

# THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS



*Given in the College Chapel, Terenure College,  
Good Friday, 2013.*

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*Prayers are taken from the Stations of the Cross in the Colosseum, Rome,  
Good Friday, 2000.*

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

## Introduction

Within the Christian tradition today is a sombre day – our altars are bare, our tabernacles empty. Today we remember the last hours of the life of Jesus Christ and in particular the journey from the handing down of the death sentence by Pilate to the burial of the lifeless body of Jesus in a borrowed tomb. The journey itself from Praetorium to Golgotha is under a kilometre but it was done with much pain and humiliation. Through this journey we learn of the Father’s love for us as he allowed his Son to suffer an appalling death so that each one of us might have eternal life.

We are here because we are convinced that the *Way of the Cross* of the Son of God was not simply a journey to the place of execution. We believe that every step of the Condemned Christ, every action and every word, as well as everything felt and done by those who took part in this tragic drama, continues to speak to us. In his suffering and death, Christ reveals to us the truth about God and man.

What does it mean to have a part in the Cross of Christ? It means to experience, in the Holy Spirit, the love hidden within the Cross of Christ. It means to recognize, in the light of this love, our own cross. It means to take up that cross once more and, strengthened by this love, to continue our journey... To journey through life, in imitation of the one who “*endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God*” (Hebrews 12:2).<sup>1</sup>

The scene is the old city of Jerusalem in the springtime. The city has swelled with pilgrims for the great Jewish festival of Passover which every Jew is bound to keep and, where possible, to keep it in Jerusalem itself. Sabbath will begin in a few hours and so the streets are busy with people making their final preparations before sundown. On the previous evening Jesus was arrested by the Temple Guards and had his first trial before the Sanhedrin who found him guilty of blasphemy and condemned him to death. At the time of his arrest Jesus had been praying in anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane – he was aware of what these hours would bring. Now we begin in Herod’s palace and will end within sight of the Temple Mount.

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<sup>1</sup> From the Stations of the Cross in the Colosseum, Good Friday, 2000.

## **The First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death**

V/ *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R/ *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

The Sanhedrin of the day was able to condemn someone to death for blasphemy but they were unable to carry out the execution. They had to go before a foreign ruler to have one of their own executed for breaking one of their own laws. And so Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate who is not fazed by a little blood-letting. He is used to sorting out problems among the locals who are usually vying among themselves for power. But something isn't right here and he sends Jesus to Herod who also finds no case before returning him to Pilate, healing a rift between these two Roman officials. The first charge was a religious one which Pilate had no interest in but he has Jesus flogged and brings him before the mob again. But quickly the mood in the mob changes and treason is suddenly on the table and with it Pilate's own authority and life. He knows this man is not a political threat and should not die and so he protests, weakly.

We are called to live the Christian life every day and to stand up for Christian principles in every sphere of life. Do we truly do that or do we give in like Pilate when people begin to look at us and perhaps mock us for our stance?

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*Lord Jesus Christ, you accepted an unjust judgement. Grant to us and to all the men and women of our time the grace to remain faithful to the truth. Do not allow the weight of responsibility for the sufferings of the innocent fall upon us and upon those who come after us. To you, O Jesus, just Judge, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Prayers are taken from the Stations of the Cross in the Colosseum, Good Friday, 2000.

## **The Second Station: Jesus is made to carry the Cross**

*V/ We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

*R/ Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Part of the Roman system of justice was to use punishment as a teaching tool for others. Jesus had already been scourged and mocked by the Roman soldiers within the palace and displayed to those gathered in the courtyard dressed in purple and wearing a crown. Now it is time for him to walk to the place of public executions but rather than a simple walk shackled between two guards, the condemned had to carry the instrument of his own death. Jesus is given the heavy cross beam and, though his body is already in shock from the scourging and he is bleeding from the crown of thorns, he has no choice but to accept the heavy load and be paraded through the streets of Jerusalem which are extra busy with pilgrims for the Passover.

As Christians we are to relieve the burdens of others whom we meet and not to add insult to their injuries. But how often do we add to the humiliations of others by gossiping or adding to the backbiting and mockery?

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*Lord Jesus Christ, who accepted the Cross at the hands of men to make of it the sign of God's saving love for humanity, grant us and all the men and women of our time the grace of faith in this infinite love. By passing on to new generations the sign of the Cross, may we be authentic witnesses to the Redemption. To you, O Jesus, Priest and Victim, be praise and glory for ever. Amen.*

### **The Third Station: Jesus falls for the first time**

V/ *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R/ *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

The city of Jerusalem is built on hilly ground and even with Roman engineering the streets were not as even as ours. They had large flat stones laid down but it was very easy to trip on these as on poorly laid cobblestones. Still recovering from the first round of punishment and with blood and sweat blurring his vision in the increasing heat of the day, Jesus falls on the road under the burden he is carrying. The soldiers, playing up on the spectacle would have treated him roughly but not rough enough to have him die before they got to hang him on the cross.

