



The Physical Passion of our Lord on the Tau Cross Twelve Stations

Introduction

The “Stations of the Tau Cross” is an adaption of a written work, “A Physician Analyzes the Crucifixion” by Dr. C. Truman Davis with assistance from the work of his contemporary colleague, Dr. Pierre Barbet, a French surgeon who has done exhaustive historical and experimental research on the subject of Christ’s crucifixion. It also includes excerpts from the “30 Day Prayer to Mary.” Gospel excerpts and entries by Dennis Mallon, OFS.

The stations will depict the physical aspects of the passion and suffering of Jesus, just as St. Francis may have visualized when he received the stigmata. The intimate and devoted relationship Francis had with Christ would have undoubtedly left him with the experience of following Christ’s every step during his passion.

These stations follow Christ from the Garden of Gethsemane, through his trial, his scourging, his path along the Via Dolorosa, and end at his last dying hours on the cross.

Doctor Davis reports: “In the past we may have taken the crucifixion of our Lord more or less for granted and had grown callous to it’s horror by a too-easy familiarity with the grim details — and a too distant friendship with Him.

Thus, we will see a glimpse of the epitome of evil which man can exhibit toward man — and toward God. This is not a pretty sight and is apt to leave us despondent and depressed. However, we can be grateful that we have a glimpse of the infinite mercy of God toward man — the miracle of the atonement and the expectation of eternal life.

The physiological and anatomical aspects of our Lord’s passion we can examine in some detail . . . what did the body of Jesus of Nazareth actually endure during those hours of torture?” Dr. C. Truman Davis



Face of Christ
on the Shroud of Turin

The physical passion of Christ begins in the Garden of Gethsemane

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The First Station

Jesus, is overwhelmed in the Garden of Gethsemane

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus asks his eternal Father to remove from him, if possible, the bitter chalice of his future passion.

“And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” (Luke 22:44)

This phenomenon of hematidrosis, or bloody sweat is where, under great emotional stress, the tiny capillaries in his sweat glands broke causing the mixing of his blood with his sweat.

After asking his disciples, three times, to pray with him for just one hour, Jesus, with a grieving heart is left alone to pray to his heavenly Father. The anticipation of what he was to face left him with bitter tears and the feeling of acceptance of what was dreadful but inevitable.

Reflection: Pray with me for one hour.

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

T

Second Station

His Blessed Mother accompanies him to face his accuser Judas
and the soldiers who came to arrest him

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

After his agony in the garden he is betrayed by Judas and taken by soldiers and guards of the chief priests to be tried by the Sanhedrin. His mother Mary, with dolorous steps accompanies him to the shocking theatre of his sufferings and death.

Reflection: Jesus' betrayal ... His mother's suffering ...

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Third Station

Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

In the middle of the night, Jesus who is accused of blasphemy by his excusers is brought before the Sanhedrin, first to Annas the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest. When questioned by the high priest he said, *“I have spoken openly to the world ...”* then remaining silent, one of the temple guards strikes Jesus across the face saying, *“Is this the way you answer the high priest.”* Jesus answered him *“If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong ... But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?”* This is where the first physical trauma is inflicted. Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Reflection: Jesus faces his accusers ... Our trials and tribulations ...

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Fourth Station

Jesus faces Pontius Pilate the Procurator of Judea

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

In the early morning Jesus, battered and bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night is taken across Jerusalem to the Praetorium of the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate. It was then, in response to the cries of the mob, that Pilate ordered Bar-Abbas (Barabbas) the insurrectionist released and condemned Jesus to scourging and crucifixion. Interestingly, Barabbas's full name was Jeshua Barabbas, in English = Jesus, Son of the Father. Pilate's question to the crowd, *“which one should I release ...”* [this] *Jesus, Son of the Father* or [that] *Jesus, Son of the Father, (who is called Christ)?*

Pilate originally ordered Jesus scourged as his full punishment and that the death sentence by crucifixion came only in response to the taunting of the mob. Jesus bears his unjust sentence, scoffs, ignominies and false accusations with holy patience,

Reflection: Patience, in the time of trial.

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Fifth Station

Jesus is stripped of his seamless garment

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus is stripped and his hands tied to a post above his head. It is doubtful whether the Romans made any attempt to follow the Jewish law in this matter of scourging. The Jews had an ancient law prohibiting more than forty lashes. The Pharisees, always making sure that the law was strictly kept, insisted that only thirty-nine lashes be given. (In case of a miscount, they were sure of remaining within the law).

