

11. Jesus is nailed to the cross.
12. Jesus dies on the cross.
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross.
14. Jesus is laid in the sepulcher.

In most places where the Stations are erected there are paintings or images illustrating these fourteen scenes. These are not, however, actually the Stations, which are the crosses (not crucifixes) that are above the representations. The indulgences are attached to these crosses. Stations may also be erected out of doors.

### Veneration of the Cross

After St. Helena's discovery of the true cross, it was exposed for public veneration, and thousands journeyed to Jerusalem to honor Christ by honoring the instrument of His death. When particles of the cross were distributed to churches in other parts of the world, these too were venerated, and where there was no relic of the true cross, a simple blessed crucifix was used in this devotion.

This devotion has become an important part of the Good Friday liturgy. Good Friday is the Friday before Easter Day. Its origins as a special holy day go back to the development of Holy Week in Jerusalem in the late fourth century. In the East it came to be called "Great" and in the West "Good" Friday. It is observed in the Western nations in many ways.

In the Roman Catholic church, the Good Friday liturgy is composed of three distinct parts: readings and prayers, including the reading of the Passion according to St. John; the veneration of the cross; and a general communion service (formerly called the Mass of the Pre-sanctified), involving the reception of pre-consecrated Hosts by the priest and faithful.

The showing and veneration of the Cross, is meant to call to mind our salvation through the Cross of Christ. It is helpful to consider that the liturgy continually refers to a cross, not a crucifix.

The keeping of the Easter Triduum as one celebration of the dying/rising of Jesus depends upon a better appreciation of the cross. The crucifix narrows our thoughts to the moment in history, whereas the cross brings Jesus' death and resurrection to each in time and life. It is the sacred tree: "O tree of beauty, tree of light," "O cross, our one reliance."

All Christians should show their gratitude to Christ by venerating the crucifix and treasuring it in their homes.

## The Crucifix, Stations of the Cross, and the Veneration of the Cross



The "Return Crucifix"

The crucifix in the northwest corner of the Church of the Holy Innocents, in New York City, is called the "Return Crucifix" because a soldier, seeking a return to faith, stopped here to say a prayer before he went off to fight in World War I. After the war, he entered a monastery in France. Ever since, this cross has been the object of devotion for people all over the world. Before it, many sinners have found salvation.

The renowned artist, C. Bosseron Chambers, stepped into the Church of the Holy Innocents one evening. He noticed that huddled before this great crucifix was a man

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marked by a dissolute life but also marked by an overpowering contrition. The penitent that evening was converted from his life of sin, and Chambers conceived painting, “The Return.”

If the cross, the symbol of Redemption, has been a source of strength to Christians, the crucifix, the actual representation of the act of Redemption, has been a source of even greater strength.

The Cross is the sign of the power of Jesus, who through the wood of the Cross defeated Satan and was glorified by his heavenly Father with new life in his resurrection. Jesus shows us through his passion and death that his destiny is ours. His triumph is ours. His life is ours. With this knowledge we pray, “We adore you O Christ and we bless you, because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.”

### **Development**

The early Christians were afraid to use the cross publicly, they were also afraid to use the crucifix openly. They, therefore, employed symbols of the crucifixion—the lamb reclining beside an anchor, the dolphin entwined around a trident.

After the sixth century, the homage of Christ on the cross was used openly. The crucifix was at first an idealized representation of Christ’s death. The Savior was shown robed in a tunic and ruling from the cross as Master of the universe, as Christ the King. This type was generally used until about the thirteenth century, when it was replaced by the more realistic type with which we are now familiar.

The common crucifix portrays the torn body of Christ, wearing a loincloth, nailed to the cross. The word crucifix is from the Latin

“*cruci fixus*” (fixed to a cross). Above Christ’s head is a tablet inscribed I.N.R.I., the first letters of the words Pilate had written for the cross: “*Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaerum*”—“Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” (The Latin I and J are the same).

You may, on occasion, see at the foot of the cross a skull and crossbones. The explanation is that the mountain upon which the Old City of Jerusalem is built was called Golgoltha, which means “the Skull.” On top of this mountain stands the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The name Golgoltha has entered the Christian tradition as “Golgotha,” and the site has become sacred. The word was translated into Latin, and is now known as Calvary.

Why was the mountain called Golgoltha—the Skull? According to an ancient legend, cited by early Christian sources as a Jewish tradition, the skull of Adam, the first man, lies hidden in this mountain. It is also told that Shem, son of Noah the righteous, hid this skull here after he left the ark, at the end of the flood on the earth.

Christian lore relates that when Jesus was crucified on Mount Golgoltha, a drop of his blood fell to the earth, touched the skull of Adam and revived in it a breath of life for a fleeting moment.

### **Use and Indulgences**

The Church requires that a crucifix be placed on or near every altar at which holy Mass is offered. The crucifix is also used as a processional cross in solemn ceremonies. The faithful are urged to display the crucifix in their homes, especially in their bedrooms.

To all who recite before a crucifix the prayer, “Look down upon me, good and gentle

Jesus,” an indulgence has been granted. A plenary indulgence may be gained by one reciting this prayer after receiving Holy Communion and praying for the intentions of the Holy Father.

### **Stations of the Cross**

The Passion of Christ reaches its height in the devotion of the Stations of the Cross. This devotion grew out of the practice of the faithful to follow Christ’s path to death when they visited Jerusalem as pilgrims. When the holy places fell to the Moslems, it was no longer safe to make the Way of the Cross there, and representations of the incidents of the Passion were set up in Churches of Europe. It is said that the first to encourage this practice was Blessed Alvarez, a Dominican from Cordova, Spain. About 1350 the devotion was adopted by Franciscan Minorities. It was soon approved and indulgenced by the Holy See, and it became so popular that one man, St. Leonard of Port Maurice, erected 572 sets of Stations himself, one in the Coliseum in Rome and the others in various parts of Italy.

The number of stations varied at first, but Pope Clement XII in 1731 fixed the number at fourteen. They are:

1. Jesus is condemned to death.
2. Jesus takes up His cross.
3. Jesus falls the first time.
4. Jesus meets His Mother.
5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross.
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.
7. Jesus falls the second time.
8. Jesus speaks to the weeping women of Jerusalem.
9. Jesus fall the third time.
10. Jesus is stripped of His garments.