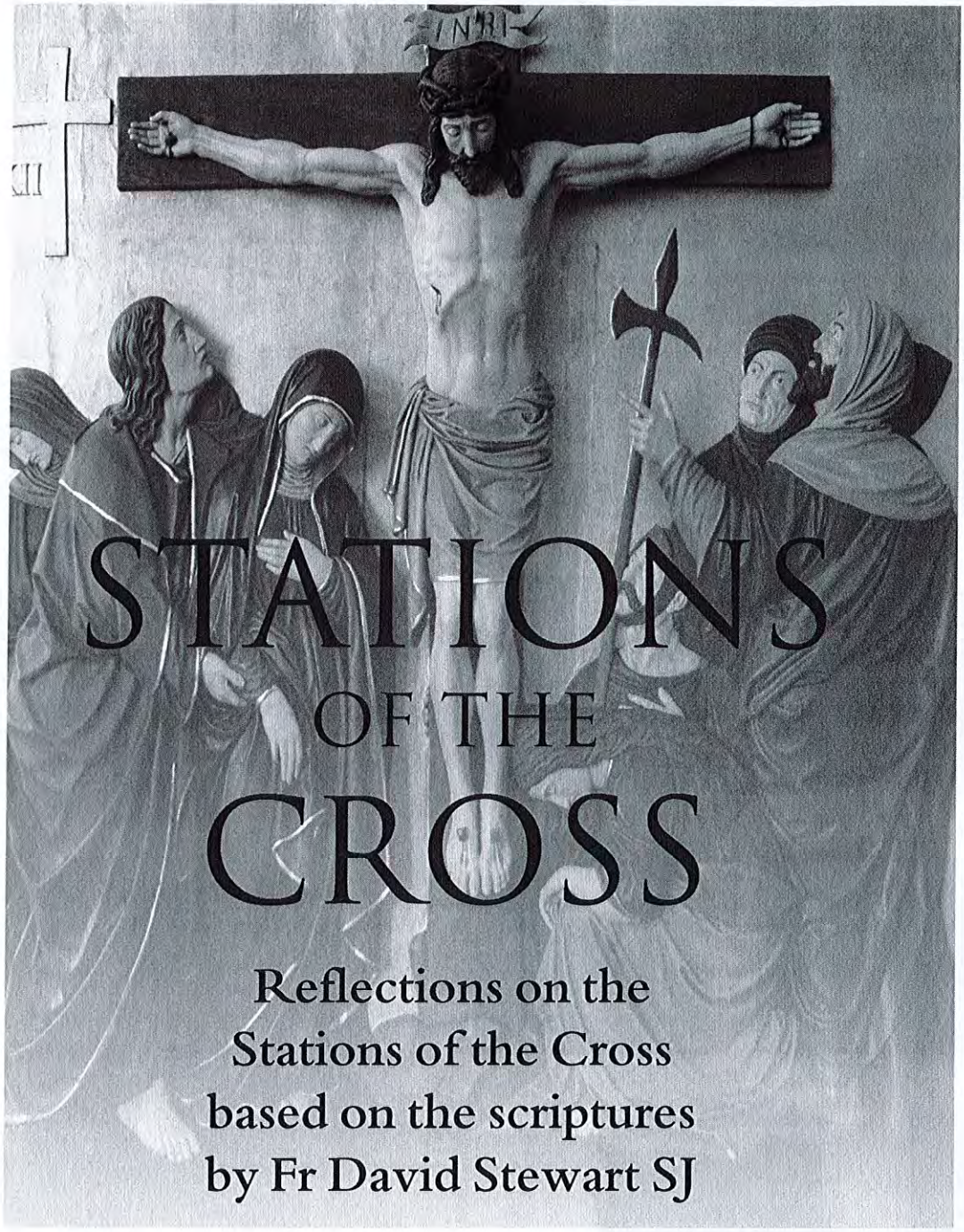

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Reflections on the Stations of the Cross based on the scriptures by Fr David Stewart SJ

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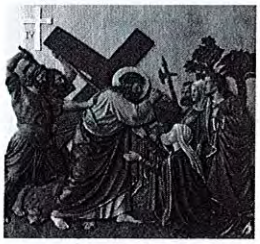


How to use these stations

At the start of every Spiritual Exercise, or time of Ignatian prayer, St Ignatius always encouraged people to remember that God is looking at us as we go to prayer; the Trinity full of longing, full of love, full of mercy that is to be given to us. Let us now bring that fact to mind and rest in God's gaze for a few moments. Let God look at you.

And if you notice any particular thoughts or desires coming up, tell God about them, now.
From all the many thoughts and questions that are probably in your mind right now, let at least some of them fall away, or place them to one side. The ones that really matter at this moment will be the ones you bring to God and will probably be the concerns that matter to God, too.

