

Incarnate Word Missionaries
Stations of the Cross
Annual Retreat March 2010

I. Jesus is condemned to death.

Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus called the Messiah?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" But he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted louder, "Let him be crucified!" Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified. –Matthew 27:22-23, 26

And the woman married and conceived children, seeking to bring life into the world and raise children in love. But her husband began to drink. He continued to drink and lie to the point where he could not function as a husband or father. The woman was then left with the cross that so many Mexican women were given to bear: she could remain silent and endure the abuse of her husband, or she could reach out for help only to be turned away and rejected by a society that expected women to remain devoted to their husbands, regardless of the reality. She would continue to love and care for her children, but without the support or companionship of her husband, and always being subjected to the judgment of her family and community.

II. Jesus carries his cross.

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews." --John 19:16-17, 19

During a youth group session, a 14 year old girl named Abby was asked what she would change about her life if she could. "Nada," she said shrugging, an answer that really surprised me a few weeks later. I visited her house for the first time and learned that she, her sister and grandmother were sharing what is basically a large storage closet. Despite a really bad living situation, Abby does not dwell on it (at least outwardly) and instead tries to better herself and avoid it by getting involved in parish activities, Bible class, English lessons, and the excitement of her quinceañeros. She is someone carrying a heavy cross but she has accepted that because it can't be removed right now, she will keep going in spite of it.

III. Jesus falls the first time.

Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his scars, we were healed. –Isaiah 53:4-5

The sick and dying often believe that their illness is God's punishment for their past sins and indiscretions. How weak their faith when they need God's blessing the most. In our mission, we have the privilege to remind them that Jesus Christ suffered for us all; and in their suffering, their sins are forgiven, and not as punishment. It is a difficult message to communicate, but often brings relief to their anguish of the soul.

IV. Jesus meets his mother.

The foe stretched out his hand to all her treasures. "At this I weep, my eyes run with tears. Come, all you who pass by the way, look and see whether there is any suffering like my suffering. –Lamentations 1:10, 16, 12

Doña Pricy was a mother of four children. Two of the children lived into adulthood, but with the brain capacity of a one-and-a-half and a three-year old. She dedicated most of her life to caring for her children, accepting them as they were, and loving them unconditionally. Now, Doña Pricy lives alone – she visits sick people in their homes and brings communion to them – the actual body of Christ as well as that loving and accepting motherly presence. She experiences the deep sorrow of a mother grieving her beloved children, but trusts that one day, she will be reunited with them.

V. Jesus is helped by Simon.

They pressed into service a passerby, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. –Mark 15:21

We are Jesus suffering... but we are also Simon pressed into helping at sometimes inopportune times.

The parish table is a constant space for walking with someone as they carry their burden. Padre opens his house to each and every way-laid member. One day he encountered a man outside the parish, reeking of marijuana and with eyes blood-shot, one of which rolled up into his head. Father invited this person to the table without reservation and fed him what was probably his most complete meal in weeks. Father is a powerful example of Simon in my life. He realizes that sometimes you can't completely change the outcome, but you can help along the way.

VI. Jesus' face is wiped by Veronica.

Even as many were amazed at him—so marred was his look beyond that of man, and his appearance beyond that of mortals. There was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him. He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, one of those from whom men hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem. --Isaiah 52:14, 53:2-3

At work one day when I received some difficult news, I held strong for a while with people saying I was strong and then one other teacher, who apparently found out as well, had my class pray for me, my family and my grandma. Then I started crying. The kids

kept coming up to me, giving me hugs. Israel, a four year old boy, came up to me, help my hand and wiped the tears from my eyes/cheeks and said “Tranquilo, Lisa, tranquilo,” and then went back to learning. But he didn’t stop there; after that class ended he came back to me, once I had more control again, held my hand and made sure I was okay. And the next few days/week he asked how my Grandma was. “Where can I find God in this situation?” Melissa had asked me. “Israel!”

VII. Jesus falls the second time.

We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; but the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all. Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth. Smitten for the sin of his people. –Isaiah 53:6-7, 8

As a newly arrived missionary, a woman asked if she could talk to me after mass. In a small chapel she immediately began crying and began to tell me about raising her four grandchildren by herself; one had recently had a baby (at 15 years old), and two others often arrived home high from acutane or fought in the street. After a brief period of giving reading lessons to the younger drug addict (he stopped coming to classes and disappeared when he knew I was coming), I realized that my real mission work was supporting Cleo, who desperately needed an outlet for all her conflict. As we continued our weekly breakfasts, I am impressed by her ability to get up every time she falls. She still cries often, but every time she dries her tears and continues on, loving her “children” and caring for them the best she can... even when they arrive home high.