We all know people who are afflicted by old age, ill health, deteriorating mental capacities, people who struggle to get by but who cannot cope with the burdens they have to carry, and so they stumble and fall. Do we treat them poorly at that moment because they are a burden, or do we suffer with them and try to ease their burdens?

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*Lord Jesus Christ, through your humiliation beneath the Cross you revealed to the world the price of its redemption. Grant to the men and women of our time the light of faith, so that, as they recognize in you the Suffering Servant of God and man, they may have the courage to follow the same path which, by way of the Cross and self-emptying, leads to life without end. To you, O Jesus, our support when we are weak, be honour and glory for ever. Amen.*

### **The Fourth Station: Jesus meets his Mother**

V/ *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R/ *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

The route to Calvary cuts through the centre of Jerusalem and is busy with people, some of whom are interested in the spectacle provided by the Romans, and others who are rushing about their business before Sabbath begins. Within the crowd are the close family and friends of the condemned who follow along to see what happens, hoping against hope that this is all a dream and that a reprieve might come at any moment. In the midst of it all Jesus comes face to face with his Mother, a woman who at this moment appears a solitary figure without even a husband to lean on. No words are recorded between them and perhaps nothing was said. Any parent seeing their child suffer in such a way, and knowing that there is nothing they can do to stop it or alleviate it, must feel as though they themselves were in hell. The words of Simeon in the Temple all those years ago echo: *'And a sword shall pierce your soul too'* (Luke 2:35).

All of this highlights Mary's incredible and unending 'yes' at the Annunciation. The Lord calls us to be true Christians and to be faithful to our baptismal promises every day but are we as generous in our response as was Mary, or do we give a conditional 'yes' - conditional on our always being happy and in control?

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*O Mary, who walked the way of the Cross with your Son, your mother's heart torn by grief, but mindful always of your 'yes' to God and fully confident that he to whom nothing is impossible would be able to fulfil his promises, implore for us and for the generations yet to come the grace of surrender to God's love. Help us, in the face of suffering, rejection, and trial, however prolonged and severe, never to doubt his love. To Jesus, your Son, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

## **The Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus**

V/ *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R/ *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

As the procession continues it becomes apparent to the soldiers that one of the prisoners might not actually make it to Calvary. So they grab a man from the crowd – Simon who comes from Cyrene in North Africa, father of Alexander and Rufus – and force him to assist the prisoner with his heavy load. This was not something for which a volunteer was requested – the order of the Roman soldiers was enough and so Simon had no choice but to make the journey to Calvary himself and share in the abuse from the guards and the onlookers, to walk in the footsteps of Christ. The fact that his name and the name of his sons are recorded suggests that this experience touched their lives and that they became followers of Jesus and of his Way.

Living the Christian life means that we must be willing to help others no matter who they are or how they appear to us. Simon helped but under duress. Unlike Simon we have the freedom to help or to walk on past like those in the story of the Good Samaritan. To be true Christians we must be willing to help others and to journey with them in their time of suffering.

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*O Christ, you gave to Simon of Cyrene the dignity of carrying your Cross. Welcome us too under its weight, welcome all men and women and grant to everyone the gift of readiness to serve. Do not permit that we should turn away from those who are crushed by the cross of illness or loneliness, hunger or injustice. As we carry each other's burdens, help us to become witnesses to the gospel of the Cross and witnesses to you, who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.*

## **The Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus**

V/ *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R/ *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

The procession continues through the narrow streets and it is quite easy to come face to face with and to touch the prisoners. In the midst of all of this a woman, Veronica – whose name means ‘the true image’ – produces a cloth and wipes the blood and sweat from the face of Jesus to give him some relief: a brief human touch in the midst of inhuman treatment. For her kindness Veronica is left with the imprint of the face of Christ on her cloth.

Even a small and insignificant gesture as this is how we too are called to treat others. While Veronica was rewarded with an image on cloth we will be rewarded by seeing relief, gratitude and perhaps a smile on the face of those we help. And that is the image that should be for ever marked on our memory because it is the gratitude of Christ himself present in those we help: *‘In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me’* (Matthew 25:40).

