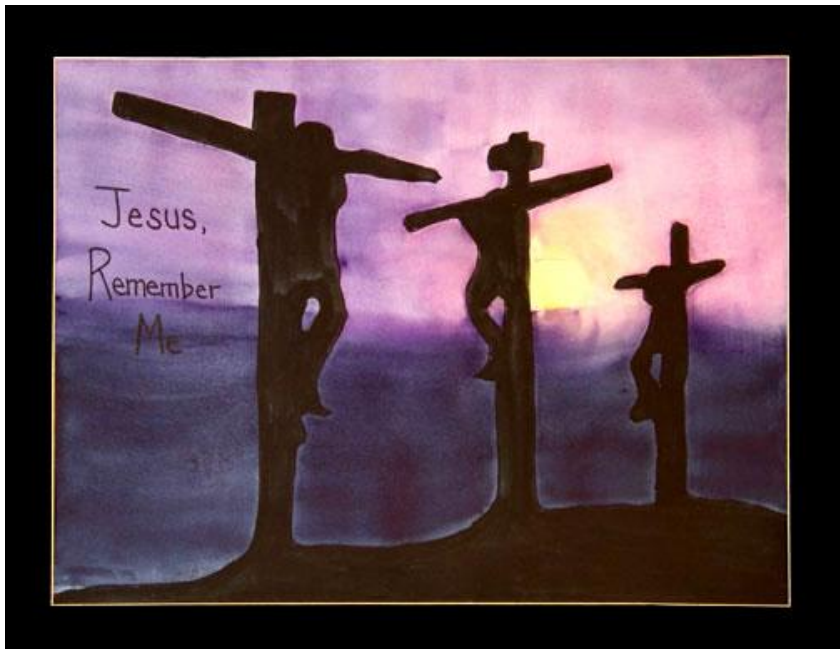


The Way of the Cross with the Good Thief



**Don T.
Mike W.**



The Legend of St. Dismas

Saint Dismas, also known as the **Good Thief** or the **Penitent Thief**, is the name given to one of the thieves who was crucified alongside Christ according to the [Gospel of Luke](#) 23:39-43:

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us."

The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation. And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

The name of "Dismas" for this person, unnamed in the [canonical](#) Gospel itself, appears first in the [twelfth century](#) in the [Gospel of Nicodemus](#).

The name of "Dismas" was adapted from a [Greek](#) word meaning "sunset" or "death." The other thief's name is given as [Gestas](#). The apocryphal [Arabic Infancy Gospel](#) calls the two thieves Titus and Dumachus, and adds a tale about how Titus (Dismas) prevented other thieves in his company from robbing [Mary](#) and [Joseph](#) on their flight into [Egypt](#).

Dismas in the "Apocryphal" Gospel of Nicodemus- Chapter 10

And Pilate, after sentence, ordered a title to be written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin letters, according to what the [Jews](#) said:

This is the King of the [Jews](#). And one of the robbers who were hanged, by name Gestas, said to Him: If you are the [Christ](#), free yourself and us. And Dismas answering, rebuked him, saying: Do you not even fear [God](#), who art in this condemnation? for we justly and deservedly have received those things which we endure; but He has done no [evil](#). And he kept saying to Jesus: Remember me, Lord, in Your kingdom. And Jesus said to him: Verily I say unto you, that today shall you be with me in paradise.

Dear Friends,

My name is Dismas - that is not my real name mind you now go by as it was given to me by my good friend Jesus



You see I am what was known as a bad seed by many. I had a rough childhood - my Dad was a nasty man and he was hard on my Mom and all of us kids. He liked his wine too much and no matter what any of us did it was never good enough.

I left our small town when I was only 15 years old and shortly after I hooked up with this older guy called Gestas - he was a real tough and together we made quite a pair.

We took no crap from anyone and pretty soon we had our territory marked out and any travelers coming by were ours for the taking. I remember this one couple that wandered into our neighborhood - they were from Nazareth - they seemed to be on the run and they had a baby with them. My partner wanted to rip them off but I could sense that they were different and I told Gestas to back off and let them proceed on their journey.

