

The Way of the Cross

**THEME: CHRIST'S SUFFERING AND THE LIFE OF
FR. STAN SWAMY SJ**

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Hymn: We hail thee

Introduction:

The way of the cross is a beautiful traditional devotion which meditates on the journey of Jesus to the cross and the tomb. Today we not only journey with Jesus but also, with one of his devoted servants Fr. Stan Swamy SJ.

Fr. Stan Swamy was a Jesuit Priest, from Jamshedpur Province in Jharkhand, and a Human Right Activist, especially defending the constitutional and human rights of the Adivasis, for more than 40 years. He died on 5th July 2021 at the age of 84.

As we journey with Jesus and Fr. Stan Swamy, we will see how Fr Stan suffered just like Jesus.

We will also look at our own lives and reflect on ourselves. We will also place on the cross at every station an attitude that keeps us away from Jesus. These are Nails that nailed Jesus to the Cross. (A paper cut-out of each attitude may be placed/nailed to the cross at each station.)

And so, we pray: Lord Jesus, help us to journey with you on your way to Calvary. Open our hearts to listen to your gentle whisper, and help us to be touched by the life of Fr Stan Swamy and help us to be moved by your Spirit.

Amen

First Station: Jesus is condemned to Death:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

A Reading from Gospel according to John. (Jn 18:2-5)

Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, procuring a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he."

Jesus was innocent & yet he was condemned to death & that too death on a cross.

A Reading from the Auto-biography of Fr Stan 'I am not a silent spectator' (Ch 4):

"At 6 am on the 28 August 2018, I heard loud footsteps outside my room at Bagaicha. From the window, I saw that my two Jesuit confrères were outside their rooms. On opening my door, I saw standing in front of me a local police contingent of about 30 men with rifles and lathis. A small group of eight persons in civil clothes came forward. They introduced themselves as the Pune Police and said they had come to raid my premises and search me..."

The parallel between the two readings is startling. Like Jesus, Fr Stan was unjustly condemned on false charges. In 2018, Fr Stan was implicated in the Bhima-Koregaon case. The charges against him were absurd. From then on, he was persecuted until his death.

Jesus and Fr Stan were unjustly condemned. Do we unjustly condemn people, by gossip, judgemental attitude and rash judgements?

Prayer: Lord, Help us not to condemn and judge others rashly, but instead offer them understanding and patience. Help us also, like Jesus and Fr Stan, to always stand up for the truth no matter what the cost.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Judgemental Attitude on the Cross.

Hymn: It takes Courage

Second station: Jesus takes up his Cross:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

They placed the heavy cross on Jesus' wounded shoulder. Jesus was already weakened by the scourging and the cross was very heavy. It was not an easy task.

Fr Stan was 81 years old when he was first implicated. He was old, frail, and suffered from Parkinson's Disease. Yet he took on the cross of being accused, arrested and publicly maligned.

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We may not be arrested by police but sometimes we feel betrayed when people malign our name. How often we carry the burdens of our past with us – regret, unforgiveness, anger, grudges, bitterness etc...

Prayer: Lord, help us to surrender our burdens to You particularly the burden of past regrets and take your yoke, for your yoke is easy and your burden light.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Past Regrets on the Cross.

Hymn: If you wish to be my disciple

Third station: Jesus falls the 1st time:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.
Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

Lord, you fell but you got up again – out of love for us. So strong was your determination to do the will of God that you got up again.

Fr. Stan's room was raided for the first time on 28th August 2018. During this raid, his laptop, mobile phone, a few CDs, documents and files were confiscated by the Police. But he still continued to be vocal against the unjust land grabbing and against the ruling establishment that had framed him.

Both Jesus and Fr Stan had the resilience to keep on going. In my fight against my own illicit passions (be it lust, anger, jealousy, pride, etc) how often do I fall into sin!

Prayer: Lord, when I fall into sin & temptation, when I fall prey to my illicit passions help me also to get up out of love for you. Help me also to be so determined to persist to do your will always.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Illicit Passions on the Cross.

Fourth Station: Jesus meets his mother:

**We adore you O Christ and we bless You.
Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.**

No words can describe the beauty and sorrow of this meeting between Jesus and his mother. No words were exchanged. Just a loving gaze. No one understood better the meaning of the Cross than his mother, no one experienced the pain more than she did. She was the perfect disciple who stayed with him throughout till the very end.

When Fr Stan was arrested, many of his friends, Jesuit companions, the Society of Jesus & the Church stood by him, accompanying him along the way. They kept filing for bail in spite of every bail petition being denied. The Mother Church stood by him till the very end.

Do we stand by those being unjustly persecuted? Sometimes the least we can do is spread awareness about the injustice. Or are we so indifferent that we just don't care?

Prayer: Oh! Mother Mary, walk with us on our journey of life. Be with us too and help us to understand the meaning of our cross, our sufferings. Help us to stand up for justice and truth and not to be indifferent to the struggles & sufferings of others.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Indifference on the Cross.