VIII. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem.

A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children. If these things are done when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? --Luke 23:27-28, 31

Neddy is a twenty-something year old woman who was left severely paralyzed by a spinal chord injury gone wrong. Though she can barely move, she speaks a little and can think normally. She lives with other severely ill women who lack families, including a skinny 19-year old girl named Corazón who can walk and talk a little but has the mental capacity of a two year old. After knowing neddy for several months, she became attached to me and is always excited when I enter the room. When I arrived to work one day, Corazón grabbed me, wrapped her arms around me and led me to Neddy’s bed to sit with her, knowing it would make her happy. The patients I work with have no concept of world suffering outside the experiences in their house, and no ability to reflect on Jesus’ suffering. Yet God has given them the ability to love, to recognize love, and to look for ways to serve others.

IX. Jesus falls the third time.

Who is this that comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments, from Bozrah—This one arrayed in majesty, marching in the greatness of his strength? ... Why is your apparel red, and your garments like those of the wine presser? “The wine press I have trodden alone, and of my people there was no one with me. I looked about, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that there was no one to lend support; so my own arm brought about the victory.” --Isaiah 63:1-3, 5

For the young mother at the Guarderia with three children by the same drug-addicted man, who has been written off as an unfit, uneducated mother. That she may pass her struggles as a teenage mother and find a way to provide for her children. And for her children, that they may be provided the tools to grow and succeed.

X. Jesus is stripped of his garments.

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but this tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. So they said to one another, “Let’s not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be,” in order that the passage of scripture might be fulfilled [that says]: “They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots.” --John 19:23-24

A family bought their house in a seemingly legal purchase. Many years later the seller’s son claimed the property was not sold. Since the family did not have sufficient papers proving legal ownership, the family was kicked out of their house. We came upon them with the little clothes and furniture they had left, living in the Avenue several blocks from the missionary house. They had been stripped of both belongings and dignity due to an unjust system.

XI. Jesus is nailed to the cross.

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. –Luke 23:33-34

Heavenly Father, I pray to you for our fellow human beings who have been and continue to be condemned by society (through the denial of their human rights). Please help us to recognize that by labeling and stigmatizing individuals and/or groups of people, we too are condemning them to death. I offer this prayer especially for those who are living with HIV or AIDS. God, please open our hearts and minds to their struggle for acceptance in our society and greater world. Enable us to be compassionate and not to judge. Teach us to understand that whatever led to their current health status is not for us to judge. They, like us, are your children and you are the supreme judge for all of us. Help us to see that by violating human rights (through moral judgment, harsh words, denying access to

health facilities and health education) concerning HIV/AIDS we are condemning millions to death through this epidemic.

XII. Jesus dies on the cross.

There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit. –John 19:29-30

The time just before death is truly precious time. I remember entering a house of a middle-aged woman with terminal cancer. The family was present – some were talking with their mother and grandmother, others were preparing food for all the family that was present, others were continuing to work because time does not stop just because someone is sick. People were in various stages of grieving the fact that soon this woman would die. We sang with the family that day, because she loved to sing. It was a very peaceful feeling that entered the room that day. The night before she died, we sang with her at the clinic one song that had been particularly helpful that day with her family... "Señor, me has mirado a los ojos, sonriendo, has dicho mi nombre. En la arena, he dejado mi barca. Junto a ti, buscaré otro mar..."

XIII. Jesus is taken down from the cross.

They shall look on him whom they have thrust through, and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son, and they shall grieve over him as one grieves over a first-born. On that day, the mourning in Jerusalem shall be great. On that day, there shall be open a fountain to purify from sin and uncleanness. –Zechariah 12:10, 11; 13:1

By the time we got to the house the man had just died. We were met with an overwhelming experience of sadness, as his sons, daughters, wife, siblings and grandchildren grieved his death. All we could do was accompany them in their pain and try to embrace our hope and faith in Christ's resurrection.

XIV. Jesus is laid in the tomb.

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, secretly a disciple of Jesus for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. And Pilate permitted it. So he came and took his body. Nicodemus, the one who had first come to him at night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom. Now in the place where he had been crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried. So they laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day; for the tomb was close by. –John 19:38-42

The grandfather of a clinic employee died suddenly at home in bed. We rushed to the home to say prayers, and to anoint the body with oils. We knelt with the family at the bedside – the rosary gave them something to hold on to, as the shock set in. The funeral

service company arrived, and those who managed to get there in time saw the body removed. The funeral was held the next day – as is the custom. No embalming – and no time to notify all family.