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*Lord Jesus Christ, you accepted a woman’s selfless gesture of love, and in exchange ordained that future generations should remember her by the name of your face. Grant that our works and the works of all who will come after us will make us like unto you and will leave in the world the reflection of your infinite love. To you, O Jesus, splendour of the Father’s glory, be praise and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

### **The Seventh Station: Jesus falls the second time**

*V/ We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

*R/ Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Despite the fact that he has someone to help him with the heavy load, Jesus still stumbles and falls. Perhaps it's because of the uneven road surface, perhaps he's pushed too roughly by the soldiers, perhaps there's jostling going on in the crowd, or perhaps he's simply exhausted in the heat from loss of blood and energy. Whatever the cause, Jesus falls to the ground again.

These three stations remind us of the importance of persisting in helping others. Even though we may help others once or give them something one day, it doesn't mean that we are done with charity. Charity is a lifelong part of the Christian and even those whom we have helped may fall again and need our aid once more.

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*Lord Jesus Christ, you fall under the weight of human sin and you get up again in order to take it upon yourself and cancel it. Give to us, weak men and women, the strength to carry the cross of daily life and to get up again from our falls, so that we may bring to future generations the Gospel of your saving power. To you, O Jesus, our support when we are weak, be praise and glory for ever. Amen.*

## **The Eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem**

*V/ We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

*R/ Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Not everyone in Jerusalem was happy to see Jesus condemned. Many had listened to his preaching and were won over by it and must have watched in sadness as this holy man was led out to be executed. Whether they truly believed him or not the sight of a man of peace and healing being treated so badly must have moved some to recoil in horror. Jesus speaks to this group of women for a very brief moment and tells them not to cry for him – his fate was sealed a long time ago. Instead they should weep for their children as they grow up in a city which has rejected the true God, just like the vineyard owner whose tenants beat and killed his servants and his son (Mark 12:1-12) and claimed the property for their own.

Living the Christian life is not an easy thing, not because of what it asks us to do or believe but because of the society and the times we live in. Our world grows in secularism and is uncomfortable with public displays of worship and faith. Pope Francis is currently very popular but in time his message, his orthodoxy too will meet with hardened hearts. To be a true Christian admitting that we believe in God is not enough – we must put that faith into practice by how we live, act and worship despite the society in which we live. To be a true Christian also means to hand on to the next generation the truth of the Gospel.

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*O Christ, you came into this world to visit all those who await salvation. Grant that our generation will recognize the time of its visitation and share in the fruits of your redemption. Do not permit that there should be weeping for us and for the men and women of our time because we have rejected our merciful Father's outstretched hand. To you, O Jesus, born of the Virgin Daughter of Zion, be honour and praise for ever and ever. Amen.*

### **The Ninth Station: Jesus falls the third time**

V/ *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R/ *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Quite often the Roman execution of criminals was on the main road coming into a city so that those entering knew to behave themselves. The criminals were executed on higher ground so that those using the road couldn't avoid the sight. And so Jesus now has to climb a hill - not like climbing the Mount of Beatitudes with a spring in his step to teach the people who flocked to hear him. This is the hill of death and the journey is almost at an end, as Jesus falls the third time.

At times the road for us is quite steep and uneven and there are times when we feel like staying down when we fall and giving up on trying to be a good Christian. But despite the load he had to carry, Jesus didn't give up but made those last steps to complete the journey knowing what lay beyond. We too must persevere in the Christian Way knowing that a great reward lies ahead of us.

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*O Christ, as you fall under the weight of our faults and rise again for our justification, we pray, help us and all who are weighed down by sin to stand up again and continue the journey. Give us the strength of the Spirit to carry with you the cross of our weakness. To you, O Jesus, crushed under the weight of our faults be our praise and love for ever. Amen.*

## **The Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments**

*V/ We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

*R/ Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Finally the procession reaches Golgotha – the Place of the Skull – the place of death. The cross is taken and prepared and Jesus can simply stand still for a few moments to draw breath before the next indignity. Despite being stained with his blood and sweat the soldiers recognise the quality of Jesus' garments and so they gamble for them. As a result Jesus is not crucified in the sanitised way our modern crucifixes and images show. Instead, in a final indignity, he will leave this world as naked as he entered it.

For most Christians and people this is a moment when they cringe because the natural reaction in such a situation is to try and cover up the person and restore to them some dignity. But dignity isn't simply lost because someone has no clothes. Dignity is lost when people have no food, no roof over their heads, or when they have to beg in order to survive. Our reaction to our fellow men and women should be the same as our reaction to Jesus being stripped of his garments.

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*Lord Jesus, who, with supreme dedication, accepted death on the Cross for our salvation, grant to us and to all the world's peoples a share in your sacrifice on the Cross, so that what we are and what we do may always be a free and conscious sharing in your work of salvation. To you, O Jesus, Priest and Victim, be honour and glory for ever. Amen.*

## **The Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the Cross**

*V/ We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

*R/ Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Jesus has now arrived at the point of no return, the moment for which he came into the world. The Romans were experts at executing in such a way that the criminal did die, but in a slow manner over several hours. Jesus is placed against the wood of the cross, his arms outstretched and nails driven through his hands and feet to secure him in place. He is then left to die above the heads of the onlookers and for all arriving for the festival to see.

