

Notre Dame University Australia

Fremantle, Western Australia.

The Way of The Cross.

Good Friday Stations Of The Cross

Readings & Meditations

For Each Station

Adapted from St Mary's Seminary, Mulgrave, Victoria.

With new reflections from Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI www.ronrolheiser.com

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The Seventh Station – Simon Of Cyrene Helps Jesus To Carry The Cross.

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

P: *Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

1st Reader: **Scripture Reading: (Mark 15:21)**

They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross.

Meditation: R Rolheiser OMI - Helping Simon of Cyrene Carry Jesus' Cross (19-3-2006)

"It seems as though through purely earthly accidents we are made responsible for what is heavenly and divine." Karl Rahner wrote those words to describe what happened to Saint Joseph when he was asked by an angel to be the husband to Mary and support her in the birth and raising of Jesus: "Take the child to yourself." Something of God was entrusted into his care, not because he wanted it, planned it, or because he himself was central to the event. He was asked to do something simply because of circumstance, because he was engaged to someone inside a great drama. Moreover, what he was asked to do radically reshaped his life in a way not according to his own choosing.

Rahner's words are just as accurate when applied to Simon of Cyrene, the man conscripted to help Jesus carry his cross. The Passion accounts tell us that, when Jesus was too weak and wearied to carry the cross, a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene was forced to help him carry it.

We aren't given any details as to how this happened other than that Simon was someone who was incidentally there, a "passer-by", a victim of circumstance. This was not something for which he had planned or volunteered. He was merely at the wrong place at the wrong time. No doubt too, being conscripted to help carry the cross was an irritation and something humbling and shameful for him (guilt by association with a condemned criminal). Helping a scorned person carry his or her humiliation in front of a jeering crowd doesn't exactly bring the same reaction as helping Tiger Woods carry his golf clubs.

Whatever Simon's feelings, there can be not doubt that helping Jesus carry his cross was something that was unwanted, unpleasant, and was experienced at the time as an unfairness, bad luck.

Yet, ironically, this would be the most significant thing he would do in his whole life, earning him a place in history and folklore that can only be envied by the most famous of athletes, entertainers, politicians, writers, and religious figures. Simon of Cyrene will forever be famous. Thousands of years from now his name will still be remembered – and for the right reason, he helped carry the cross of Jesus.

There's a wonderful mystical image here, namely, the picture of a man or woman being victimized by circumstance so that he or she, simply by being at a given place at a given time, is

conscripted to do a task that is unwanted, unplanned for, humbling, disruptive of his or her own agenda and dreams, and yet this unwanted thing becomes, in the end, the most important thing he or she will ever do. How does that happen to you? How do you become a Simon of Cyrene, helping Jesus carry his cross?

The cross of Jesus appears in many forms: Whenever you are the one who has to take care of an aging parent because circumstance arranges that you are the one who happens to be living close by; whenever you are the parent of a handicapped child and are asked to do things ordinary parents aren't asked to do; whenever you are the one to whom the emotionally needy person at work chooses to reach out; whenever you are the one whose gentle nature makes it difficult to say no and people take advantage of you; whenever you are the one who is the first at the scene of an accident; whenever you are the one whom the drunk accosts on the side-walk; whenever you are the one who forever finds herself caught up in duties not of your own choosing that always have you around when the less-glamorous work needs to be done; whenever you are the one whose plans and dreams can be sacrificed because everyone else's are deemed more important; whenever you're the one whose life is disrupted by unwanted circumstance, you are Simon of Cyrene, helping Jesus carry the cross.

Simon of Cyrene was not central to the drama or meaning of Jesus' passion and death. He was an unimportant figure who happened to be standing at the edges of things when the drama accidentally enfolded him and forced him to play an un-glamorous, self-effacing, but needed, role. His own agenda and plans had to be sacrificed and his response was, no doubt, less than fully enthusiastic. Yet this unplanned for, conscripted, humble service became the most important thing he ever did, his signature piece, and gave him a place in history beyond the thousands and millions whose place in the drama of life was deemed important.

There's a lesson here: Henri Nouwen once wrote "I used to get upset about all the interruptions to my work until one day I realized that the interruptions were my real work." Pure earthly accidents often do make us responsible for what is divine and they conscript us to our real work.

1st Reader: Thanksgiving

For the help of Simon the reluctant stranger. **R/.**

R/. We give you thanks, O Lord.

For letting us share the burden of your cross. **R/.**

For giving us the strength to lighten the burden of others. **R/.**

2nd Reader: Let Us Pray

Lord Jesus, the cross comes uninvited into our lives.