I first got to talk to Jesus face to face in a cell we briefly shared. You see my life of crime had caught up with me and my buddy Gestas and we were sentenced to die by hanging on a cross. The Romans were brutal and they showed us no mercy. My time was up and I knew it and there was nowhere left to run. Seems I was not as good a thief as I thought I was.

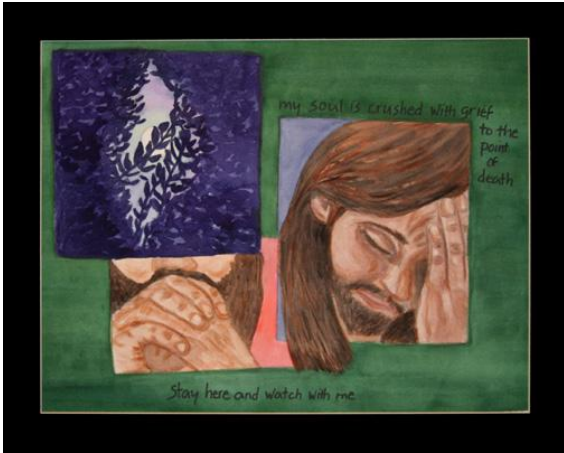
Just before we were to be lead out to be executed the Romans threw Jesus into our cell. It only took one look to know that he was different from the rest of us in that cold dungeon room. The story that follows is what happened to him and me on that last day of our lives.

It was a journey we took together on the way to the cross and it changed my life in an instant. I hope by the time you are finished hearing our story you too will know that no matter what you may have done in your life, my brother Jesus will welcome you with open arms into the Kingdom and there you will find peace.

Your Friend,

Dismas

1: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane



Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." He advanced a little and fell face down in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will *Matthew 26:36-41*

Dismas: As I sat in my cell with my partner Gestas, I began to regret all that I had done especially since in a day or so, Gestas and I will be put to death.

I began to feel sorrow and a sense of shame for what I've done. As I sat in this dark and damp cell lost in my thoughts the guards opened the cell door and threw a new prisoner into the darkness. I asked him for his name and he said "I am Jesus". I had heard rumors about a man called Jesus. There was talk that he was working all of these wonders for the people, healing them and helping them. I asked, "are you the same man?" He said he was. We then talked for hours and I felt remarkably at ease with him. He was like no other man I had ever met. I told him how regretful and afraid I was. He told me he too was afraid, and he shared with me how he had prayed to his Father – who he said was God - in some garden just a few hours ago. I told him I was too ashamed and unworthy to ask God for anything, he told me not to worry, we'd do it together.

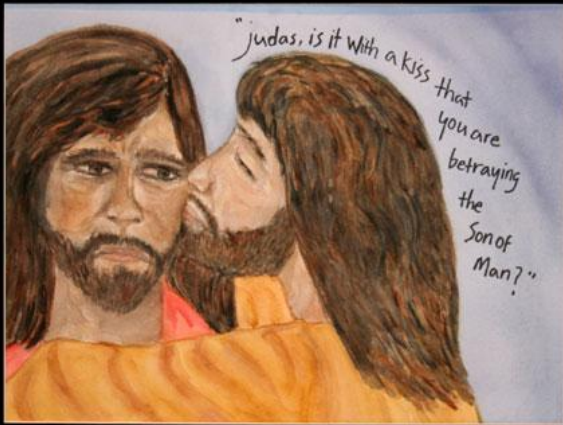
Jesus, you prayed to your Father, Can you help me to reach out to Him in prayer in my time of need?

Prayer

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, give me the strength to endure my daily burden and courage to come to you in prayer and the wisdom to know and accept your will.

2: Jesus, Betrayed by Judas, is Arrested



Then, while [Jesus] was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, "the man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely." He came and immediately went over to him and said, "Rabbi." And he kissed him. At this they laid hands on him and arrested him.

