

Stations of the Cross

*A resource for those praying at home
as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic*



Introduction

In the Stations of the Cross we are presented with fourteen snapshot scenes to lead us into a deeper understanding of the mystery of the cross and the suffering of Jesus for our sake. It is a devotion that enables us to enter into the drama of death and reconciliation, drawing us into the story of our salvation as witnesses of its message and recipients of its grace.

This Holy Week the restrictions on public worship during the coronavirus and the closure of our churches will mean that we shall have to make this journey in our hearts and minds, placing ourselves consciously not only on the road to Calvary, but also in the company of fellow pilgrims who are offering this devotion in their own homes too.

Circumstances may keep us apart physically, but we can draw together spiritually and unite as we strive to keep this week as best we can. So think of your armchair as you pray this devotion as holy ground, and recall the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit in your life drawing us all into communion with each other wherever we are. The hymn writer William Cowper (1731-1800) has a wonderful insight for us when he writes:

Jesus, where'er thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy-seat:
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.

The great company of brother and sister Christians is called to mind through the use of the text from the Walsingham Pilgrim Manual for these devotions. We think of our own past pilgrimages to that holy place, even as we look forward to our return there soon. But perhaps using the Pilgrim Manual invites another thought: We often make a pilgrimage to Walsingham with a 'special intention' in our hearts, that is we offer our pilgrimage in prayer for a particular person or situation. Perhaps as we make this spiritual pilgrimage along the Way of the Cross our 'special intention' could be all who are affected by coronavirus, through illness or isolation or anxiety, that they may find relief and recovery; for those risking their own health to care for the sick and suffering; and for the dying, that they may know comfort and peace.

May Our Lady of Walsingham pray for us.

Fr Philip Barnes, Guardian of the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham

*At the start of our meditation on each station we pray:
We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Opening Prayer

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Almighty Father,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

1st Station - Jesus is condemned to death

Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. *John 19.14-16*

Pilate is a man with a divided heart. He knows that Jesus is innocent and he looks for a way to free him, but at the same time he is afraid of the crowd, and so his own self-interest becomes more important than what is right. Justice is trampled underfoot by weakness, cowardice, and fear of the prevailing mood.

We acknowledge with penitence the times that we have failed to stand up for the truth through fear or indecision. We pray for the falsely accused and victims of injustice.

Lord Jesus, strengthen our conscience. Save us from quick and easy judgements on others. Help us to walk in the way of your justice and truth.

2nd Station - Jesus receives his cross

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of the skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. *John 19.17*

Jesus is made to carry the means of his own death. Wearing the mocking crown of thorn he appears as the true King, who reigns, not through violence, but through suffering love. He takes up the cross, bearing the burden of a sinful world, bearing our burden. He takes up the cross and begins to walk, showing the way that leads to true life.

We acknowledge with sorrow the burdens we have placed on the shoulders of others, or times when we have failed to ease the burdens of those who came to us hoping for consolation or reassurance. We pray for the grace to carry the crosses we have to bear, crosses of pain or responsibility of ourselves or others.

Lord Jesus, help us to follow path of your love, and as we accept its demands to find life.

3rd Station - Jesus falls for the first time

Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.
Philippians 2.6-8

As Jesus falls beneath the weight of the cross the whole meaning of his life is revealed. He empties himself and descends to the lowest point of human nature, so that he might lift us up again with him in glory. We so often fall into self-destruction through pride or self-centredness, but the merciful love of the Lord reaches down to us even in those moments to save us and raise us up.

We acknowledge with thanksgiving that this fall of Jesus is no accident, but a part of his movement down to fallen humanity. We pray for the strength to leave the destructive pride which drags us down, and through our sharing in the humility of Jesus, to rise again.

Lord Jesus, forgive our falls from your grace, and help us to be compassionate towards the failings of others.

4th Station - Jesus meets his mother

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’ Luke 2.34-35

Mary’s heart was a treasury. In her heart she had kept the words of the angel, spoken to her at the beginning “do not be afraid Mary”, and in it she had pondered all the events surrounding the birth of her Son. Her heart carried Jesus as she watched him grow and begin his ministry. Now, in this dark hour her heart knew the courage of a mother, the fidelity of a mother, the faith of a mother as she followed along the way to Calvary.

We acknowledge the courage of Mary’s love and pray that we may have some share of that faithfulness in our own discipleship. We pray for mothers who are carrying great burdens today, especially for those caring for their suffering children, or for those struggling to understand a child who seems to be lost to them.

May Mary, the Mother of Mercy, be their strength and companion.

5th Station - Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. *Mark 15.21*

Simon was just going about his daily business when he happened across the sad procession of condemned men on their way to Calvary. As the soldiers force him into helping to carry the cross of Jesus how angry he must have felt at this brutal interruption to his day. But St Mark’s Gospel tells us not only his name but the names of his children. They are known to the Christian community. This chance encounter touched Simon’s heart, and he became a disciple.

We acknowledge in penance our own reluctance to help those in need if it interferes with our own plans or desires. We pray for the grace to share the sufferings of others and so to build up the body of Christ.

Lord, help us to recognise you in the faces of those who need our help.

6th Station - Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his face!'

Your face, Lord, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,

O God of my salvation! *Psalm 27.8-9*

In the Old Testament we hear believers yearning to see the face of God. In Jesus Christ that face is made visible. At first Veronica saw only a bloodied and bruised face, but as she stepped forward to bring comfort to this condemned man the image of the true God was impressed on her heart. In the man of sorrows she sees the face of God.