We do not pray for it; rather we are pressed into service.

Lord, the cross transformed Simon's life: Let it change our lives as well. **Amen.**

The Eighth Station – The Women Of Jerusalem.

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

P: *Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

1st Reader: **Scripture Reading: (Luke 23:27-28)**

Large numbers of people followed Him, and of women too, who mourned and lamented for Him. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children.”

Meditation: R Rolheiser OMI - Caring for Our Hearts (24-09-2006)

"Be careful not to seek yourself in love, you can end up with a broken heart that way."

Therese of Lisieux wrote that. But what exactly does she mean, given that most of the time love will break our hearts anyway even if we're not seeking ourselves?

The heart breaks in different ways. It can break in a way that softens, purifies, and stretches it in love and selflessness, or it can break in way that makes it bitter, jealous, and cold. Heartbreaks can be warm or cold and, either way, the pain will bring us to our knees and that moment will define us, one way or the other. Let's look at an example:

At the end of the Victor Hugo's, *Les Miserables*, there's a particularly poignant scene where Jean Val Jean, now an old man, is praying in a inordinately lonely moment. It's the evening of his adopted daughter's wedding, a celebration he is unable to attend. He is on his knees, painfully alone, physically ill, emotionally drained, and acutely aware that the young woman who has brought so much joy and meaning to his life will now be drawing her life from someone else. Indeed she is dancing and celebrating at this very moment when his grief in losing her is so great.

But, despite the pain, his heart is at peace, joyful even, at the knowledge that the young man she has fallen in love with and is marrying will provide her with the very joy that he, as her father, could not give her. In the moment of his deepest loss, he is able to be happy for her and to withdraw quietly without bitterness into that self- effacement and solitude that loss and aging eventually ask of us all. As his heart is breaking, he blesses and lets go, knowing that what is most important, his daughter's happiness, is assured and that, given the mystery of love, his own relationship to his daughter is ensured by his gracefully letting go.

That's one example of a heart breaking, in a good way. The opposite is the heartbreak we experience when we lose somebody and our hearts freeze over in jealousy and bitterness. What that bitterness and coldness reveal in fact is that, all along, it was not the other's well-being we had been seeking, but our own. The proof is that now, when we can no longer be the primary relationship in that other person's life, we no longer really wish him or her well. Indeed, not so subtle is the wish that a certain unhappiness will befall that other, so that he or she will know that it was a mistake to no longer remain primarily invested in us.

That's the antithesis of the blessing we see at the end of *Les Miserables* where Jean Val Jean, despite the pain of his own loss, can rejoice that someone else can be a more powerful

instrument of happiness than he in his daughter's life. He can be happy because his love is for his daughter, not for himself.

Notice what underlies a murder-suicide. There is a broken heart, but when it breaks a rage spews forth that reveals that, all along, the love has not been for the other but for oneself. The cold truth becomes clear: If I can't be the main person in her life, nobody will be! Better her dead, than without me! What kind of love has this been along the way?

We replicate this in subtle ways: Indeed many of the tears we shed are cried not for others but for ourselves. We may think we're crying about someone else's pain, but, more often than not, what is revealed in our tears is more our own possessiveness than our compassion, more our own brokenness than the wounds over which we think we are weeping. In our tears, just as in love, we are often unconsciously seeking ourselves.

We replicate this too, more than we think, in our good deeds and generosity towards others. We can be generous, big-hearted, self-sacrificing, and helpful, as long as we are assured that we are needed, that we are important, that nobody else can quite provide what we are giving. But, should we one day find out that someone else has arrived who is wanted more than we are, we can very quickly become cool and distant, resentful even, because someone else is providing a help and a happiness instead of us, perhaps healthier and deeper than ours. The resentment we feel betrays that, to a large measure, what we were seeking in our generosity was ourselves, not someone else's happiness.

All of this, of course, can be even more painfully true when we fall in love and experience the heartaches and heartbreaks that go with that.

And so is a doctor's warning, a health warning, a fair warning: "Be careful not to seek yourself in love, you can end up with a broken heart that way."

1st Reader: Thanksgiving

For your compassion in your hour of pain. **R/.**

R/. We give you thanks, O Lord.

For your calling us to come to you. **R/.**

For your concern for us despite our failings. **R/.**

2nd Reader: Let Us Pray

Lord Jesus,

help us find the narrow path to salvation.

Help us remain steadfast in faith

no matter what trials may come our way.