Eighth Station

Jesus Meets the Holy Women



Love and consolation come
in times of trouble.

You must have been speaking as a proud father when you said, "This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Jesus was loved by so many; his presence was sought after and cherished. And here were the holy women who had listened to him preach, laughed and cried and shared meals with him, now accompanying him on his final earthly journey.

All parents wish their children to be well-liked. We want their actions to evoke the kind of love and loyalty these women had for Jesus. If they have this support we know they will be ready for any challenge life hands them.



Ever-present God, you see and know all things. Help others to recognize our children as special and important human beings. May we, like you, say, "This is my beloved daughter/son. I am so very proud!"

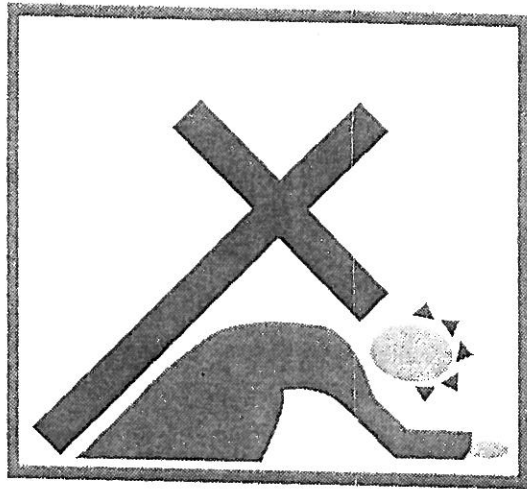
Jesus Falls the Third Time

By now, for Mary and Jesus' friends, the fear must have turned to terror. They must have asked themselves how much more Jesus could endure, how much longer this punishment and pain could go on. Was there anything but death that could save him now?

Any parent who has paced through the night with a sick and helpless baby has been there. Any parent who has weathered a child's serious illness has been there. Any parent who has surrendered a dying child to eternal life in Christ has been there. All these know how quickly life can change, how deep and high are the bounds where our emotions can go.



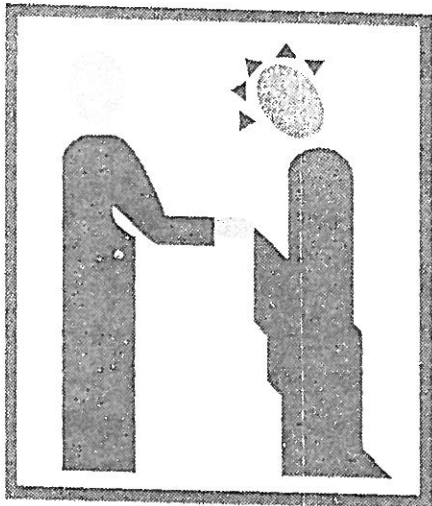
Oh God, it is here that we parents so often meet you: in the loneliness of a long night; when we feel inadequate and drained by our parenting efforts; when no one has answers, or when the answers aren't the ones we want to hear. At these times be our strength, be our consolation, be our hope.



In adversity, our faith is tested.

The Tenth Station

Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments



There are some things no one
can take away.

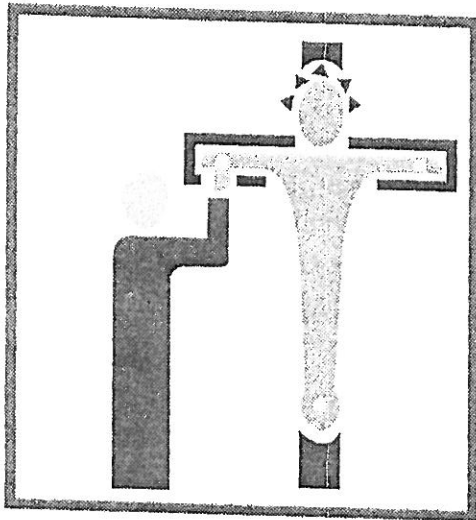
You watched as slowly, deliberately, Jesus was robbed of sleep, health, comfort, and even his very clothing. Some of the soldiers were cold and calculating. Others just followed along, never bothering to think for themselves. Perhaps some were too frightened to interfere or protest. To eyes able to see only the tangible they had taken everything; but you knew your son had not surrendered any of the really important things.

There are those in our children's lives who come to rob them. Some take their innocence, some their security, some their health. We would do almost anything to stop it, but we don't always have the power.



Loving God, help our children to understand that no one can rob them of their self-esteem and pride, of their dignity and worth in your eyes. Help us to instill in them the realization of their own power and potential.

Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross



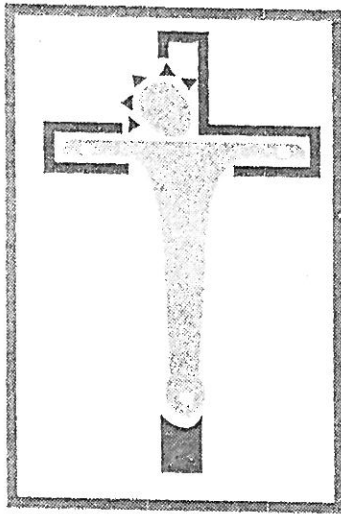
Holding grudges is bad for the soul.

