The Via Crucis, also known as the Way of the Cross, is one of the most profound and moving devotions in the Catholic tradition. Throughout its fourteen stations, we contemplate the most significant moments of Christ's Passion, from His condemnation to His burial. Each station is a window that allows us to delve into the mystery of God's redemptive love. On this occasion, we pause at the **fourth station: Jesus meets His afflicted mother**, an encounter filled with pain, love, and deep theological significance.

The Origin and History of This Station

Although the Via Crucis as we know it today has its roots in the Middle Ages, the devotion of accompanying Jesus on His way to Calvary dates back to the early centuries of Christianity. Pilgrims visiting Jerusalem wanted to relive the steps of Christ, and thus the practice of physically walking the path He took was born. However, the fourth station, which narrates Jesus' encounter with His mother, does not appear in the canonical Gospels. This episode is part of tradition and popular piety, nourished by apocryphal writings and the revelations of mystics such as Saint Bridget of Sweden and Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich.

The absence of this encounter in the Gospels does not diminish its importance. On the contrary, it invites us to delve deeper into its spiritual meaning. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has recognized in this station a profound truth: the shared pain between Jesus and Mary reflects the purest and most sacrificial love.

The Encounter: A Dialogue of Glances and Hearts

Let us imagine the scene: Jesus, carrying the cross, physically and emotionally exhausted, slowly makes His way through the streets of Jerusalem. Among the crowd watching Him is Mary, His mother. Their eyes meet, and in that instant, time seems to stand still. No words are recorded in this encounter, but the silence speaks louder than a thousand speeches.

Mary, the *Theotokos* (Mother of God), gazes upon her Son, the incarnate Word, suffering inhumanly. She, who conceived Him by the power of the Holy Spirit, carried Him in her womb, cared for Him in Bethlehem, accompanied Him in Nazareth, and witnessed the beginning of His public ministry, now sees Him disfigured by pain. At this moment, the prophecy of Simeon is fulfilled: «And a sword will pierce your own soul too» (Luke 2:35).

Jesus, for His part, sees His mother, the woman who accompanied Him from the beginning, the one who said "yes" to God's plan at the Annunciation. In her gaze, He finds comfort and strength. Though physically alone, He is spiritually united to her in an unbreakable bond.

The Theological Meaning: Mary's Redemptive Suffering

This encounter is not merely a moment of human pain; it carries deep theological significance. Mary is not a passive spectator in her Son's Passion. She actively participates in the work of redemption. The Second Vatican Council, in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, describes Mary as «intimately united with her Son in the work of salvation.»

In the fourth station, we see how Mary cooperates with Jesus in the redemption of humanity. Her "yes" at the Annunciation was the beginning of her participation in the divine plan, and now, at the foot of the cross, her "yes" is renewed. She accepts the pain of seeing her Son suffer, uniting herself to His sacrifice. This act of total surrender is a model for all Christians: we are called to unite our sufferings to those of Christ for the salvation of the world.

Furthermore, this encounter reminds us of the importance of family in God's plan. Jesus, even in His agony, honors His mother. This act of filial love teaches us to value and respect our parents, especially in difficult times.

Relevance in the Modern Context

In a world marked by individualism, indifference, and suffering, the fourth station of the Via Crucis offers a profoundly relevant message. It invites us to look at those who suffer, to not remain indifferent to the pain of others. Mary, upon meeting Jesus, does not flee or hide; she draws near, accompanies, and shares His pain. This is a call to solidarity and compassion.

It also teaches us to find meaning in suffering. Often, we wonder why God allows pain. In this encounter, we see that suffering, when united to Christ's, has redemptive value. It is not an end in itself but a means to participate in the work of salvation.

Finally, this station reminds us of the importance of Mary's maternal presence in our spiritual lives. She, who accompanied Jesus on His way to Calvary, also accompanies us in our own "via crucis." We can turn to her in times of difficulty, knowing that her intercession is powerful and her love, unconditional.

Conclusion: An Encounter That Transforms

The fourth station of the Via Crucis is much more than a moment of pain; it is an encounter that transforms. In the meeting of glances between Jesus and Mary, we discover the power of love that bears all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. This encounter invites us to reflect on our own relationship with Christ and with those who suffer around us.

As we meditate on this station, let us ask for the grace to imitate Mary in her faithfulness, her strength, and her love. May her example inspire us to accompany Jesus in His Passion, not only during Lent but in every moment of our lives. And in doing so, may we find in suffering a path to resurrection.

«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 her, "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).

May these words of the Gospel remind us that Mary is also our mother, and that in her we find comfort, guidance, and inexhaustible love. Amen.