Standing, sitting or kneeling, according to your physical capacity, think of yourself as moving into a space of prayer, drawn there by God's spirit. You can even pause just a little way away from the place or space where you're going to pray and gently begin to focus your attention on that place, recognising that you're hoping to encounter the Lord there. When you're ready, after a few moments, you can move to that place.

Think of yourself being still, quiet, on the outside and in the inside; think about it and it will become real for you! Say inwardly to yourself, "my body is relaxing", three or four times.
Then take five deep, slow breaths; each time inhaling deeply, holding the breath for a couple of seconds, then exhaling slowly; the inward breath can be you inviting God's grace into your heart while the outward breath can be you expelling anything that is bad or unhelpful in you.

In each of the Stations, there can be three moments which we call, ASK, PRAY and NOTICE. We're all invited to imagine ourselves really present in the Gospel episodes, seeing and hearing all the people, Jesus as well, and perhaps even becoming one of the participants. Let Jesus look at you in the scene; let him even speak to you. Notice anything you'd like to say to him. And say it. He's listening! You may find it appropriate to sing a song or chant at the end of each station, or listen to one if praying on your own.
Pray with the material as you are drawn to do so. If you are leading a group you may wish to shorten the reflections or add your own prayers.

I
JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

We let that gaze of the Trinity fall on us and become conscious of God looking at us, now.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "Jesus, give me a deep inner sense of your sorrow at what is about to unfold, so that I can be sorrowful with you"

PRAY

We listen to the words of the Gospel of Matthew, and imagine what it must have been like to be present. We can ask the Holy Spirit to place us there, in the scene.

Reader

Then Jesus came with them to a plot of land called Gethsemane; and he said to this them, "Stay here while I go over there to pray". He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him. And he began to feel sadness and anguish. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful to the point of death. Wait here and stay awake with me." And going on a little further he fell on his face and prayed. "My Father," he said, "if it is possible, let this cup pass me by; nevertheless, let it be as you, not I, would have it." He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So you had not the strength to stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake, and pray not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing enough, but human nature is weak. "

Matthew 26:36-41

NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

Ask the Spirit of God to hold you in that place of interior quietness and stillness. Remember again that God is gazing on you now, in love. What caught your attention about that story of Gethsemane? How did it touch you and what feelings arose in you? Notice any, but don't judge or explain them.

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, we know that we should not refuse to get involved in what happens to other people, especially when they are being treated badly or unjustly. This can mean people around us in our own place or people thousands of miles away. But there are times when we try to look the other way or prefer not to get involved. It doesn't matter who we are, how well our bodies work, how little we feel we've got to offer or how many things we can or cannot do for ourselves. We can always do something for others. We can share in the suffering of others, and we want to try to.

Help us, Lord, not to condemn other people by the things we sometimes say; help us not to be unjust to others in the things we sometimes do. Help us to avoid judging others by the things we sometimes think.

Forgive us, Lord, and give us the courage to do always what we really know is right and just.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.

Glory be...

II
JESUS, BETRAYED BY JUDAS, IS ARRESTED

Continuing to allow God's gaze to fall on us, we stay still and quiet; if it helps, take more deep slow breaths, up to a maximum of five.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "Jesus, as you are arrested and taken away from your friends and companions, let your anguish at this moment deeply touch my heart too"

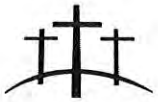
PRAY

We listen to the words of the Gospel of Mark; watch the faces and actions of those who arrest Him, watch Judas's face and then look at Jesus – what is going on in his heart?

Reader

And at once, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came up and with him a number of men armed with clubs, sent by the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the traitor had arranged a signal with them saying, "The one I kiss, he is the man. Arrest him, and see he is well guarded when you lead him away. So when the traitor came, he went up to Jesus at once and said "Rabbi!" and kissed him. The others seized him and arrested him.

Mark 14:43-46



NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

What did you notice about the arrest of Jesus? How did the police who arrested him treat him? Where were his disciples and how did they behave? What feelings did all this spark inside you? Notice, but don't judge or explain.

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, we realise that we do sometimes betray you in our words and actions in everyday life. We even betray your people, even though they are our brothers and sisters, often just because they are a bit different from us.

We also realise that you allowed yourself to be taken, to be handed over when it would have been possible for you to resist violence with violence. But finally we realise that this would never be your way and so you allowed yourself to be handed over. This must have been a moment of fear as well as sadness for you.

