



SAINT JOHN'S
CATHEDRAL
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF FLORIDA

LOVE *at the* CORE.

Marcel Dupre's "Le Chemin de la Croix" (The Stations of the Cross), with Poetry by Paul Claudel

Good Friday

April 18, 2025 | 7 p.m.



Le Chemin de la Croix, Op 29, Marcel Dupré with poetry by Paul Claudel

Timothy Tuller, organ

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera, narrator

Abbé R. Delestre has written: "In the Stations of the Cross, Marcel Dupré has placed himself in the drama as a witness...he has seen, he has heard the two principal actors of the drama: Christ and the Virgin Mary. Christ the victim appears to us everywhere; from the first station, the cries of the mob follow him. We hear him fall under the weight of his cross, but it is in the eighth station that he is truly revealed in a gesture of misery with regard to the women of Israel who follow him. Crushed under the burden, he falls down at the ninth station; it is on him alone that our attention is fixed when, finally, he is stripped of his clothes and nailed to the cross. He calls to his Father a final time before dying."

First Station: Jesus Is Condemned to Death

As soon as Pilate has pronounced the fateful phrase: Guards, seize this man! the agitation of the crowd, which has calmed for a moment, breaks out again and degenerates into a tumult, in the midst of which one can hear the cries of Barrabas! Jesus! and crucify him!, and finally, to death! Then, as the praetorium gradually empties, the cries recede and die away in the distance.'

Second Station: Jesus Receives His Cross

Above a persistent dotted rhythm, symbolizing uneven steps, the theme of the Cross is declaimed by a raspy solo trumpet, proliferating into two and then three voices. The painful march to Calvary has begun.

Third Station: Jesus Falls for the First Time

An ostinato motif of paired descending eighth-notes symbolizes the weary steps of Jesus, above which the poignant lament of the theme of Suffering sings out in octaves high in the treble. At the climax of the piece the ostinato moves to the pedals, but exhaustion overwhelms even the pain; the intensity recedes, and Jesus falls... silence... then the quiet, serene theme of Redemption ends the station, filling the hearts of his disciples with hope.

Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

The grief of Mary is expressed not by any outburst, but rather by an atmosphere of stupor and quiet horror. The theme of the Virgin sings out on a solo flute above a circling, almost motionless chromatic accompaniment on the Voix Celeste. Towards the end there is a brief reminiscence of the "weary steps" motif from the Third Station.

Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

The music here is closely related to the second station. The theme of the Cross is again played by a solo trumpet, first in one voice, symbolizing Jesus alone, then by two voices in canon, as Simon attempts to share the burden, and finally the two voices in unison as their steps at last coincide and the burden is eased.

Sixth Station: Jesus and Veronica

Here, the double melody of Compassion sings out in music which possesses an archaic and slightly exotic atmosphere. There is a hypnotic, slightly oriental flavor which shows Dupré at his most poetic and imaginative. The double theme unfolds on the oboe, and the pedals play a hushed reminiscence of the theme of the Cross. At the end the theme of Redemption reappears on the Voix Celeste, 'sustained by mysterious harmonies'.

Seventh Station: Jesus Falls for the Second Time

The bitter ascent to Calvary resumes, while the turbulent crowd presses on all sides around the tragic procession, and the second fall passes almost unnoticed. The music of the second fall is developed from the Third Station, intensifying the “weary steps” motif through the addition of chromatic sixteenth-note decoration. Again the scene rises to a central climax and then recedes.

Eighth Station: Jesus Comforts the Women of Jerusalem

The Holy Women follow Jesus, sad unto death, haunted by the vision of the final sacrifice. This station provides another musical oasis of calm. The theme of Pity is characterized by expressive diatonic harmonies on gentle flutes, while the voice of Jesus, with his theme of Consolation, is entrusted to a soft trumpet.

Ninth Station: Jesus Falls for the Third Time

The violence implicit in the two previous falls now erupts in full fury. The “weary steps” motif is now transformed into a barrage of relentless sixteenth-note figuration, which is combined with a new theme of Persecution. At the climax, for full organ, the original motif of paired descending steps returns in the pedals, while both the other themes are superimposed above. The final fall is graphic, sudden, and violent. It is followed by a long silence, after which a few muffled spasms illustrate the crushing of the Victim.

Tenth Station: Jesus Is Stripped of His Clothes

An agitated chromatic scherzo evokes the violence and hurry with which Jesus is stripped of his garments and flogged. After a long pause, the moving spectacle of the Savior’s helpless body inspires a hushed meditation on the theme of the Incarnation utilizing a soft 8’ flute.

Eleventh Station: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

This station is dominated by the obsessive rhythm of the hammer blows forcing the nails through the hands and feet of Jesus. The heart-rending lament of the theme of Suffering from the Third Station breaks through, expressing the implacable cruelty of the executioners.

Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies Upon the Cross

Broken solo phrases on the Vox Humana evoke the seven last words of Christ, which include a reprise of the theme of Consolation from the Eighth Station. Then, as he dies, the rumble of the earthquake is heard, followed by a reprise of the theme of Redemption, expressing the grief of the disciples.

Thirteenth Station: The Body of Jesus Is Taken from the Cross and Laid in Mary’s Bosom

A gently flowing scherzo for flutes evokes the tenderness of the descent from the cross, and the station ends with a poignant quotation from the fourth station, as Mary is reunited with the body of her son.

Fourteenth Station: The Body of Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

The slow, mournful rhythm of the cortège opens the station as the body of Jesus is carried to the tomb. The theme of Pity gradually intensifies from a single voice to a full texture, and the music blossoms into a final development of the theme of Suffering. As this recedes, the pedals initiate a muffled drum beat which underpins the resumption of the cortège, in a passage that evokes an extraordinary atmosphere of muted, hopeless grief. Finally, however, the miracle occurs: the gates of paradise are opened, and the theme of Suffering is transformed into the new ‘theme of the Fruits of Redemption’, concluding the work with a vision of transcendent peace.

NOTES ON THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS THE MUSIC

Born in Rouen in 1886, Marcel Dupré devoted his entire life to the organ. As a concert organist, he gave a total of 2,178 recitals all over the world. He was especially renowned as an improviser, and his ability to extemporaneously create strict five-part fugues, six-part ricercars, and four-movement symphonies with miraculous ease has led many to consider him as the greatest improviser of all time. He was also widely respected as a pedagogue, teaching at the Paris Conservatory and guiding many of the great organ talents of the twentieth century. As a composer, Dupré wrote for a wide variety of media, with a special focus on the organ. He died on Whitsunday (Pentecost) in 1971.

The Stations of the Cross is generally recognized as Marcel Dupré's masterpiece. He stated, "The first sketch of The Stations of the Cross was conceived and realized in the form of an improvisation, at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Brussels, on 13th February 1931. During the concert the fourteen stanzas of "Le Chemin de la Croix" by the great French poet Paul Claudel were read, and after each I improvised a musical commentary. Many in the audience expressed their regret that nothing should remain of this spontaneous music, I decided to write the work down, trying to evoke the same atmosphere. Its composition took me an entire year, and I gave the first performance on the organ of the Trocadero in Paris on 18th March 1932. "Le Chemin de la Croix" is a vast symphonic poem in which several leading themes recur, but each station has its own musical conception..." The entire composition is based on recurring musical themes which represent various characters and emotions.

Dupré explained that "...certain intervals, certain melodic shapes are part of the patrimony of music. I researched how the Masters have agreed on certain formulas, such as the double leap of a fourth for the Cross; we find it in Bach, Handel, and Schütz. The theme of Redemption, formed of four conjunct notes, is found in Handel's *Messiah*, in Bach's *St. John Passion*, in Franck's *Beatitudes*, in Wagner's *Parsifal*. The theme of the Virgin, forming the major triad, is the idea of 'Genetrix'. The theme of Suffering, composed of a descending chromatic phrase, is found in Bach. These are all themes of traditional symbolism..."

THE POETRY

The poetry for the Stations of the Cross was written in 1911 by the French poet, playwright, and diplomat Paul Claudel (1868-1955). As a poet, Claudel was influenced by Mallarmé, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, and Walt Whitman. At the age of eighteen (1886), after experiencing a powerful personal religious revelation during a service on Christmas Day in Notre Dame Cathedral, Claudel was suddenly converted to a devout Roman Catholicism. This experience played a major role in shaping his artistic development from that point onward, and the Bible became the center of Claudel's world and his inspiration. He saw God as the supreme architect of the world, and believed that God had chosen man to be in the central place in the drama of the world. The English translation being read today was completed in 2001 by Dr. David Landon, Professor of Theatre and Speech at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee.

ORGANIST

A native of Elmira, New York, Timothy Tuller has served as Canon for Music at Jacksonville's St. John's Cathedral since January, 2007. He is also accompanist for the UNF Chorale and Chamber Singers. A summa cum laude graduate of Ithaca College, Mr. Tuller received the Valedictory Prize upon earning his Master of Music degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he was a student of Todd Wilson. Prior to coming to Jacksonville, Mr. Tuller served as Music Associate at the Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham, AL, and as Assistant University Organist at the University of the South in Sewanee.

The notes for this program were compiled by Timothy Tuller, in consultation with the following sources: Abbé R. Delestre, L'Oeuvre de Marcel Dupré (Paris, 1952); sleeve notes by David Gammie for Jeremy Filsell's recording of The Stations of the Cross (Guild Music Ltd., 2000); sleeve notes by Marcel Dupré for his own recording (Westminster Records, 1958).