We acknowledge with sorrow our blindness of heart which means we only see the surface of things. We pray for help to see God's glory in the suffering, the poor, the oppressed and for the courage to serve him in those people and places.

Lord Jesus, imprint your image in our hearts that we may show you to the world.

7th Station - Jesus falls the second time

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! *Romans 7.21-25*

The tradition of Jesus' falls beneath the weight of the cross remind us of the falls of humanity –from the moment of Adam's fall in story of Genesis through to our own falls through moral weakness or selfish pride. It is humanity with its back turned on God that lies fallen in the dust. But Jesus shared our weakness so that we may share his strength. He falls in order to raise us up.

We acknowledge with sorrow our falls and failures, especially when others may have been depending on us. We pray for a clearer sense of God's presence in our lives, lifting us up above the forces of evil.

Lord Jesus, give us the gift of hope.

8th Station - Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?' *Luke 23.27-31*

The women of Jerusalem fulfil a pious duty to weep for a condemned man, but their grief is formal and ritualistic. Jesus' words to them point us to a deeper truth: sentimental piety on its own is not enough, but must lead to a true conversion of heart. Do we stand and express sorrow and consternation at the world's woes, shed a tear but then turn away?

We acknowledge with sorrow times of insincerity or shallow piety. We pray for the gift of real compassion that acts in the face of suffering, and for those who are the helpless witnesses of cruelty or pain.

Lord Jesus, help us to follow you not just with words, but with the whole of our lives.

9th Station - Jesus falls for the third time

He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.' *John 21.17*

The falls of Jesus speak to fallen humanity and to our own falls through weakness or sin. But the Church falls too; through our lack of unity, our failure to live up to the call of Christ, the sinful actions of her ministers and our petty squabbling and power struggles while the gospel goes un-proclaimed. When the Church falls we drag down the name of Christ, but he is yet the resurrection and the life –and his power can raise us up.

We acknowledge with sorrow the times we have wounded the Body of Christ. We pray for those who have lapsed from the Church because of the actions of her members –that the strong love of Jesus would draw them back.

Lord Jesus, save and sanctify your Church, save and sanctify us.

10th Station - Jesus is stripped of his garments

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. *Ephesians 4.22-24*

As the soldiers remove Jesus' clothing they remove every last shred of his dignity. He becomes simply an outcast, despised by all alike, judged by the eyes he is exposed to. Jesus once more takes on the condition of fallen humanity, when we are stripped of all we surround ourselves with and come face to face with God.

We acknowledge the futility of the self-deceit and disguise with which we can clothe ourselves with before God. We pray for the gift of self knowledge and self awareness. And we pray for all those who have had their dignity removed through the inhumanity and cruelty of others, for victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation –and that the hearts of the perpetrators may be turned.

Lord Jesus, give us respect for all humanity. Clothe us with your grace.

11th Station - Jesus is nailed to the cross

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' *Luke 23.33*

In the terrible cruelty of the moment Jesus deliberately takes the pain of the crucifixion. As his arms and legs are stretched out and pinned to the beams of the cross his whole body demonstrates the height and breadth and depth of the measure of God's love for us. He is fastened to a world's sin and failings and self-centredness, so that we might be joined to him for ever.

We acknowledge with sorrow times when we have preferred a faith that asks little of us or of a half-hearted following of Christ. We pray for the tortured and those awaiting execution, for those fastened to the crosses of addictions to drugs or alcohol and those who find no joy in being alive. May the love of God which triumphed in even this dark hour be their strength and stay.

Lord Jesus, let us be bound to you and never let us go.

12th Station - Jesus dies on the cross

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.'

Luke 23.44-47

Jesus has accomplished his task. He has thrown open the way to heaven, and given himself into the hands of the Father. With all creation we stand in awe and wonder as Jesus, our Lord and God, dies.

A period of silence is kept.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me,

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O good Jesus, hear me.

Within thy wounds hide me.

Suffer me not to be separated from thee.

From the malicious enemy defend me.

In the hour of my death call me,

And bid me come to thee,

*That with thy saints I may praise thee for ever
and ever. Amen.*

13th Station - Jesus is taken down from the cross

Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. After these things,

Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. *John 19.32-34,38*

Jesus is dead. Yet before the body is wrenched from the cross and put into the arms of Mary, his side is pierced and water and blood flow out –an image of Baptism and the Eucharist which will be at the heart of his Church. Even in this hour of immense grief the hidden God is preparing the way for something new, as a community of faith begins to take shape.

We acknowledge with sorrow the times when we have been tempted to loose heart. We pray for all who cannot see beyond the darkness of grief, and for all who mourn –especially parents mourning the death of a child. May Mary, who knew the pain of grief, pray with them and for them.

Lord Jesus, even when we feel helpless prepare our hearts for resurrection.

14th Station - Jesus is laid in the tomb

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6.3-4

It seems that it is all over. A disgraced body is placed in a tomb, with a great rock rolled over the entrance like a giant full-stop. But Jesus is on the cusp of a new beginning. Ahead lies an unimaginable future which he will share with all whose life seems to have reached a dead end. From this place of death will spring forth glorious new life.

We acknowledge with sorrow our failure to live up to our baptismal covenant. Let us pray for all the baptised, and for those preparing for baptism. Since in baptism we have shared Christ's death in order to share his risen life, so through us may the word of God be alive and active today.

Lord Jesus, help us to be messengers of your Way of life.

Closing prayer

Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you
in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory;
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be praise
and honour,
glory and might, now and in all eternity.

Amen.

Our Lady of Walsingham, pray for us.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.