Hymn: Be with us Mary along the way

Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus Carrying the Cross:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

Jesus was tired & very weak. They didn't want him to die on the way. And so, they forced Simon to help Jesus. Simon just happened to be in the right place at the right time and he was asked to help Jesus.

When Fr Stan was in Taloja Prison, he was greatly helped by his fellow inmates, namely, Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira and two more unnamed men. He wrote in one of his letters from prison: "Arun assists me to have my breakfast and lunch. Vernon helps me with bath. My two inmates help out during supper, in washing my clothes and give massage to my knee joints. They are from very poor families. Please remember my inmates and my colleagues in your prayers. Despite all odds, humanity is bubbling in Taloja prison."

What an amazing privileged Simon had to help Jesus carry his cross! Would we have helped Fr Stan in Prison? Do we reach out to people in their need? The elderly, the weak, the poor? Or are we too busy to help out. Do we say to ourselves "I have enough problems of my own?"

Prayer: Lord, Help us to reach out to those in need in our families, our homes and our neighbourhood. Help us not to be Selfish and only think of ourselves.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Selfishness on the Cross.

Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

Jesus' face was covered with sweat & blood. How brave and courageous Veronica was. She too must have had a busy schedule, she too must have had other work to do, a family to take care of... But still, she made time and she came forward to help Jesus, & she wiped his face with her veil.

When Fr Stan was in Taloja Prison, he was unable to hold a glass to drink due to Parkinson's Disease. He was not allowed to take his straw-sipper. He made various requests for it. Even legal petitions were filed to give him a straw-sipper. But all were denied. Seeing this situation various people on social media ordered straw-sippers online and sent them to Taloja Jail as a sign of protest. These people, like Veronica, made time from their busy schedule to help Fr Stan.

Do we go out of our comfort zone to help others? Or are we too busy? Or simply too scared to help our neighbour in need? Are we too scared to speak out against the political establishment?

Prayer: Lord, we pray that we too may be brave and courageous in times of persecution. We pray for the courage to stand up against injustice like Veronica and Fr Stan Swamy. And despite our busy schedule make time for God's will.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Cowardice on the Cross.

Seventh Station: Jesus falls 2nd time:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

This second fall of Jesus opened up all his wounds and increased his pain. He was exhausted and tired but still he got up again.

Fr Stan's room was raided for the second time, on 12th June 2019. In this instance, the hard disk of his computer, mobile phone, his email and social media accounts were all confiscated. He was barred from using his social media. For an 82 year old man to bare this for the second time was hard, but he still kept on going.

Sometimes, I too get tired and exhausted and feel that I cannot go on.
Prayer: Lord, in times of distress, desolation, despair and disappointment, when I feel exhausted... give me the strength to go on and persevere in doing Your Holy will.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Desolation on the Cross.

Hymn: What a friend we have in Jesus

Eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

Jesus was being treated like a criminal & was being led to his death. The women felt helpless and wept for Jesus. Although, they didn't do much, at least they didn't run away.

When Fr Stan was in Prison, large multitudes of people came out in support of him on social media. The 'Stand with Stan' campaign was very successful. They helped spread awareness about the issue. At least they were not silent spectators! It is said "Silence always helps the Oppressor."

How many of us speak out and are vocal about injustice? Or do we remain silent? – "let other people speak, I have my own problems." How many of us are willing to risk ourselves, to be vocal against injustice, even if it is against those in authority?

Prayer: Lord, Help us also to be sensitive to the needs of those around us, in spite of our struggles and sufferings and to be vocal so as to spread awareness about injustice and not be Silent in the face of Injustice.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Unjust Silence on the Cross.

Ninth Station: Jesus falls 3rd time:

**We adore you O Christ and we bless You.
Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.**

Jesus, was so tired, he could barely stand, he could hardly move. And, so he fell for the 3rd time. But still he got up again despite all the pain & suffering...

Fr Stan's residence was raided for the third time, on 8th Oct 2020. This time they took Fr Stan himself – never to return. The 83-year-old man was arrested and treated like a criminal, still he kept going on.

In our struggle against injustice as well as in our struggle against our own sin, we fall multiple times. We feel like giving up, like quitting.

Prayer: Lord, Help us to have the strength to get up and persevere in doing your holy will. Help us never to quit fighting against evil.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Quitting Attitude on the Cross.

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

Jesus' clothes were soaked in blood. The blood had dried and his clothes were stuck to his body. As they violently stripped of his clothes his skin came off too, his wounds reopened. Oh! How much you suffered! And the nakedness added shame to the agony and pain.

Fr Stan - an 83-year-old man suffering from Parkinson's disease and other age-related illnesses, was arrested and treated like a criminal. The words used in court to describe him were 'Dreaded Criminal.' He was stripped of his belongings, even his need for a straw-sipper was denied. He suffered from hearing loss in both ears and had undergone surgeries. He fell multiple times while in prison.

Sometimes, we are stripped of our dignity when people speak ill about us. Sometimes we strip others of their dignity when we gossip about them, slander about them & spoil their good name.