Mark 14: 43-46

Dismas: As Jesus and I continued our talk, he told me how one of his own guys had turned him into the religious leaders. I have no idea why this Judas turned against his friend, but what amazed me is that Jesus wasn't even angry with him.

I've been snitched on before, I can tell you, all I remember was wanting revenge. Anger and hate have ruled most of my life. My so-called 'friends' and even my own family, who were supposed to be the ones I could trust the most, turned out to be those I could trust the least. I hated them for their betrayal.

Jesus was different, even while he talked about his betrayal by his own friend, he showed no hate or anger, only a sad look about him as he wondered about his friend.

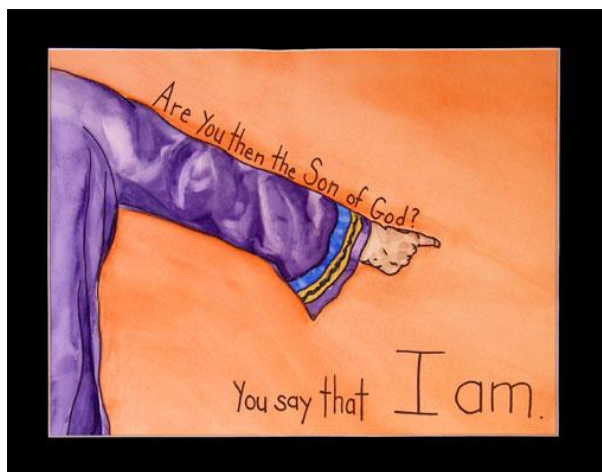
Jesus, I too know about betrayal. Is there hope for a heart twisted with anger and hatred?

Betrayal

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, let your love flow through my heart, let this love take away the hardness of my heart. Help me to learn to let go of my anger and hate, that I too may learn to love and forgive.

3: Jesus, Condemned by the Sanhedrin



At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. "If you are the Christ," they said, "tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You are right in saying I am." Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips." *Luke 22:66-71*

Dismas: My new friend Jesus and I were still talking when the temple guards came in. They took Jesus and told him the high priest wanted to talk to him. Before he left, he touched my arm reassuringly. When Jesus was gone, the darkness and gloom seemed to close in on me. I suddenly became anxious, pacing in my cell and I started to feel confused. I couldn't understand how much this Jesus had affected me.

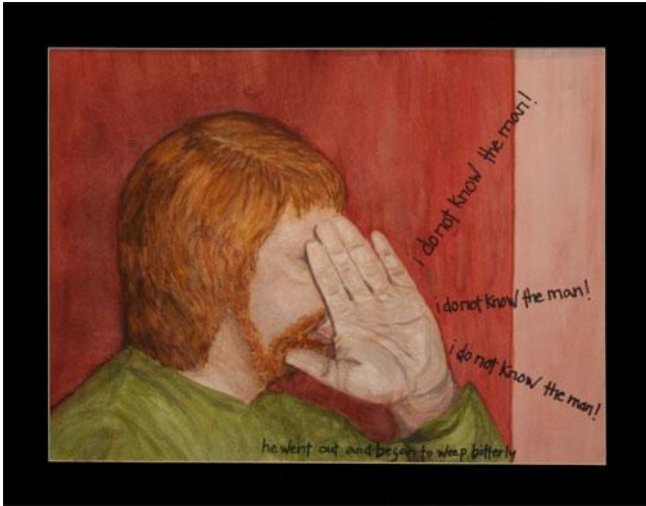
I can't deny that the short time we had spent together were the best 3 hours of my life. I felt for the first time in my life free from fear and loneliness. Jesus did not see me as a thief, but as a person. I really appreciated that more than he could possibly ever know. I hoped they bring him back to me.

Jesus, I've been a loner all my life, always restless and confused. I have been judged and judged others harshly. Can you help me to accept others the way you have accepted me?

