

CARMELITE COMPANIONS TO PRAYER

Steps of Pain, Steps of Hope

Reflections on the Way of the Cross

by MATTHEW DICKENS



Saint Albert's Press
2012

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First published 2012 by Saint Albert's Press.

Saint Albert's Press
Whitefriars, 35 Tanners Street,
Faversham, Kent, ME13 7JN, United Kingdom
www.carmelite.org
ISBN-10: 0-904849-43-0
ISBN-13: 978-0-904849-43-1

Edited and designed by Johan Bergström-Allen, Carmelite Projects & Publications Office, York.

Typeset by Jakub Kubů, Prague, Czech Republic.
Production coordinated by Karmelitánské nakladatelství s.r.o., Kostelní Vydří 58,
380 01 Dačice, Czech Republic, www.kna.cz.
Printed by ERMAT Praha s.r.o., Czech Republic.

FOREWORD

Many of us were brought up on the *Stations of the Cross* by Saint Alphonsus Liguori. Good as they are, it is also very helpful to read fresh reflections which focus on the mystery of the Passion.

Steps of Pain, Steps of Hope – Reflections on the Way of the Cross by Monsignor Matthew Dickens is a fresh and moving meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Each station reflects something in our own lives, such as love, uncertainty, compassion, moral weakness, death, Eucharist, prayer.

I warmly welcome these *Stations of the Cross* and hope that they will be read and reflected upon by many Christians.

+ Cormac Card. Murphy-O'Connor
Archbishop Emeritus of Westminster

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank those friends who have helped me in the preparation of this work: to Monica Hayes for typing the manuscript and to Anne Kelly for her illustrations; and to my mother, Margaret, who nursed me through the period of convalescence when I wrote these meditations.

Matthew Dickens

INTRODUCTION

The Christian journeys through life hoping and yearning for the Kingdom of God, where all pain, suffering and sin will be healed by the reconciling power of God's love.

This journey can never be an easy or straightforward one, since every human being shares in the Fall of Adam and Eve, the rebellion against God that lies so deep in our hearts.

Jesus' journey to the Crucifixion and beyond it into the Resurrection reveals that our Christian hope is not an empty dream. The risen Lord will lead us to his Kingdom, however frail our faith may be and however heavily our sins may weigh us down.

So we make this Way of the Cross with Jesus, now risen and glorified, renewing our faith in his words: "Come to me, all you who labour and are over-burdened, and I will give you rest" (*Matthew* 11:28).

The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you;
Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

*Pilate asked "But what harm has he done?" But they shouted
all the louder, "Let him be crucified!"*

(Matthew 27:23)

As Procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate was tasked with the smooth-running of this particularly troublesome corner of the Roman Empire. He needed stability and would have it, whatever the cost. Although in his conscience he knew that Jesus was an innocent man, to avoid civil disturbance he handed him over to the crowd and to certain death.

In the exercise of authority, it is often easier to choose the politically expedient solution rather than to stand up for justice and truth. Our minds can find all sorts of ways to justify the evasion of truth. When we do this, we are no better than Pilate washing his hands. We have failed to take responsibility.

Pause

Lord, forgive the abuse of power in whatever form it takes. Give us courage to stand up and be counted, to defend the innocent and marginalised. You will call us to account for what we say and do: strengthen us, then, to proclaim the truth and justice of your Kingdom.

Our Father ... Hail Mary ... Glory be ...



The Second Station: Jesus takes up his Cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you;
Because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

*Carrying his own cross he went out to the Place of the Skull,
or, as it is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.*

(John 19:17)

The Roman method of crucifixion was not only physical torture, it was psychological as well. The condemned person was forced to carry the instrument of his own death through the baying, hysterical mob. There was no mercy here, nothing to ease the mind from the physical suffering to come. Jesus was ridiculed, taunted and spat upon: a man deprived of every human dignity as he began his journey to Golgotha.

We recoil at such inhumanity, such grotesque violence. Yet this cruelty exists among us when a child is neglected or abused; or when an elderly person is terrorised and beaten up. These things bring shame on our society.

Pause

Lord, as we see you accept the instrument of your suffering and death, help us to understand how small our sufferings often are in comparison with yours. We cannot make this journey with you except by carrying our share of your cross. Help us to walk with courage, uniting our suffering with yours. Do not let us vanish into the crowd, but strengthen us to stand and protect those who are most vulnerable.

Our Father ... Hail Mary ... Glory be ...

