

Stations of the Cross

*Reflecting on the
Coronavirus Pandemic*



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

Introduction

The Stations of the Cross mark Jesus' final journey, from the moment when he is condemned to death, to the moment where he is laid in the tomb. Nine of the fourteen Stations are directly referenced in Scripture; others became part of the early tradition of the Church. In Jerusalem the way of the cross, where the stations are geographically located, is named "Via Dolorosa" (Way of Sadness).

Jesus journey to the cross has vivid echoes and resonances for us in this time of Pandemic – Jesus does not abandon us, but walks with us. And along the way he meets those who offer moments of soothing and generous relief in the midst of agony and distress.

Therefore the first part of the reflection for each of these Stations refers to the Scripture passages and other references which inspire them. The second part of each reflection is focussed specifically on an element of the CoronaVirus Pandemic, helping us to bring this to prayer in despair and anguish, joy and hope, and helping us to name some of the characters on this modern "Via Dolorosa."

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First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**

Scripture Reflection

The high priest questioned him, saying: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" And Jesus said to him, "I am. And you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." The high priest tore his robes and said, "What need of witnesses have we now? You have heard the blasphemy. What is your finding?" Their verdict was unanimous: he deserved to die. Some of them started spitting at his face, hitting him and saying: "Play the prophet!" (Mark 14:61-64)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

The beginning of symptoms of CoronaVirus will feel, for some, like a condemnation to death. Breathlessness, pneumonia, and the need for a ventilator will be serious and life-threatening. As Jesus is condemned to die, though innocent of any crime or charges, we too may feel the injustice of the death of innocent loved ones, family members and friends. It feels harsh, brutal, and inexplicable.

We notice too the detail of the Gospel – they spat in Jesus' face. Spitting has become a weapon in this pandemic – spitting at police, even at NHS workers, as a sign of anger or frustration, with the intent to spread the virus. Jesus knows exactly what it is like to be spat at, exactly what it is like to be condemned to die. He walks with us.

Pause for a moment of quiet personal prayer and reflection

Taize chant as we move to the next Station:

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom;
Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

Second Station: Jesus Carries his Cross

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**

Scripture Reflection

“Here is your king” said Pilate to the Jews. But they shouted, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate said, “Shall I crucify your king?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king except Caesar.” So at that Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. They then took charge of Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out to the Place of the Skull, or as it is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.” (John 19:14-17)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

Jesus picks up his cross. It would have been a very weighty piece of wood; enough to support a man, some feet from the ground. He has already been beaten, and had a crown of thorns put on his head. What crosses are we having to carry in these days? The cross of isolation. The cross of living with people who are hard to live with. The cross of a cramped flat, with no garden. What crosses are others carrying? Those who are refugees, or homeless. Those who have elderly relatives they cannot visit. Those who are anxious about money, or jobs. Consider for a moment the particular cross that you are carrying in this pandemic. Do you have someone who you can talk to about it? Most certainly, you can talk to Christ, in prayer. Jesus knows exactly what it is like to carry your cross.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Taize chant as we move to the next Station:

Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
(where there is charity and love, God is there)

Third Station: Jesus Falls for the First Time

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**

Scripture Reflection

For my part I made no resistance, neither did I turn away.
I offered my back to those who struck me,
my cheeks to those who tore at my beard;
I did not cover my face against insult and spittle. (Isaiah 50:6)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

It is not surprising that Jesus falls over. The cross is heavy, he is weakened by loss of blood, and the midday heat in Jerusalem is fierce. The ground is uneven, and the crowds press around.

It will not be surprising if we also fall over in these pressured days. A moment when we snap at someone we are sharing a house with; a moment where we lose patience in a supermarket queue; a moment where we are reduced to tears by the sheer helplessness we feel in the face of illness, death, and confinement.

As we lie on the ground – literally and metaphorically – we can look to our side and see that Jesus is there with us, on the floor, weighed down. Together with Jesus, we find extra strength to get up and carry on.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Hymn as we move to the next Station:

Were you there when they crucified my Lord,
Were you there when they crucified my Lord
Oh-oh-oh-oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my Lord

Fourth Station: Jesus meets his mother Mary

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**

Scripture Reflection

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, this is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "This is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25-27)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

How much mothers suffer when they see their children suffer. It is hard to imagine the grief and distress of Mary as she sees what is happening to Jesus. And in CoronaVirus wards in hospitals which mothers cannot enter, while their children struggle for breath, how deeply the pain and sorrow are felt. For children, too, who cannot visit parents, at home or in hospital, there is great stress and distress.