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, come into my life and let your light shine on the path you choose for me. Let me accept others the way your Son has accepted me.

4: Jesus is Denied by Peter



[After twice denying Jesus in the courtyard of the building where Christ was being held captive, Peter was approached again and asked] "Surely you too are one of them; even your speech gives you away." At that [Peter] began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had spoken: "Before the cock crows you will deny me three times." He went out and began to weep bitterly.

Matthew 26: 69-75

Dismas: It wasn't too long before Jesus came back to our cell. He looked a little roughed up. Before I could even ask if he was okay, he held up his hand as he made his way toward me by the cell window. He pointed out this tall guy next to a fire. He tells me this guys name is Peter and that he is his good and trusted friend. Just as Jesus finished, we heard this Peter yell out that he does not know Jesus. As I looked out the window I see Peter hurrying away from a servant girl. As I looked back at Jesus, I couldn't help feeling for the guy. It's a shame, but it happens all the time. Just when you think you can trust someone you believe to be a friend, they shut the door and lock you out. What really amazed me however, was the way Jesus was dealing with it all.

He got very quiet and with his eyes closed he asked God, who he again called Father, to forgive Peter, his friend ,even though this Peter had just denied knowing him.

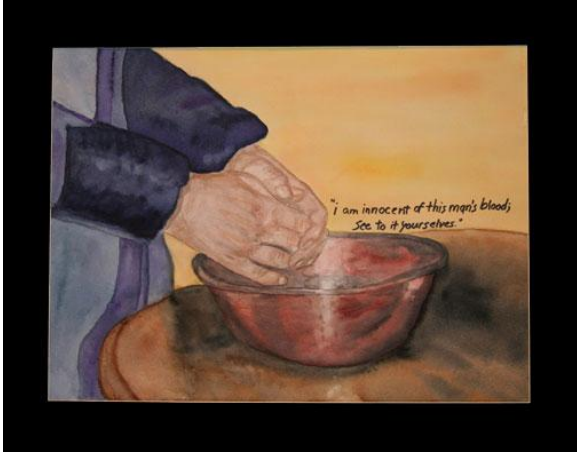
Jesus, how can I or anyone bear the grief and loneliness abandonment brings. Can you help me to understand and forgive?

Abandonment

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, grant that I might rise above my own grief and loneliness, so that I might learn to forgive others who have hurt me or abandoned me and help me to stick with others in their time of need. 7

5: Jesus is Judged by Pilate



The chief priests with the elders and the scribes, held a council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He said to him in reply, "You say so." The chief priests accused him of many things. Again Pilate questioned him, "Have you no answer? See how many things they accuse you of." Jesus gave him no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.... Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barrabas... [and] handed [Jesus] over to be crucified.
Mark 15: 1-5, 15

Dismas: When morning came, so did the temple guards. As they were putting chains on Jesus, I could hear men talking outside our cell window. For a quick moment, I thought his friend had come back with others to break him out. As I drew closer to the window, I realized that it was the religious leaders. They were talking to a small group of men and they were conspiring to frame Jesus and to get him crucified. It was all too much.

Even I, a common thief, know that you don't have to lie if a person is guilty. What I was hearing was too much to bear. Not only because of my new friend Jesus, but what the religious leaders were doing to him reminded me of my own past. I've betrayed innocent blood to get what I wanted. When I faced the truth about what I had done, I was filled with shame and anguish.

Jesus, can there be any forgiveness for our unjust actions and false accusations against others?

Falsely Accused

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, grant me the strength to be honest in my dealings with others and to never bend the truth against another for my own benefit. Help me to forgive those who have falsely accused me in the past and free me from all hatred and resentment towards them.

6: Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns



The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Mark 15: 16-20

Dismas: The guards told us they have to tend to some “royal business”, but they’d be back for Gestas and me. I wonder what happened to Jesus. Those religious leaders and their treacherous crowd seemed eager to get Jesus a death sentence. Why they would want to kill a man like Jesus is beyond me. I think they were jealous of Jesus and threatened by his new ways of doing things. Jesus seemed like a very peaceful man. Knowing people is something I’m good at and there was no violence or deceit in Jesus.