Prayer: Lord, help us to have the grace to bare insults and calumny when we are targeted by people. And help us never to slander or calumniate against anyone, never to indulge in idle gossip.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Idle Gossip on the Cross.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

Words cannot describe how inhuman the process of crucifixion was, to hammer nails into human flesh and bone!! Yet Jesus suffered all this out of love for me. O how great indeed is his love for me! How truly unworthy I am of his Love!

Fr Stan was interrogated in detail by the NIA (National Investigation Agency) on 6 documented occasions before his arrest, and countless times after arrest. Each gruelling interrogation session ranged from 2 hours to 5 hours. An innocent 83-year-old man was hammered with questions and accusation for hours on end.

When I'm suffering in my life, it is easy to only look at my own sufferings, but instead when I look at the struggles and sufferings of others I can get the grace to reach out to them. But I'm weak. I don't know if I have the strength to bare my sufferings.

Prayer: Lord, When I'm suffering in my life, help me to look at the struggles and sufferings of others and give me the grace to reach out to them. Give me the strength to bare all my sufferings & take away my weakness.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Weakness on the Cross.

Hymn: Old Rugged Cross / Were you there when they crucified

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the Cross:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

Finally, after suffering for 3 hours unimaginable pain, Jesus' earthly life comes to an end. But we know that this is not the End but the Beginning.

Fr Stan's health continued to deteriorate in prison. Yet every bail petition filed even on age and health grounds was denied. Until finally, on 28th May 2021, the Bombay High Court directed the Maharashtra government to admit Swamy to a private hospital for 15 days, considering his rapidly deteriorating health. And he was admitted to the Holy Family Hospital, Bandra, Mumbai. But, this was too little too late. He then tested positive for COVID-19. His health continued to deteriorate in hospital, and finally he died on 5th July 2021, ahead of his bail hearing in Bombay High Court. But like in Jesus' case we know that this is only the beginning.

DEATH... Death is a subject that makes us all uncomfortable. Death takes away our hope. We all will experience death. But as Christians, we have hope...

Prayer: Lord, by dying on the cross, you gave us new life. Death is not the end but the beginning. Help us to have that hope of new life and new beginnings. Help us never to lose hope.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Hopelessness on the Cross.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

Jesus' body is placed in the arms of his mother. The same arms that held him as a child, are now holding his lifeless, battered and bleeding body. Yet in humble surrender, Mary accepted the will of God.

After Fr Stan's death, his body was returned to his mother Church. The Society of Jesus took procession of his body and his funeral was held in St. Peter's Church Bandra. The Funeral was telecast live on Youtube, watched by thousands. And, thousands more later. His funeral is there on atleast 3 youtube channels with views totalling to over 5 lakhs.

In difficult times in our life, when tragedies fall on us, we are tempted to be angry with God. Yet we can learn from Mary to accept the will of God always.

Prayer: O Mother Mary, help us also to surrender ourselves wholly and completely to God and thus to accept the will of God in all circumstances, especially when it is most difficult. Help us never to be angry with You.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Anger for God on the Cross.

Hymn: Sing of a girl

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is placed in the tomb:

We adore you O Christ and we bless You.

Because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the whole world.

Jesus' earthly mission seems finished. His body is finally placed in the tomb. He is hidden closed behind a mighty stone, hidden, for no human eye to see... But still, he is alive and active working in the world. And this is how it is today, though He is hidden from our human eyes, he is still there. Only through the eyes of faith can we see Him in the tabernacle and in the bread and wine and see him still actively working among us today.

After Fr Stan's funeral his body was cremated and his ashes were sent back to his home state of Jharkhand. There they had a prayer service and his ashes received hundreds of floral tributes. Finally, in December 2022, a Massachusetts-based digital forensics firm Arsenal Consulting reported the results of its investigation into the evidence which had led to Fr Stan Swamy's arrest and imprisonment which eventually led to his death. The report concluded that Fr Swamy was systematically targeted in a cyber campaign over a four-year period during which time falsified evidence was planted on his computer. In short, he was framed. But, Indian courts have yet to clear his name. However, his cause is still alive, and we have to continue his mission.

Jesus only lived 2000 years ago, ... Or so we are tempted to think. But only with faith can we know that Jesus is alive even today.

Prayer: Lord, give us that grace of faith, to truly see you present in the Eucharist, to see you in the poor and the needy, the oppressed, the unjustly imprisoned and to see you truly alive even today. Help us to have the grace and strength to fight against injustice and strive for truth always.

Have mercy on us O Lord.

And now, we will place our Disbelief on the Cross.

Concluding Prayer:

Lord, as we have journeyed with you on your way to Calvary, we have also learnt about Fr Stan Swamy. Fill our hearts with determination like Fr Stan, to never be silent spectators to injustice. Journey with us Lord Jesus, and be with us in our journey of life. And, help us to never to forget your sacrifice for us. Thank You Lord Jesus.

Hymn: Down the Via Dolorosa