Jesus understands. Mary understands. And Jesus shows us his care for Mary as he entrusts her to John, the beloved disciple. It does not take away the fear and pain, but it does mean that she is not alone, as we are not alone – Jesus makes sure that we are never alone.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are you amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Taize chant as we move to the next Station:

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom;
Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene help Jesus to carry his Cross

We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Scripture Reflection

As they were leading him away they seized on a man, Simon from Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus.” (Lk. 23:26)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

Simon is pulled from the crowd and enlisted to help Jesus. Consider the crosses that we are carrying, and that others are carrying, that we reflected on earlier. Then think about what it means to help another person to carry their cross. It could be as simple as a smile and a warm hello, as you pass the window of the neighbour in isolation. It could be a “thank you” to the supermarket assistant regulating the queue at the shop door, or to the person at the checkout, carrying their crosses of abuse as people are impatient with waiting, or with missing goods. It could be leaving a thank you card with the bins, as the bin men continue their job. It could be a donation to a food bank, a long phone call to someone with no visitors, or a generous listening ear for someone who is in despair.

To pick up the cross of another costs us time, energy, sometimes money. And it transforms us – somehow our own crosses diminish when we shoulder the burden of another. Jesus shows us what that looks like – and Simon shows us how we can step in to help. For whom can you be Simon of Cyrene, in this pandemic? Who needs help to carry their cross?

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Taize chant as we move to the next Station:

Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
(where there is charity and love, God is there)

Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Scripture Reflection

"Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger, and make you welcome; naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and go to see you?" And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this for one of the least of my sisters and brothers, you did it for me." (Mt 25: 37-40)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

What a moment of blessed relief! In the heat, dust and pain of the journey to Calvary this is a brief instant of soothing tenderness. Veronica comes from the crowd and wipes the face of Jesus; the image of his face remains on the cloth.

In CoronaVirus wards a nurse brings a sip of water to a patient with a dry throat; another holds the hand of a dying woman, consoling her just by her presence. In a block of flats a young child writes a letter to an elderly neighbour, reaching out to them through the isolation.

These are the Veronica moments; moments of relief and kindness, tenderness and concern. And these moments make all the difference, allowing the fog of pain, loneliness and sorrow to lift, and offering hope that even in cruel circumstances, love is present.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Hymn as we move to the next Station:

Were you there when they crucified my Lord,
Were you there when they crucified my Lord
Oh-oh-oh-oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my Lord

Seventh Station: Jesus Falls for the Second Time

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**

Scripture Reflection

“Down in the dust I lie prostrate; true to your word, revive me.
I tell you my ways and you answer me; teach me your wishes. ...
I am melting away for grief; true to your word, raise me up.”
(Ps. 119:25-26, 28)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

Again, Jesus falls. Lying in the road, tasting the dust, even as the soldiers shout and beat him to stand up, to carry on.

Again, we fall. Consumed by grief for a person whose funeral we are not permitted to attend. Despairing as our children try to continue their lessons in a cramped flat with no wifi. Frustrated and angry as the death toll rises and we feel powerless.

We fall, and we too taste the dust – the bitterness of despair, anguish and grief. And again, as we look to our side, we see that Jesus is there. And again, as we see him roughly hauled from the ground and pushed on along the road, as he staggers forward, so too we have the strength to get up and carry on. For we know that Jesus understands.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Taize chant as we move to the next Station:

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom;
Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

Eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Scripture Reflection

Large numbers of people followed him, and women too, who mourned and lamented for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children.” (Luke 23:27-28)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

The tears of the women stream down their faces; they are bereft, consumed by the sadness of aching hearts, by the loss of someone so dear.

Jesus’ response seems very odd; don’t weep for me, but for yourselves and for your children. By the time Luke’s Gospel was set down in writing the listeners would know that the Jewish Temple at the heart of Jerusalem had been destroyed, in 70AD, with children killed and much of Jerusalem in ruins.

Jesus prophesies this, and he shows us that even as he journeys to Calvary his thoughts are not about himself, but others.

As we weep in these days of CoronaVirus, can we also look beyond our own grief and suffering, our own broken hearts, and weep for those who are alone, weep for those in countries with few hospitals and scarce medical supplies, weep for those who have no more tears to cry, weep knowing that even in his moments of greatest agony, Jesus is thinking about us, consoling us, grieving with us.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Taize chant as we move to the next Station:

Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
(where there is charity and love, God is there)

Ninth Station: Jesus Falls for a Third Time

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**

Scripture Reflection

Ill-treated and afflicted,
he never opened his mouth,
like a lamb led to the slaughter house. (Isaiah 53:7)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

Jesus falls for the third time, and in this moment he must have wondered if he would ever get up. Every part of his body is shattered, and even with Simon carrying the cross he can barely put one foot in front of the other.

We see the images of the nurses with faces marked and chafed by the elastic of masks, exhausted after twelve, fourteen and sixteen hour shifts. We see them slumped in hospital corridors, defeated by the amount of suffering they are witnessing. And we see the single mother, living with three children in one room in a London flat, worn down by trying to cope.

