

The Last Words of Christ in the Way of the Cross

A Sequence for Voices

By Thomas J. Gardiner

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DEDICATION

For Anne

STORY OF THE PLAY

The 14 Stations of the Cross are brilliantly re-interpreted for modern audiences. Each Station is written to be whole in and of itself, and thus different Stations may or may not be used in each production. The goal of this play is to *"Help us to share in the Passion of our Savior, to sense how those twisted streets of Jerusalem run through the streets of Los Angeles and Calcutta. To intuit how the wood that made the cross may buttress the fragile walls of our own homes, to feel how the steel that made the nails may make bullets and bayonets. To teach us to somehow make sense of our suffering, the way You make the suffering of Our Lord meaningful. To put our lives and ourselves together the way You put those sacred events together."* This work has been praised by clergy and performed in churches around the country. A man and a woman are the minimum cast; if more speakers are available, the parts should be distributed appropriately, changing at each station. About 30 minutes if performed in its entirety.

**THE LAST WORDS OF CHRIST
IN THE WAY OF THE CROSS**

(The room or auditorium is darkened, except for the LIGHTS on the lecterns in front of the room or at the edge of the stage. The SPEAKERS enter and take their places at the lecterns. A man and a woman are the minimum cast; if more speakers are available, the parts should be distributed appropriately, changing at each station. "All" refers to all the men and women in the cast, who should speak those lines in unison.)

WOMAN: O Holy Spirit, You whose enveloping wings
Embrace the outermost edges of the universe
And touch the innermost center of our selves
With gentle understanding, hear our prayer.

MAN: You are the Meaning under all the meanings
We hear in words or read in the world's events.

WOMAN: Help us to share in the Passion of our Savior,

MAN: To sense how those twisted streets of Jerusalem
Run through the streets of New York and Los Angeles,
Calcutta and Sarajevo, Berlin and Paris and Rio,

WOMAN: To intuit how the wood that made the cross
May buttress the fragile walls of our own homes,
To feel how the steel that made the nails
May make bullets and switchblades, bayonets and bombs,

MAN: To guess how the Roman administrator Pilate
May reappear an administrator anywhere
When we disregard Your guidance;

ALL: And to confess
That part of us was in the crowd that rejected You,
That let You be led away.

WOMAN: Dear Holy Spirit,
Teach us to somehow make sense of our suffering,
The way You make the suffering of Our Lord
Meaningful, to put our lives and ourselves together
The way You put those sacred events together,

ALL: And to make Our Lord's reunion with His Father
And with us, His chastened followers, a joyful one.

FIRST STATION

WOMAN: The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death.

MAN: She got pale and faint coming from the abortion clinic,
Big beads of cold sweat strung across her forehead.

I knew the place was private, first-rate doctors,
And what else should she do, raise an unwanted child?

WOMAN: I'll be okay, she said, lying down.

MAN: It's not as if I left her there to die. *(Pause.)*

WOMAN: The prison is really crowded, the place is filthy,
But at least they guarantee them three meals a day.

They're not running rehabilitation programs,
But I said I'd visit him, if I can find the time.

It's much too far to travel very often,
But it's not as if I left him there to die. *(Pause.)*

MAN: She had what they called "an identity crisis" in college,
And after she flunked all her courses they sent her home.

She didn't keep herself clean and she ate like an animal.
She spent all her time just sitting in her room.

The mental hospital is not very pretty,
But it's not as if I left her there to die.

WOMAN: When he got fired the last time, that was it.
I don't care if it wasn't his fault or not.

I know what the Church says about divorce,
But I have my own career to think of, too.
He may have been depressed when I left before,
But it's not as if I left him there to die.

MAN: The doctor said it wasn't a normal baby,
But she never even began to develop normally.
Just walking in the street with her was embarrassing,
And talking to her was a waste of time.

The institution's no paradise I suppose,
But it's not as if I left her there to die.

WOMAN: Pop could still shop for himself and visit his
cronies

And managed to keep himself in pretty good health.
It's just that he seemed to get in everyone's way.
In the nursing home there'll be people his own age.

WOMAN: (*Cont'd.*) It may not be the nicest place in the world

But it's not as if I left him there to die.

MAN: We warned Jesus about provoking the politicians,
Annoying the army, and insulting the doctors and lawyers.
When he took on the rabbis we knew they'd get revenge.
We stuck out our necks for him in a few conversations,
But how far can you go to defend a fanatic?
It's not as if we left him there to die.

WOMAN: It's not "as if."

ALL: We left Him there to die.

SECOND STATION

WOMAN: The Second Station: Jesus takes up His cross.

MAN: That tree's good

Solid wood

Joseph said,

Cut it down,

Drag it 'round

To the shed. Lop the limbs,

Peel and trim

All the bark;

Leave the trunk

Like the chest,

Clean and stark.

To make wood

For our good

Trees must die

Like the lamb

So that all

May survive,

So that we

From this tree

Can make planks

For a house,

Wood for fires.

The Last Words of Christ in the Way of the Cross

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ALL: We give thanks
For the tree
And the lamb,
For the ram
In place of Isaac,
For our father Abraham.

MAN: When our God
Made the stars,
Made the earth,
He made all
As a test
Of our worth,
He made even
This tree
Tall and bare
Stretching out
Empty arms
In the air,
Reaching down
Hungry roots
In the dry
Sandy soil
Of our questioning
Why.

ALL: In the dry
Desert wastes
Wondering why
Our just God
Lets the just Man
Die.

(Pause.)

MAN: Miriam! Come and see
How the boy
Handles wood!
With what joy
He lifts up the big planks....

THIRD STATION

WOMAN: The Third Station: Jesus falls the first time

MAN: Not like a snowflake powdering to crystals,

WOMAN: Nor like a meteor melting into fireworks,

MAN: Nor even like an astronaut returning back to earth

With mathematical, heroic certitude,

Insulated by a steel shell,

WOMAN: But like an old person in the grip of a mugger,

MAN: Like the naive target of a wily con-man,

WOMAN: Like a kid being sold a vial of crack,

ALL: Or like the time we wondered whether

Lying would make any difference.

MAN: "Carry that coal if you want the minimum wage,"

WOMAN: "Carry the extra baggage or we'll fire you,"

ALL: Carry all the loafers on the top

So they won't treat you like "the peons on the bottom."

MEN: Don't protest, if you want to keep your job -

No matter how low the wages, unsafe the conditions,

Unfair the promotions, the benefits, the boss

WOMEN: Or quit, coward - you can be replaced!

MAN: "Blacks are all shiftless,"

WOMAN: "Hispanics are unreliable,"

MAN: "Asians will work for anything you pay them."

WOMAN: When you're down, you can always

MAN: "Take an upper"

WOMAN: "Buy some new clothes"

MAN: "Go to the movies"

WOMAN: "Try professional help"

ALL: Get up from there, you lazy slob, Get up.

FOURTH STATION

WOMAN: The Fourth Station: Jesus meets His Mother
at the end of a twisted corridor,

The comforting light on her shoulders like a shawl

Of cotton she wove on her loom, her presence always

Like the seamless garment she had woven him

End of Freeview

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