Well it didn’t matter anymore, the guards came with the slabs of wood. They tied our arms to the wood and led us into the court yard. As I stepped out I could not believe what I was seeing. They had whipped my friend Jesus bloody and placed a branch of thorns on his head like a crown. My heart sank when he looked over at me. I don’t understand how an innocent man could have come to this.

Jesus, why is it that we hurt each other, that we lie and deceive others? Why is there so much pain and sorrow in the world?

Pain and Sorrow

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, light my path that I do not stumble. Let me be free of hated and prejudice in my life. Keep me strong in truth and deed so others might see your love in me.

7: Jesus bears his cross



But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull. *John 19:15-17*

Dismas: My buddy Gestas thought the sight of Jesus' bloody body from the whipping was pretty funny. He started to call him all sorts of names.

I could not believe it when they made Jesus pick up his entire cross and carry it. We only carried the top portion but the guards really have it in for Jesus. Their cruelty knew no end.

God, if I only had one more chance, I'd do things differently. As I looked at Jesus all ripped and bloody, I felt shame for some reason. Maybe because I knew he was an innocent man. It was like he was carrying the sins of all us on his back with that heavy cross.

Jesus, I've experienced hardship all of all my life and I have caused it as well. Tell me am I bound by it, or is there a better way?

Hardship

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, help me to see and understand the pain in my life, and give me the strength to make sure that my actions do not cause hardship and hurt to others.

8: Jesus is Helped by Simon to Carry the Cross



Then they led Jesus out to crucify him. They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, to [help Jesus] carry his cross.
Mark 15: 21

Dismas: I knew that cross would be too heavy for Jesus especially after the beating he took at the hands of the guards.

The soldiers and the people kept mocking and laughing at him. Why did they hate this guy so much? As we were walking through the market Jesus kept falling to his knees. Finally they got this guy to help him, he looked strong enough.

Now I am an “old school guy” but Jesus taught me another thing by accepting help from this guy - asking for and accepting help is not something I am very good at- I thought it was a sign of weakness- You see I am too proud to ask for a help even though I know I need it.

Jesus simply thanked the stranger and got back on his feet and continued the journey.

Jesus,

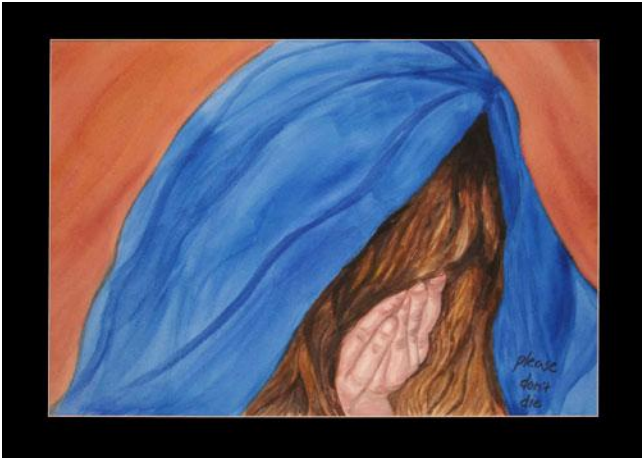
Can you assist me to be strong enough to ask for help when I need it and to offer it to others when I am able.

Accepting Help & Helping

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, grant me a willing spirit that is not too proud to ask for help when I need it and to offer help to others when I am able.

9: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem



A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.

Luke 23: 27

Dismas: We were halfway along the route to our execution place. There was a small band of women who were following Jesus. One woman really pushed her luck when she ran up to Jesus and she wiped his face with a cloth. She had courage to say the least, but the Romans pushed her aside and we continued our last stretch of road.