As we look, perhaps we can make out the faint outline of a person sitting in the corridor with the nurse, and on the carpet of the flat with the mother. They don't say anything, but just accompany them in their despair. That figure is Christ: fallen for the third time; with us in our moments of gravest despair; understanding exactly how we feel; never leaving us on our own.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Hymn as we move to the next Station:

Were you there when they crucified my Lord,
Were you there when they crucified my Lord
Oh-oh-oh-oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my Lord.

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his clothes

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**

Scripture Reflection

“They took his clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamless, woven in one piece from neck to hem, so they said to one another, “Instead of dividing it, let’s throw dice to decide who is to have it.” (John 19:23-24a)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

When Jesus dies on the cross he is naked. It is the final humiliation – all dignity stripped away as his clothes are stripped away, becoming an object for soldiers to bet on with the throw of the dice.

Christ comes into the world naked on a stable floor; he dies naked on a wooden cross. What sort of King is this? What sort of God is this?

Jesus, fully God and fully human, enters our darkest moments, is present at the times when we are humiliated, when we are robbed of dignity. CoronaVirus robs us of human contact, of work, of the chance to play freely. CoronaVirus strips us back to the barest essentials. What do we find, in these moments that look so bleak? We discover and rediscover how much it matters to love, and to be loved. On the cross Jesus may be bereft of clothes, he may be stripped and humiliated, but he is never robbed of the greatest garment of all, the essence of who he is – pure love.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Taize chant as we move to the next Station:

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom;
Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**

Scripture Reflection

When they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him and the two criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:33-34)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

Jesus' final words are words of forgiveness. What would we want our final words to be, to our loved ones and close friends.

When we leave the house to briefly shop, or exercise, what are our last words? How do we end the phone call, or the online chat?

Take a moment to consider if there is someone who needs to hear some fresh final words from you – words of love, words of peace, words of forgiveness.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Taize chant as we move to the next Station:

Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
(where there is charity and love, God is there)

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.
Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**

Scripture Reflection

It was now about the sixth hour and the sun's light failed, so that darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The veil of the Sanctuary was torn right down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice saying, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." With these words, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-46)

If it is possible, we kneel silently, or stand with our head bowed.

Reflection in the time of pandemic

The death of Jesus Christ transforms the very fact of death, forever. As we pray in the funeral Mass, "Death is life changed, but not ended."

But for some days, months, or even years, this truth of faith does not take away the raw anguish of grief at the loss of a close friend, parent or child. Our aching heart, our despairing cry, our sense of radical emptiness and loss.

By now we all know people who have died from CoronaVirus. Very often no words adequately express how we feel. So the open arms of the crucified Christ can be seen as God's embrace of all that is most raw and difficult as we grieve. And for as long as we need, we can simply allow ourselves to be held in that embrace, silently, with pure love.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

We move in silence to the next Station.

Thirteenth Station: The Body of Jesus is taken down from the cross

We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Scripture Reflection

Joseph of Arimathaea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because he was afraid of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission so they came and took it away. Nicodemus came as well ... and he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, following the Jewish burial custom (John 19:38-40)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

There are so many people who will never be able to cradle the body of their loved one in their arms, in this time of CoronaVirus. And so this is a moment to pray for those who will do that for us; the nurses who will wash the body, and carefully prepare it; the undertakers who will wrap it in a shroud, and season the coffin with oils and other preparations for burial or cremation; the priest who will be at the graveside, or in the crematorium chapel, praying with and for those who cannot be present. Through each of these people, Jesus is there. And with each of these people, Jesus cradles the body of our loved one.

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Taize chant as we move to the next Station:

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom;

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb

We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You.

Because by your holy Cross You have redeemed the world.

Scripture Reflection

At the place where he had been crucified there was a garden and in this garden a new tomb in which no-one had yet been buried. Since it was the Jewish Day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. Joseph of Arimathaea then rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. (John 19:41-42, Mark 15:46b)

Reflection in the time of pandemic

“There is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep.” These words are from an ancient homily for Holy Saturday. Jesus’ pierced, bloodied and cold body is in the tomb, and there is silence. We wait.

For this is not the end of the story, and just as the springtime buds blossom on the once bare trees, so too the hope of Resurrection stirs in the tomb hewn from the stone. There is sorrow as we leave the graveside, but – with the women and with the disciples – we will run to the tomb the next day, and we will find it empty. CoronaVirus will pass. In the Risen Lord “perfect love casts out fear” (1John 4:18) and “neither death nor any created thing whatever ... will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

Pause for a moment of quiet prayer and reflection

Our Father

Hail Mary

Glory Be

Final Blessing

Taize chant to conclude these reflections:

Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
Ubi caritas, et amor, Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est
(where there is charity and love, God is there)