

Praying the Stations of the Cross with your kids

If you want to introduce your kids to the very heart of the Christian story, praying the Stations of the Cross (or Way of the Cross) with them is an excellent way to start.

It's an excellent way to introduce them to the story of Jesus' Passion (his suffering and death), breaking it down into discrete pieces that kids can more easily memorize. But the Stations are more than the re-telling of a story: it is a prayerful participation in the event that lies at the heart of Christianity. At its best, the Stations engage kids at a spiritual level.

If the thought of doing the Stations of the Cross with your kids feels like its own special kind of passion, then read on for some family-friendly ideas and strategies.

The History of the Stations

Since the earliest centuries of the Church, Christians have made pilgrimages to Jerusalem in order to retrace the steps of Jesus during his suffering and death (the *Via Dolorosa* or "Way of Sorrow"). Around the fifteenth century, Christians began the practice of prayerfully meditating on the Passion of Christ by reproducing that pilgrimage in miniature in what eventually became known as the Stations of the Cross.

Why meditate on Jesus' suffering? Most people want to avoid suffering, not spend time imagining it! But suffering is a reality that everyone has to deal with in life. In Jesus, God entered into our suffering in order to save us. By walking with Jesus, we join our suffering to his, knowing that he will lead us through it into the new life of the Resurrection.

Today, there are fourteen stations, each of which represents an event during Christ's Passion. Besides the traditional Stations, Pope John Paul II introduced a form of the Stations more closely linked to events recorded in the Scriptures; this form of the Stations is known as the Scriptural Stations of the Cross. Also, the bishops of the Philippines recently introduced a "new" set of stations that turns out to be perfectly suited for younger children who may just be learning the story of Holy Week. Both versions are presented below.

Ways to Do the Stations with Your Family

Here are some ways to pray the Stations of the Cross with your family:

- 1. Find a public service.** Join a public meditation on the Stations of the Cross at a local parish or retreat center; these are most common during Lent and other penitential times.
- 2. Pray the Stations as a family at your parish.** Most Catholic parishes have the Stations of the Cross depicted in pictures or bas relief on the side walls of the nave, or sometimes on the grounds outdoors. Pick a quiet time to visit the church to say the Stations there.
- 3. Pray the Stations at home.** Praying the Stations of the Cross at home offers flexibility and convenience for families with young children. If you go this route, try to round up an illustrated guide or artworks to represent the stations. You can either present each artwork on your prayer table as you pray that Station, or you can post the artworks around your home to make your very own Way of the Cross.

Wiggly, distracted kids? Here are a few strategies for keeping them engaged:

- **Do one station every day** over the course of a couple

weeks.

- **Let them lead.** If they're old enough to read, let kids take on part of the prayer service at each station. Give younger children something to do—holding up the illustration of each station, for instance, or holding the cross at the head of your procession.
- **Use a video.** Search online for Stations of the Cross videos, or check out the excellent video from Catholic Online at the end of this post.

4. Find the guide that fits your family. For a richer experience of the Stations of the Cross, find a meditation guide to deepen your prayer and reflection. [*Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*](#) contains one such guide, but there are literally hundreds in circulation. If you have young children, look for a [*Stations of the Cross*](#) geared toward their age.

Forms of the Stations of the Cross

As the Vatican Way of the Cross website makes clear in some detail, the Stations of the Cross emerged as a private pious practice and have taken on many forms over the years. The most commonly used in the United States are the so-called “traditional” stations (dating to 17th century Spain) and the biblical, or Scriptural, stations. Another form, the so-called “New Way of the Cross,” was introduced by the bishops of the Philippines and is immensely popular there.

The Traditional Stations of the Cross

Here are the Stations of the Cross as they have traditionally been presented from the 17th through the 20th century.

1. Pilate condemns Jesus to die

2. Jesus accepts his cross
3. Jesus falls for the first time
4. Jesus meets his mother, Mary
5. Simon helps carry the cross
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7. Jesus falls for the second time
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls for the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross
14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

The Scriptural Stations of the Cross

In 1991, Pope John Paul II introduced a form of the Stations of the Cross more closely linked to events recorded in the Scriptures. You can use the following outline of the stations to meditate on the Passion, or use one of the many resources available at your parish or online (search “Scriptural Stations of the Cross”). This is the form celebrated every year by the pope, and the Vatican publishes a [guide that you can download](#).

One: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

Read Matthew 26:36-41

Two: Jesus, Betrayed by Judas, is Arrested

Read Mark 14: 43-46

Three: Jesus is Condemned by the Sanhedrin

Read Luke 22: 66-71

Four: Jesus is Denied by Peter

Read Matthew 26: 69-75

Five: Jesus is Judged by Pilate

Read Mark 15: 1-5, 15

Six: Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns

Read John 19: 1-3

Seven: Jesus Bears the Cross

Read John 19: 6, 15-17

Eight: Jesus is Helped by Simon to Carry the Cross

Read Mark 15: 21

Nine: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Luke 23: 27-31

Ten: Jesus is Crucified

Read Luke 23: 33-34

Eleven: Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief

Read Luke 23: 39-43

Twelve: Jesus Speaks to His Mother and the Disciple

Read John 19: 25-27

Thirteen: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Read Luke 23: 44-46

Fourteen: Jesus is Placed in the Tomb

Read Matthew 27: 57-60

The 'New' Stations of the Cross from the Philippines

A third form of the Stations of the Cross was recently introduced by the Catholic bishops in the Philippines. This form of the stations is especially well-suited to children who are just learning the story of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.

- 1. The Last Supper**
- 2. The Agony in Gethsemane**
- 3. Jesus is Condemned to Death**
- 4. Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns**
- 5. Jesus Carries the Cross**
- 6. Jesus Falls under the Weight of the Cross**
- 7. Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross**
- 8. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem**
- 9. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross**
- 10. The Good Thief**
- 11. Mary and John at the Foot of the Cross**
- 12. Jesus Dies on the Cross**
- 13. Jesus is Laid in the Tomb**
- 14. Jesus Rises from Death**

Learn more

- [Stations of the Cross at the USCCB](#): A brief explanation, and several options for praying the

stations, including an audio version.