

Mysteries of the Way of the Cross and Plenary Indulgence

The Stations of the Cross which one sees on the walls of almost every Catholic Church belong to a devotion which was introduced and promoted by the sons of St. Francis. As guardians of the holy places in Palestine, the Franciscans began to walk along the Via Dolorosa or Sorrowful Way from the Praetorium to Golgotha, prayerfully recalling the events in the Passion of our Lord which occurred enroute. They still do this every day at 3:15 in the afternoon, rain or shine. They introduced this devotion also in Europe, and in 1686 Pope Innocent XI granted to the faithful who made the Way of the Cross the same indulgences which were gained by visiting the holy places in Jerusalem. St. Leonard of Port Maurice (1751) is especially known for his great zeal in promoting the devotion of the Way of the Cross. It was Pope St. Pius X who in 1906 granted the Franciscans permission to celebrate a special feast of the Mysteries of the Way of the Cross.

At the present time, the faithful can gain a plenary indulgence as often as they go the Way of the Cross; and an additional plenary indulgence is granted to them if they receive Holy Communion on the same day. A remarkable feature of the plenary indulgence attached to the Way of the Cross is the fact that the usual conditions for such an indulgence are not required, namely confession, Communion, and vocal prayers, not even for the intention of the Holy Father. All that need be done, besides being in the state of grace, is to walk from station to station and to meditate briefly at each one on some phase of the Passion, not necessarily the one depicted at the station. Those who cannot visit the Stations where they are erected in church can gain the same indulgences by holding in their hands a specially blessed Stations Crucifix and reciting twenty Our Fathers, Hail Mary's, and Gloria's. The sick who cannot say these prayers need only kiss such a crucifix or look upon it and at least mentally say a short ejaculation in honor of the Passion, for instance "My Jesus, mercy!" the favorite prayer of St. Leonard.

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