The Roman legionnaire steps forward with the flagrum (or flagellum), a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each. The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through his skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in his underlying muscles.

The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally his skin on his back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the Jesus is near death, the beating is finally stopped.

Reflection: It is reasonable to think that an ordinary man would die under these circumstances. But Jesus was not an ordinary man.

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Sixth Station

Jesus is crowned with thorns

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Blood trickled from his royal and sacred head when he was pierced with the crown of thorns and when he was struck with his scepter of a reed.

Half-fainting Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with his own blood. The Roman soldiers see a great joke in the provincial Jew claiming to be a King. They throw a robe across his shoulders and place a stick in his hand for a scepter. They still need a crown to make their travesty complete. A small bundle of flexible branches of long thorns (Acacia thorns, commonly used for

firewood) are plaited into the shape of a crown and pressed into his scalp. Again there is copious bleeding (the scalp being one of the most vascular areas of the body). After mocking him and striking him across the face, the soldiers take the stick from his hand and strike him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into his scalp. Finally, they tire of their sadistic sport and the robe is torn from his back.

His robe had already become adherent to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, and its removal, like a careless removal of a surgical bandage, causes excruciating pain ... almost as though he were being whipped again — his wounds again begin to bleed.

Reflection: The physical and emotional pain of the crown of thorns.

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Seventh Station

Jesus is made to carry his cross

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

In deference to Jewish custom, the Romans soldiers return his garments and a heavy patibulum, or the cross beam, the top of the cross, is tied across his shoulders, (One who was condemned to death by crucifixion was called patibulatus = one who carries the patibulum). The upright post, or stipes, was fixed in the ground at the site of execution. The stipes and patibulum together is what makes the image of a “Tau Cross”. The procession of the condemned begins — Jesus and two thieves together with the detail of Roman soldiers, headed by a centurion begin their slow journey along the Via Dolorosa. A titulus, or small sign, stating his crime is carried at the front of the procession and will later be nailed to the cross above his head. The titulus over Jesus’ head reads *“Jesus of Nazareth, The King of The Jews.”*

Reflection: Jesus’ struggles to carry his cross and reach the “Place of the skull,” Golgotha.

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Eight Station

Jesus falls the first time
and Simon of Cyrene is asked to carry the patibulum

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

In spite of his efforts to walk erect, the weight of the heavy wooden beam or patibulum, which weighs about 110 pounds, and the shock produced by copious blood loss, is too much — He stumbles and falls for the first time. He will fall again before he reaches Golgotha.

The rough wood of the beam gouges into the lacerated skin and muscles of his shoulders. He tries to rise, but his muscles have been pushed beyond their endurance.

The centurion, anxious to get on with the crucifixion, selects a stalwart North African onlooker, Simon of Cyrene, to carry his cross. Jesus follows Simon, still bleeding and sweating the cold, clammy sweat of shock.

The Fortress Antonia to Golgotha is a 650 yard journey. After Jesus falls two more times his journey is finally completed.

Reflection: Jesus falls because of the pain and weakness of his body.

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Ninth Station

Jesus is striped of his garment and nailed to the patibulum

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Except for a loin cloth which is allowed the Jews, the crucifixion begins. Jesus is offered wine mixed with Myrrh, a mild analgesic mixture. He refuses to drink. Simon is ordered to place the patibulum on the ground and Jesus is quickly thrown backward with his shoulders against the wood. Jesus suffers excruciating torment when his hands are fastened with huge nails to the patibulum.

(The “Latin Cross” is a cross that the upright portion of the cross (or stipes) has the cross-arm (or patibulum) attached two or three feet below its top — this is what we commonly think of today as the classical form of the cross) however, the common form used in our Lord's day was the “Tau” cross, shaped like the Greek letter Tau or like our letter T. In this cross his hands are nailed to the patibulum then the patibulum placed in a notch at the top of the stipes). The cross illustrated at the top of the first page of this article was drawn by St. Francis in a blessing he sent to brother Leo.

The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. (The wrist was considered part of the hand) He drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexion and movement.