As I have said many times in telling you this story something just doesn't seem right though. People lined the road calling Jesus , Rabbi or even Master. They had a lot of names for Him, but the one that stood out was Messiah. I had heard stories a Messiah, the chosen one of God. Could Jesus really be the one who was chosen by God?

Was this why he kept calling God his Father?

Jesus, in my life, I've have often failed to stop and help another in need. With your love in my heart do you think I could show kindness to another the way that woman did to you?

Kindness & Compassion

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, grant me a generous and loving heart, to do your will and to show kindness to those who need it especially to those who in the past I have judged as unworthy of my kindness and compassion.

10: Jesus is Crucified



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*

Dismas: The pain of being crucified was unbelievable. The Roman soldiers knew how to make a person suffer. With Jesus they took extra pleasure in driving those nails through his hands and his feet.

Then, after it was all finished and they slammed the cross into place. Jesus once again surprised me - instead of cursing his tormentors, instead of vowing revenge on all who had betrayed him, Jesus looked up towards the heavens and said to God, "Father, please forgive them all ,for they don't know what they are doing."

It got me thinking - perhaps if I was to ask for forgiveness from Jesus for all the wrong I had done, for the pain I had caused, if I asked, then maybe, he would see to it that God would forgive me.

I asked ... and Jesus told me that my sins were forgiven. He then told me to offer that same forgiveness to all that had hurt me. I did that - in my mind I forgave my family for all they had done to me, and my friends who had forgotten me. It's hard to describe, but at that moment I felt a peace come over me - even though I was in great physical pain, it felt like a tremendous weight had been lifted from my shoulders.

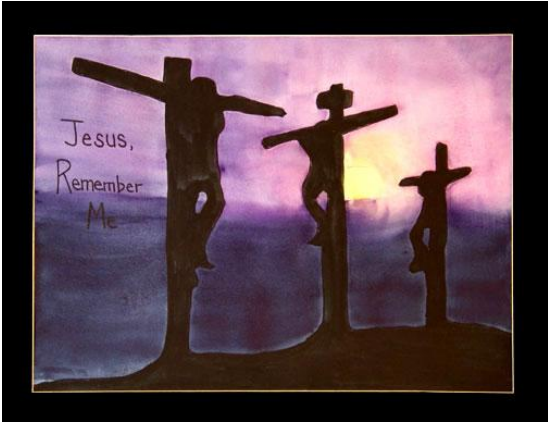
Jesus, is forgiveness for my sins really possible? How can I forgive so much that was done to me?

Forgiveness

With St. Dismas we pray:

God, grant me a merciful heart to forgive those who offended me, and grant me forgiveness for the wrongs I have committed.

11: Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief



Now one of the criminals hanging there shouted at Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." *Luke 23: 39-43*

Dismas: We had been up there for a few hours now. As I looked down, I could see those who followed Jesus. I even saw the religious leaders there, they were still mocking him, even Gestas. I asked Gestas why he didn't fear God. I told him we deserved our punishment, but that Jesus was an innocent man.

At that very moment I believed that Jesus was the Son of God. I can't explain it, but I believed it. I turned to look at Him and asked, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom". He looked over at me with eyes wide open and a love I cannot explain and said "My friend, today you will be with me in paradise."

In the middle of all this suffering I had hope for the first time- I believed that paradise awaited me just as Jesus had promised.

Jesus, I've always been disappointed in deals 'to good to be true'. Is believing in you enough to be saved?

Hope

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, grant me a heart and mind working as one, believing in your promise of everlasting life which is realized through faith in your son Jesus.

12: Jesus speaks to his Mother and the disciple



Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.
John 19:25-27

Dismas: It seemed like forever hanging there waiting to die. I could feel myself getting weaker moment by moment, even the pain was fading away. The sky was getting darker, even though it was only midday.

I believed God might be angry and rightfully so. I had heard Jesus talking. It was to his mother. I saw how much this hurt her. To see her son put to death, knowing his innocence. He also talked to his followers. I'm not sure, but I think he asked someone to care for his mother. Even close to death, Jesus thought of his mothers' well being, how wonderful, how powerful his love for her was.