For us as Christians this crucifixion is essential for salvation history and was foreshadowed in scripture. But it doesn't mean that any execution is permissible. There is a reminder here that human life was given a sacred dignity through the Incarnation, God made man, and that it belongs to God alone to take away the gift of life. It is for us as Christians to stand up for those who are treated badly, unjustly or inhumanely, or who cannot speak for themselves.

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*O Christ lifted high, O Love crucified, fill our hearts with your love, that we may see in your Cross the sign of our redemption and, drawn by your wounds, we may live and die with you, who live and reign with the Father and the Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.*

## **The Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the Cross**

V/ *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R/ *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Having endured much suffering over the past few hours along with the mental anguish of the last few days, Jesus succumbs to his injuries and passes into the Father's hands. The severity of that suffering is brought home to us when we remember that Jesus died much sooner than the other prisoners and to the surprise of Pilate who sends for confirmation of the death. Even in his last moments, Jesus gives us an example of how we too should live: trusting in God and forgiving others. He also remembered to look after his Mother by placing her under the protection of one of his apostles, and he remembered us by making her our Mother, the most powerful advocate we have in his presence.

As Christians we are all called to trust in God and forgive those who hurt us, which isn't simply seen in the death of Jesus, but is found in his life and teaching. His death makes us stop and think about our own lives and about why Jesus died: *'For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'* (John 3:16).

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*Lord Jesus Christ, in the moment of your agony you were not indifferent to humanity's fate, and with your last breath you entrusted to the Father's mercy the men and women of every age, with all their weaknesses and sins. Fill us and the generations yet to come with your Spirit of love, so that our indifference will not render vain in us the fruits of your death. To you, crucified Jesus, the wisdom and the power of God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

### **The Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the Cross**

V/ *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R/ *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

The bodies are removed from their crosses and Mary cradles the body of her Son. The last time she did this he was probably a child, now she cradles the lifeless body of a man whose flesh bears the scars of his rejection and humiliation. Not alone is Mary a widow, now the son who should have looked after and cared for her as she grew old is also gone. How lucky was the widow of Naim when Jesus restored her son to life as he passed the funeral cortege (Luke 7:11-17).

Even at this most awful moment, Mary is still a silent figure and even now she trusts in God though in her heart she must be torn apart and searching for understanding. As Christians we are called to trust in God's plan for each of us and for those around us. We are also reminded of the Beatitude - "*Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted*" (Matthew 5:5) - but that comforting is not simply confined to our entry into the next life. As believing and praying Christians we can feel the Lord's comforting presence of Christ in the midst of our sorrow and distress.

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*Implore for us, O Blessed Mother, the grace of faith, hope and charity, so that we, like you, may stand without flinching beneath the Cross until our last breath. To your Son, Jesus, our Saviour, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

### **The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the sepulchre**

V/ *We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.*

R/ *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

The Romans usually left the bodies for the vultures but Jewish Law decreed that the bodies be removed the same day and, as Passover began that day, there was an added urgency to this. The Jewish funeral rites involved a ritual of cleansing, anointing and wrapping of the body to delay the decay of death. But so fast have things happened that there isn't time to do even this much and so Jesus is quickly covered with a shroud and placed in a tomb. Over thirty years before Mary '*wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space*' (Luke 2:7b). That scene brings forth images of love and care and warmth. Now he is hurriedly buried in a state of haste, neglect and rejection on a cold slab in a borrowed tomb.

Our Father...

*Let us pray:*

*Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you were drawn by the Father from the darkness of death to the light of a new life in glory. Grant that the sign of the empty tomb may speak to us and to future generations and become a wellspring of living faith, generous love, and unshakeable hope. To you, O Jesus, whose presence, hidden and victorious, fills the history of the world, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

## **Conclusion**

And so we have reached the end of our journey with the Lord of Life lying in the tomb. The Way of the Cross first and foremost reminds us of the sufferings that Jesus underwent for us collectively and individually. It reminds us of the overwhelming love of God the Father for each one of us and of his desire for us to be one with him in the Kingdom of Truth and Life. It is also a reminder to us of the journey through life of a Christian - a journey which is not always easy but a journey which should be lived for others beginning for and from our families but then extending out to the Christian Community and then to the community of all humankind. The Way of the Cross leads to the glory of the Lord's resurrection on Easter Day and our own Christian journey leads us to the glory of eternal life.

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

Let us depart in silence.