The patibulum with Jesus nailed to it is then lifted into place at the top of the stipes and the titulus reading, *“Jesus of Nazareth, The King of The Jews”* is nailed in place. Thus the scene is that of a Tau cross on which Jesus is crucified. The cross that St. Francis believed was authentic.

The left foot then is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arches of the feet against the stipes, leaving the knees moderately flexed. Jesus is now crucified.

As he slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrist, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along his fingers and up his arms and explodes in his brain — the nails in the wrist are putting pressure on the median nerves. As He pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places his full

weight on the nail through his feet. Again, there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of his feet. looking down at the Roman soldiers casting lots for his garments he says *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

His mercy is extended to the good thief, before he commends his precious soul and spirit into the hands of his eternal Father. When the good thief says, *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”* Jesus replies, *“Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

Reflection: Jesus’ boundless gift of forgiveness.

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Tenth Station

Hours of limitless pain on the Tau cross

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, *“Woman, here is your son.”* Then Jesus looking down at the grief-stricken disciple, John, he says, *“Here is your mother.”*

At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over his muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain and with these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward. Hanging by his arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the inter-costal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise himself in order to exhale and get one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in his lungs and in the blood stream and cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen.

Jesus has endured cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back against the rough timber (stipes); then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress his heart.

Reflection: *“Woman, here is your son.”* and to John, *“Here is your mother.”*

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Eleventh Station

It is now almost over
his mission of atonement has been completed

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Finally he can allow his body to die. With one last surge of strength, he once again presses his torn feet against the nail, straightens his legs, takes a deeper breath, and utters a cry, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*"

The loss of tissue fluids has reaches a critical level — his compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick sluggish blood into his tissues — his tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. His markedly dehydrated tissues sends a flood of stimuli to his brain.

Jesus gasps and cries, "*I thirst.*" Let us remember another verse from the prophetic 22nd Psalm: *My mouth is dried up like a potsherd and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.*"

A sponge soaked in Posca, the cheap, sour wine which is the staple drink of the Roman Legionnaires, is lifted to his lips. His body is now in extremis[t], and he can feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues. This realization brings out his words — possibly little more than a tortured whisper. "*It is finished.*"

During his ignominious crucifixion on the cross, nature itself is thrown into convulsions, witnessed by many — the bursting of rocks, rending of the veil of the temple, the earthquake and the darkness of the sun and moon.

Reflection: "It is finished."

Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be to the Father

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Twelfth Station

Jesus is pierced with a lance

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

All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

The common method of ending a crucifixion was by crurifracture, the breaking of the bones of the legs. This would have prevented Jesus from pushing himself upward, the tension could not be relieved from the muscle of the chest, and rapid suffocation would have occurred. The legs of the two thieves were broken, but when they came to Jesus they saw that this was unnecessary.

These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: *"Not one of his bones will be broken,"* (John 19:36) and in (Exodus 12:46), "[The lamb] "... must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones."

(During the time of Exodus, "departure," the Paschal Lamb had to be completely intact to include that no bones could be broken before or after its slaughter. The non-breaking of Jesus' legs further pointed to his being the True Lamb of God — True Paschal Lamb — True Savior of the World presaged by his very name and foreshadowed in the Passover ritual).

Apparently to make sure of death, the legionnaire drove his lance through the fifth inter-space between the ribs of Jesus, upward through his pericardium and into his heart. The 34th verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel of John; *"one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water."* Thus there was an escape of watery fluid from the sac surrounding his heart and blood from the interior of the heart. There is rather conclusive post-mortem evidence that our Lord died, not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation but of heart failure due to shock and constriction of his heart by fluid in the pericardium.

After his death he was taken down from the cross and placed in the arms of his mother — with grieving heart she held him close.

In order that the Sabbath be not profaned, the Jews asked that Jesus and the condemned men be dispatched and removed from their crosses.

Reflection: His grace and mercy flows to us.

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Ref. Entries are, in part, from "A Physician Analyzes the Crucifixion" by Dr. C. Truman Davis, with assistance from his contemporary colleague, Dr. Pierre Barbet.

Ref. Scripture entries: New International Version.

Ref. Entries from the "30 Day Prayer to Mary."
<http://www.prayerbook.com/Devotions/BVM/thirty.htm>

Ref. Entries by Dennis Mallon, OFS, initiator of the "Stations of the Tau Cross" with assistance from Deacon Dennis A. Arcand, OFS.

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