Help us, Lord, to resist and reject violence as a way of dealing with the conflicts that confront us. Help us to value difference in others, not to hate it. Variety and diversity are wonderful parts of God's creation, in our brothers and sisters as well as in the natural world. But sometimes we need God's grace to appreciate that. It can be hard for us to let go of our opinions even if we know, deep down, that they are contrary to the Gospel. Help us to hand ourselves over too, if we are called to do so, to become your missionary disciples, for the sake of your kingdom.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.
Glory be....

III
JESUS IS CONDEMNED BY THE SANHEDRIN

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

A quiet moment of asking: "Jesus, give me an inner sense of your sorrow at what is about to unfold, so that I can be sorrowful with you"

PRAY

We listen to the words of the Gospel of Luke, and imagine ourselves watching Jesus as he is paraded before this court in this show-trial. Ask the Holy Spirit to place us there, in the scene. When Jesus responds to his accusers, what is his manner? How does he look at them? At you?

Reader

When day broke there was a meeting of the elders of the people, the chief priests and scribes. He was brought before their council, and they said to him, "If you are the Christ, tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on, the Son of man will be seated at the right hand of the Power of God." They all said, "So you are the Son of God then?" He answered, "It is you who say I am." Then they said, "Why do we need any evidence? We have heard it for ourselves from his own lips."

Luke 22:66-71; cf. Mt.26:59-6

NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

Stay in that place of interior quietness and stillness, as God still gazes on you. How did watching this trial of Jesus affect you? What did you notice about the scene and the people in it, such as the interrogators? How was Jesus during this? Can you tell, as you look at him? What feelings might it have caused in Jesus himself? Can you talk to him about these things?

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, Jesus was unjustly accused and unfairly tried in this mockery of justice. The verdict was decided long before this moment; his fate was already sealed and their minds completely closed to him. But here was a man who had done nothing wrong, who had committed no crime. An inner strength, which was about to be sorely tested, radiated from him.

We know of people in our neighbourhood, perhaps even in our church and our family, who are unjustly accused and stereotyped. We know how prejudice is always based in fear rather than facts. This court of the Sanhedrin tried to justify their actions by their crude attempt to turn Jesus's own words back on himself. We can sometimes try to hide behind certain parts of church teaching, even of Holy Scripture, to try to justify our own opinions and prejudices, instead of letting ourselves be held by the life-giving power of the Gospel.

Give us the grace of the steadfast strength that Jesus showed here, especially if we are the ones who get treated like this. Forgive us, Lord, and give us the courage to do always what we really know is right and just. And if we fall into the temptation of treating others in a prejudiced way, finding them guilty without trial, prompt us to do better.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.
Glory be...

IV
Jesus is denied by Peter

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "that I might become more aware of the shame and confusion that Peter felt within himself, firstly when he denied his friend Jesus and then, as the cock crowed, when he fully realised what he'd done".

PRAY

We listen to the words of Matthew's Gospel and we see how Peter denied knowing Jesus, getting more and more agitated each time he did so, and then was overcome with grief at what he had done.

Reader

Meanwhile Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came up to him saying, "You, too, were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it in front of them all. "I do not know what you are talking about," he said. When he went out to the gateway another servant-girl saw him and said to the people there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazarene." And again, with an oath, he denied it, "I do not know the man." A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "You are certainly one of them too! Why, your accent gives you away." Then he started cursing and swearing, "I do not know the man." And at once the cock crowed, and Peter remembered what Jesus had said, "Before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Matthew 26: 69-75

VI
Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "Lord, grant that we might share in the pain of Jesus as he is whipped and beaten, then mocked by the soldiers; we ask to know how Jesus is still mocked and pained in so many other ways in our days"

PRAY

We listen to the words of the Gospel of John, and try to be present at this painful and terrifying scene. We see the instruments of torture, the whips and weapons that they used to beat Jesus. We see what Jesus sees and we ask to know, deep in our hearts, the pain that he feels too. We ask the Holy Spirit to give us the strength to stay with Jesus in these awful moments and to know his inner pain, too.

Reader

Pilate then had Jesus taken away and scourged; and after this, the soldiers twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on his head and dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him and saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" and slapping him in the face.

John 19: 1-3

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, the encounter with Jesus was a moment that Pilate had looked forward to because he, like all of us, are attracted to Jesus, often without realising it or understanding it. When we contemplate him in the Gospels, we see how many people felt that attraction; drawn to him by his courage, his authority, his integrity although also, some came looking for miracles and spectacular tricks. This is still true for us. Sometimes we look for illusions and stunts. Yet, under the surface, we are drawn to your Son and drawn to the fullness of life that he offers.

But Pilate could not see it through to the end. He caved in to the demands of the crowd and tried to excuse himself. At the end of the day, the charity and mercy that Jesus preached was too far away from what he wanted to be to the crowd – a strong man, a powerful political ruler. He could not escape that, but it is possible that, eventually, even he did. That Roman Governor knew that Jesus was innocent but he was afraid of the crowds. He did not have enough courage but Jesus had all the courage in the world.

