

Stations of the Cross during the Pandemic - Priest's Copy

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

Introduction: Jesus, you embraced the sorrowful cup of suffering in Your passion and death. As we walk these stations in Your footsteps, we unite all our suffering, fears, inconveniences, and hardships to Your Cross. Remind us Jesus during this pandemic that you are with us as we walk this journey together

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.

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. (Mark 14:61-64)

Reflection: The beginning of symptoms of Coronavirus will feel, for some, like a condemnation to death. 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. Jesus knows exactly what it is like. He walks with us.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

"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: 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.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

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: 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 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.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

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: 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 hospital wards in which mothers have not been able to enter, while their children struggle for breath, how deeply the pain and sorrow are felt. For children, too, who could not 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. 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.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

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: 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 or a thank you to someone. 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, Who needs help to carry their cross?

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

"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: 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. In Coronavirus wards a nurse brings a sip of water to a patient with a dry throat, another consoles a dying woman just by her presence. In a block of flats a young child draws a picture for 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.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

"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: 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. Frustrated and angry as 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 know we have the strength to get up and carry on. For we know that Jesus understands.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

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: 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 does not weep for me, but for yourselves and for your children. Jesus shows us that even as he journeys to Calvary his thoughts are not about himself, but others. As we struggle in these days, can we 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.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

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

Reflection: In this moment Jesus 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 medical staff with faces exhausted after twelve, fourteen and sixteen hour shifts. We see them slumped in hospital corridors, defeated by the amount of suffering they are witnessing. 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.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

Tenth Station: Jesus Is Stripped Of His Garments

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

"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: 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. This disease robs us of human contact, of work, of the chance to play freely. It 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.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

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: Nails don’t hold Jesus to the cross; love does. It is his love for each of us, his desire to die for our sins, his yearning to grant us salvation that fastens him to the wood cross. Nothing can separate us from his love. In the midst of this pandemic, we pray for all who feel separated from Christ’s love and for those who doubt God’s presence. May God grant each of us the grace to view this pandemic through the lens of the cross. Trusting that even in the midst of death and darkness God’s love is still there.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

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.

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)

Reflection: 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 emptiness and loss. By now we all know people who have died from the Virus. 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.

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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.

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: Throughout this pandemic there are so many people who never got to cradle the body of their loved one in their arms. And so this is the moment to pray for them and those who did it for them. For each of these people, Jesus is there. And with each of these people, Jesus cradles the body of our loved one.

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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.

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: "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. The virus will pass, that hope is there in the vaccine and in all who have been vaccinated. It's there in the decreasing numbers of those who have been infected and those who have died. 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)

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I Place All My Trust in You

Prayer for the pope's intention: Sacrament of Reconciliation

Let us pray that we may experience the sacrament of reconciliation with renewed depth, to taste the infinite mercy of God. Our Father Hail Mary Glory Be.

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we have walked your Way of the Cross with you, remembering your sacrifice. We ask you through it to calm our anxious hearts, and give hope to all who despair. Lord Jesus Christ, bearer of our sins, healer of our every ill, walk with us through our trials, through our darkest hours. Open our hearts to the hope offered by the mystery of your dying and rising. Let the story of your passion inspire us anew to walk our path of discipleship. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.