



Ask, Father James:

“Why do we pray the Stations of the Cross during Lent and what are the spiritual benefits?”

The Gospel says; "They took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha" (John 19:17). The Stations of the Cross or *Via Crucis* (Way of the Cross) is a devotional practice mostly done during Lent inside a church or outdoors, beginning on Ash Wednesday through Good Friday. It is a way of following Jesus on the walk to Calvary—carrying his own cross. At each of the 14 stations we stopped, prayed, and sing a verse of the “*Stabat Mater*,” a 13th-century hymn to Mary that tells the Passion story from the perspective of the Sorrowful Mother of Jesus.

Back in the early Church, Christians would make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to retrace the steps of Jesus on His way to the cross. As the Church expanded to the ends of the world such pilgrimages became unrealistic for many people and thus they began to retrace the steps of Jesus on His way to the cross by reflecting on pictures that depicted those scenes and they place those pictures at various stations around their town or around their church and they walked the way of Jesus with His Cross. This devotional practice was a public procession in many places and would take place in streets and along pathways, re-enacting and prayerfully remembering the way Jesus passed to go to his Passion and death. Typically the route involves stopping and praying and connecting the sufferings of Christ during his passion with our suffering and the suffering of our brothers and sisters all around the world today.

In our church here, we call upon different groups within the parish to lead us through the stations. All parishioners are encouraged to participate. By participating we engage in theological reflection on the mysteries of the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It brings alive for us the Lenten spirituality and songs like; "When I survey the wondrous cross." Participation offers great spiritual benefit called plenary indulgence. A Plenary indulgence is granted to those who piously make the Way of the Cross, which consists of fourteen stations and pious readings to which some vocal prayers are added to the pious meditation on the Passion and Death of the Lord and a movement from one station to the next is required except for those who are "impeded."

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