Jesus, who are our brothers and sisters? Are we truly all part of God's family?

Love

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, assist me to embrace all of my brothers and sisters and grant me a tender touch for those who need a helping hand and a caring heart. May I be a sign of your peace and love to all.

13: Jesus Dies on the Cross

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; and when he had said this he breathed his last. *Luke 23: 44-46*



A Moment of Silence

Dismas: The darkness was complete. I could only see the shadow of Jesus. He cried out, then his head fell forward. Right after that the earth began shaking and the temple veil was torn in two. The guard in front of Jesus' cross fell to his knees saying "Jesus truly was the Son of God."

In a few moments, I too passed into death. But I had no fear. Jesus promised that I would be in paradise with him and I believed him. For the first time in my life, I felt a peace I have never had before. I knew I would see him again. I knew that Jesus died for me, for everyone – He died, so we could live.

I find it hard to put into words, but it is as though this man called Jesus went through all of this so I would know that my life was of value, that I mattered. It is as though he died this horrible death so that I would realize that suffering is a part of life, and that, even in suffering, we can know the peace of God.

That was to the day Jesus welcomed me into paradise .

Jesus, I believe in You, but I'm constantly battling doubts and fear. Is there any hope for me? Will I be saved?

Salvation

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, grant that I may always trust in you and that when my time on earth is ended I know you will welcome my spirit home to be with you, with your son Jesus and all the faithful departed including St Dismas.

14: Jesus is placed in a tomb



As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb. *Matthew 27: 57-61*

The last station brings the story of our Lord's passion to a close but this is not the end. From his birth until his death on Golgotha, Jesus remained faithful to God. In three days time Jesus will rise from the dead on Easter Sunday delivering us the promise of life everlasting.

Because of God's grace we are given a chance at salvation just as the good thief Saint Dismas was. This grace cannot be bought, worked for nor bribed. This grace comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ and in the knowledge that we are loved by our God and that there is eternal life. Jesus didn't come to us just to preach, but also to show us how much God loves us. He showed us the depth of this love when they crucified Jesus. Jesus himself said, "no greater love has a person than to give his life for another". Jesus talked the talk, but even more, he walked it.

Has God given you good health, a good meal, a good job?

Then thank God.

Has God blessed you with family and friends who care?

Praise God.

Has God revealed the solution to a difficult problem?

Give God his due.

Has God saved you from sin and eternal death?

Then give God glory and follow Him daily.

Jesus

I am Thankful to God for:

With St. Dismas we pray:

Dear God, Thank you for caring so much to send your only Son to be with us. We believe that one day we will all be together again in paradise. 17



St. Dismas - “Jesus, thank you for remembering me”
Jesus - “Today, you are with Me in paradise”

We pray together:

Dear God

In your mercy remember me and forgive me for the wrongs I've done.

Set me free of my deep fears and my resentments

Melt the hard places of my heart, and

Allow me the grace to

Surrender this day to your loving care.

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom”

Acknowledgements

Deacon Mike W. and Don T. started working on this version of the Way of the Cross while Don was serving time. It took several years to complete and they have since presented it on a number of occasions to schools and other groups.

These Stations are based on those celebrated by Pope John Paul II on Good Friday 1991 as an alternative to the traditional stations. Scripture excerpts are taken from the New American Bible with Revised New Testament

The prayers were adapted from the Website of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and can be found at : <http://www.usccb.org/nab/stations.htm> . *Permission is granted on this website to reproduce these excerpts in free distribution of these stations.*

The picture of Jesus and Dismas on the Cross in Station 13 was created by Glen S. while he was in a halfway house in Ontario. He is currently working on other illustrations for the series.

A special thanks to Linda Roberts for permission to use her beautiful pictures of the Stations of the Cross to enhance our journey. Please visit Linda's website at: <http://www.lindaesroberts.com/>