Mary takes us through the Stations of the Cross

Join Mary for a reflection on the Stations, as she guides us through each Station
through her eyes then, and through her eyes now.

The First Station: Jesus is condemned to die.

My Son stood before Pilate as an innocent man. But, throughout his life he entered more and more deeply into the condition of sinful flesh. It was not enough that he was born of a human mother like me. He grew up in obscurity in Nazareth. And, they always judged him there. They always judged that it wasn't right that he was conceived before Joseph and I were married. Even when he began his public ministry, the religious leaders didn't accept him. His reflection of God didn't fit their self-serving picture of God. Finally, his own followers abandoned him. I never imagined he would have to experience solidarity with prisoners beaten and tortured, but he did. I'll never forget the blood he shed and the pain he experienced at the hands of the Roman guards. Jesus began this journey by becoming one with every powerless person, mocked and made fun of by others. He did nothing that deserves capital punishment, or the abuse he was given.

His "yes" – his surrender to God's will - ultimately destroyed the power of sin and death. While he was growing up, I told him many times how I had been graced to say "let it be done to me, according to your word." I never could have imagined that this would be the sword that would ultimately pass through my heart: to watch my Son say Yes to God, so completely and fully, for the salvation of the world.

Now that he is condemned to death, reflect with me on each station of his journey – entering more and more completely into our humanity and death itself. Let us ask for God's grace to be with him and to accompany him on his journey to more fully understand it and be more fully grateful for its gift.

The Second Station: Jesus Carries His Cross.

My Son was forced to carry the cross on which he would be nailed, ridiculed and executed. We must pause here to remember what it represents. For this journey, he takes up the weight of all of our

crosses, all of our senseless suffering, and the weight of all of the sin in the world – past, present and future. Each step he took cut deeply into his already battered shoulders. I couldn't believe he could manage even a few steps.

We can look back now and remember that this is all for us. Each of us can say it was "for me." As we imagine each step he takes, we can pause now to say "thank you," in our own words, deep in our hearts.

The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time.

I can barely express to you what it was like to see my Son fall under the weight of that cross. Everything within me wanted to make them stop. This was already too much. But, there was nothing I could do but watch him lay on the ground.

Of course, I now know that if he was to enter completely into our lives, he would have to surrender to the crushing weight of the burdens so many in their world suffer. All the people of the earth who are overcome by unfair burdens will always know that, laying there on the ground, Jesus knew and would always understand their powerlessness. Unable to get himself up, he entered into and forever understands our fatigue and whatever unfairly defeats us.

I understand your sorrow and feeling of guilt at reflecting upon my Son's way to Calvary. Please, just be grateful. My Son simply wants us to remember how he loved then and loves us now. This is all about his mercy and the gift of life we have in him.

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother.

As I pushed and shoved to move through the crowds to be as close to my Son as I could, we came to a place in the road where he stopped. He saw me. And we looked into each other's eyes. I didn't want him to see my tears or know my pain, but I long ago accepted how thoroughly he knew me. The love from my heart poured out in the only embrace I could give him. My lips quietly said the prayer he taught us: "Father, may your Kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." He nodded so slightly, took a deep breath and moved on up the hill. The sword passing through my heart had blessed his mission, and I knew he knew it.

Thank him with me, even now, that he took up that mission for us. Thank him that he has tasted the separation and loss that every person in the world knows who has lost a loved one. And, he has understood the heart of every loving mother who grieves at the suffering of her children. He has become so completely one with us.

The Fifth Station: Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross.

Now reflect with me on what it must have been like for my Son to simply not be able to carry the cross any further alone. I was so relieved that he was getting help at the time, even though my heart went out to Simon who was drawn into Jesus' journey.

As we look back, we can give thanks that Jesus entered into our life, even in this gesture of help. Jesus came to know the experience of all of us who must depend upon others, who can't make it alone. Even in this final journey, Jesus would not even have the satisfaction of being able to do this on his own.

Let's pause for a moment to express to him now, whatever is in our hearts.

The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus.

I can't describe his face, with the blood and the sweat, and the bruises and swelling from the beatings. As a mother, I can hardly tell you that there was even spit on his face. It was the face of solidarity with all who have ever experienced abuse and violence.
Then, out of the crowd came a woman whose compassion for my Son was so great that she pushed passed the Roman soldiers and wiped his face with her veil. Oh, how I loved her for that. The look between them touched me deeply. His clean face, for a moment, revealed the loving face of the Son I loved.

As he smiled at the woman and continued on the journey, those of us nearby looked at her veil and saw the gift he gave her. There on her veil was a stunning likeness, a true icon of the cost of his sacrifice and the depth of his solidarity with all who suffer. This image is his gift to us forever, to always contemplate his likeness, his union with us in our worst rejection and suffering.

As you remember with me how his face was so covered with

punishment and violence, let us give thanks for his solidarity with us in every aspect of our lives.