Could Mary feel each blow of the hammer? Did the blood that flowed from the wounds in the hands and feet of Jesus stir up the blood that flowed through her own veins? Did the sound thunder in her ears until she thought they would burst? Was she able to forgive those who wronged her son?

As parents we know these sensations only too well. To hurt our children is to hurt us twice over. And we often find it hard to forgive others when our children have long since forgiven, forgotten, and been reconciled with them.



Dear God, sometimes it is our children who are our teachers. In their wide-eyed innocence they do not see people as "out to get them." When selfishness and anger is directed toward them, may they see this as the other person's problem rather than as an attack on themselves.



Sometimes, all we have left is memories.

The Twelfth Station

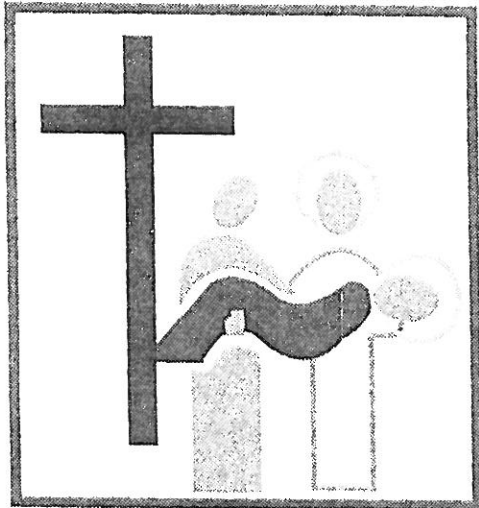
Jesus Dies on the Cross

You watch as the end finally comes. Jesus does not call out against this thoroughly unjust and senseless action. He simply utters, "It is finished," bows his head, and releases his spirit back to you. Mary, the disciples, and the holy women are left with his indelible mark in their thoughts, his unending love in their hearts, and an unceasing emptiness in their lives.

We have those same feelings so many times in our lives. When our children first go off to school...when they spend their first weekend away from us...when they become teenagers and try to break their ties to us...when they leave for college, start a job, or begin their own family; during all these times and more we know how it feels to let go.



Loving God, sometimes we must simply come and sit in your presence, allow you to delve deep inside where we are afraid to go ourselves, and gently knit us back together, holding us close and filling us with your love.



Our hearts must always
be open to welcome.

The Thirteenth Station

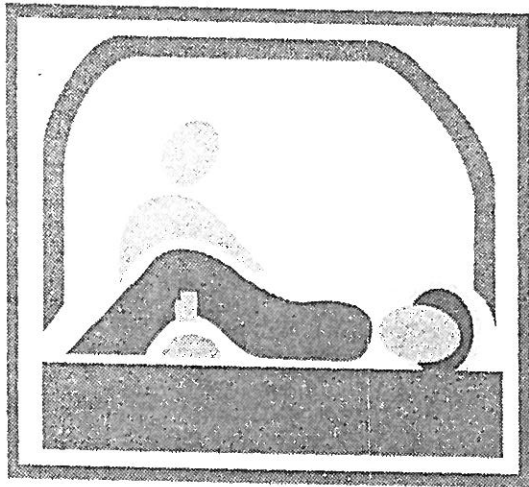
Jesus Is Laid in Mary's Arms

As you held the lifeless body of your precious son did you think about the beautiful, wiggling bundle of new life that you held in the stable in Bethlehem? Did you picture your young son as he helped Joseph do his work? Did you long to go back to the times when people were proud to say they knew Jesus, when people told you what a fine young man he had grown into?

As parents we are sometimes faced with times when the lives our children have chosen to live have left them scarred and soiled. We are asked, more than once, to take them back, clean them up, put them back together. And we often think of how it used to be, of how it could have been, of how we dreamed it would be.



Faithful God you never turn your back on us, or withhold your love. It's not always easy to welcome our children back when they have hurt us. Help us to express our love for them even when we are ready to give up.



There is more to our lives than
the ministry of parenthood.

The Fourteenth Station

Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

Your son has done that for which you sent him. His mission—to live as a human being the earth—is accomplished. But you, O God, continue to be all that you have always been, from all eternity. Mary, too, had to keep on with the business of life. She accepted the grace of the Holy Spirit and continued to live out the purpose for which she was created.

At times, parenting takes all of our energy and focus. Yet we need to remember that we are not only parents, but spouses, friends, sons and daughters, members of neighborhoods and communities, co-workers, and more. Above all, we must remember that we are each individuals called to particular service in your name.



Giver of Wisdom, teach us to respond to the needs of those around us. Help us to give to others as we remain faithful to your calling. And when parenting is no longer our primary vocation, show us new ways to use the talents and gifts which you have so graciously given us.

The Fifteenth Station

The Resurrection



You knew it, God. You had tried for centuries to tell your people. Jesus tried to tell them, too. Death isn't the end: It's only the beginning, the beginning of something too wonderful for us to even imagine.

As parents, we know this in little ways. We know it when the fever finally breaks, when yesterday's tears turn into today's laughter, when we forgive and experience forgiveness in return. Yes, we even know it when death interrupts life and we turn to you in faith, looking forward to the time when we will all share new life with you in heaven.



Eternal God, keep our faith strong during our times of trial and suffering. Send people of compassion, love, and vision to walk with us in our hours of need. Cradle us in the palm of your hand until we take the place you have reserved for us in your kingdom.