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time.

When my Son fell the second time, my heart sank as he seemed to just lose control and stumble and crumble to the ground. The way he fell to his knees on the hard stones, I could feel the jarring pain through my whole body. Helpless to help him, I again wondered if he could make it.

As I look back with you today, I imagine that this fall placed him together with people with disabilities, with people suffering from all kinds of physical diseases that weaken them, and with all who are aging and must confront the limits of their bodies. My prayer is that all God's people who know the suffering of these disabilities might know that they can always turn to my Son for understanding and comfort.

With gratitude in our hearts, we take a few moments to find the words to express our feelings to him.

The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem.

This moving scene filled my mother's heart with even more love for him. As I had seen him comfort so many groups of people during his life, now he comforts this group of women and children in Jerusalem. They aren't here to condemn him. What a remarkable meeting. They try to comfort him, as he looks on them with love and compassion. During his ministry he had come to grieve for Jerusalem. Now, my son gives them a special mission. Soon they would understand that this suffering they witnessed so closely was for them. Soon they would witness the suffering of Jerusalem and have their chance to bring their compassion and faith to their children and the people of their city.

It is good to reflect here, with him, on the mission each of us has that can be shaped by this encounter with his suffering, death and resurrection "for me." Thank him for this brief time to recall the gift we have received.

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time.

I will always remember this final fall. Having endured such a beating and having lost so much blood, my son simply collapses. I saw him lay

there on the ground and I thought he was dead. His arms spread out and his face in the dirt, Jesus found himself in solidarity with all who fall in any way.

Contemplating how the soldiers roughly pulled Jesus up and made him take the last steps to Calvary, take a few moments to speak with him, expressing your gratitude for his understanding for every weakness or failure you have ever experienced.

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped.

The sword passed through my heart again to watch my son so violated this way. They intended to shame him even more by executing him naked. They simply had to strip him of any dignity a human being could have left. I remember looking at this body I had bathed and cared for, now with all his wounds re-opened and bleeding, so exposed for everyone to see. Now I see all the people in the world who are vulnerable and without any defense, all those whose dignity is violated, and I see this act of stripping as placing my son so completely with those who suffer. His incarnation was about to be complete.

Please pause to express what is in your heart and to give him thanks that this is all so that you might be free from the power of sin and death.

The Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross.

Today, as I remember him lying on the cross, with his arms outstretched, it is the sound of the hammer hitting the nails that stays with me. I remember pulling the first of many wood splinters from his fingers as a child working in Joseph's shop. Against his precious hands and wrists, that touched and healed so many, a nail was placed, and a hammer pounded the nail through his flesh and into the wood of the cross. The sound – metal against metal – that ring – and the look on his face – the spasm of his whole body – I will never forget. Then, the other hand and finally his feet are nailed to the cross.

Spend some time with him now, imagining how they lifted him up on the cross, nailed there, that you might be free.

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross.

The sword of helplessness split my heart in two as I watched him struggle to breathe, pulling himself up to let air out of his lungs. With incredible courage and compassion, he spoke of mercy and love. There on that cross he gave me to John, and gave me to the Spirit filled Church that would be born on Pentecost. Then, after he gave himself into God's hands one last time, he took his last breath and he died. It is unforgettable to watch life leave the body of someone you love.

At the foot of his cross today, listen to my son tell you of his love for you. Speak to him from your heart.

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus Is Taken Down From The Cross.

We waited what seemed like a long time before we had permission to take his lifeless body off that cross. And, it took so long to remove the nails, and to finally lower his body to the ground. Someone removed that horrible crown of thorns from his head. They pulled his hair back and wiped his face clean before letting me hold his body one last time. He had been given to me for only a brief time. When he left home three years before, I was so proud of him and excited to experience what God would do through him. There at the foot of the cross, my heart torn by grief, but always trusting in God's promise, I asked only to be God's servant for what was ahead. After the Ascension, when we would gather in homes for the Breaking of the Bread, I again held his broken body in my hands, now full of consolation that his promise was fulfilled: he would always be with us.

Let yourself join me in receiving this mystery of the death of Jesus being so real and complete. Knowing the rest of the story, join me in speaking with him, heart to heart, about our gratitude for how he has transformed the power of death.

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid In The Tomb.

No mother should ever have to bury a child. Just a short time before this day, Jesus looked into Lazarus' tomb. He must have known he would be laid in a tomb like that soon. And when he thanked God for hearing his prayer, he must have known that the Father who sent him would give him life that would never die. In just a few days, this tomb

would be empty and forever a sign of Jesus' surrender to the forces of sin and death, for us.

As we picture this scene, let us place the image of the empty tomb before our eyes. Whenever you are tempted to stand outside any tomb and grieve, remember this empty tomb and know that, through the eyes of faith, all tombs are empty. Today, join me in giving him thanks. Join me in signing ourselves with the sign of his cross, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.