Pilate was not a very strong man here but at other times he was a bully; like all bullies he tried to cover up how weak he really felt and, probably, he did not like himself very much for this.

Continue to give us the grace, Lord, to see past those outward things that we sometimes hide behind, to accept what is good and true, because it comes from you.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.
Glory be...

V
JESUS IS JUDGED BY PILATE

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "that I might, present to this scene, know how Jesus remains courageous during his questioning by Pilate, and ponder on the behaviour of Pilate in this episode".

PRAY

We listen to the words of Mark's gospel and see how Pilate judged Jesus.

Reader

First thing in the morning, the chief priests, together with the elders and scribes and the rest of the Sanhedrin, had their plan ready. They had Jesus bound and took him away and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate put to him this question, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He replied, "It is you who say it." And the chief priests brought many accusations against him. Pilate questioned him again, "Have you no reply at all? See how many accusations they are bringing against you!" But, to Pilate's surprise, Jesus made no further reply... So Pilate, wishing to placate the crowd, released Barrabas... [and] handed [Jesus] over to be crucified.

Mark 15: 1-5, 15

NOTICE - *A silent contemplation moment*

Become aware of how you feel about Pontius Pilate at this moment. How does Jesus look at him? If you picture the scene, even become a participant in this event, an onlooker or an official, what do you notice about how Pilate responds to Jesus? He is interested; there is something about the quiet courage of Jesus that surprises him and impresses him. Do you recognise that in yourself? Now? Or at some other time in your past?

NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

Notice how you feel about St Peter here, in this moment. What was going on inside him as he heard himself making these three denials of Jesus, his friend and his Lord? Talk to him, even, and let him tell you about it, and even the bitter tears he shed; let his experience remind you of any moments when you've done something like this. But then let him tell you also about what happened later; the Lord forgave him and, not only that, placed him at the head of our Church, the Risen Christ's body on earth!

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, we are aware of the many occasions when we deny you in small ways; at work, in relationships, with friends when it feels easier to go along with the crowd, turning a blind eye to things that are wrong, keeping quiet about what we already know about you and your mercy. We can look for the easy way out in order to avoid saying what we should say about our faith. All those small denials build up; they corrode our hearts, our souls. They can also be a bad example, a scandal, to others. The women and bystanders who identified Peter were surely scandalised by his loud denials and Peter would have realised this, as he reflected on his experience. We can be like Peter here, who already had come to know you and love you yet still denied you; not once, not twice but three times. We recognise in some ways the shame and confusion, his stings of his conscience, as he panicked under questioning and denied you. Yet also we know, as Peter eventually remembered, of your overwhelming desire to encourage us and to forgive us.
Strengthen in us that desire, placed in us by the Holy Spirit, to be true to our faith and true to our best selves.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.
Glory be...

NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

Ask the Spirit of God to help you to stay in a quiet space, of interior stillness despite the violence you see in this scene. How does Jesus respond to the degrading ways they treat him here? How do you respond as you witness all this? What did the soldiers do to him and how did their mocking and torture make you feel? Even in this sad and difficult moment, talk to Jesus about what is in your heart as you witness all this; comfort him, if you can.

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, I do not always take the risk of comforting someone else. Sometimes, too, I think that the little I can do is too small, too insignificant. Sometimes I back off and leave it to others when I know I should really follow my heart.

Help me always to be on the side of the weak, especially those who are victimised by those with power, or those who are simply bullies. Help us never to be bad to people who are weaker than us, and help us to make things easier for them. And, when we fall down and feel sad about failing, help us to get up again and to carry on.

We see in the assaults on Jesus how intimidation never wins. The ones who look powerful are really the weak ones, because they rely on force and threat. Jesus is powerless and weak but he has the truth of your love within him.

Lord, thank you for all the people who have comforted me when I really needed it, when I have been intimidated and bullied by those who think they are powerful. Thank you especially for all the small gestures of loving care that others have given to me. I want to stop myself from thinking that I have nothing to give to someone else. Help me to see that even a tiny gesture for someone else is something I do for you.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.

Glory be...

VII
Jesus Bears the Cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "At this moment, when the Cross is thrown onto your shoulders, help me to know your inner pain and help me not to turn away from your great suffering".

PRAY

We listen to the words of the Gospel of John and imagine these moments when those shouts of "crucify him!" grew deafening, as the Cross was roughly forced on Jesus and as he, already seriously injured, began to make his way to Golgotha. But before he reached that place, he would stumble and fall under the weight of the Cross at least three times.

Reader

When they saw him, the chief priests and the guards shouted, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and crucify him. I find no guilt against him." ... They cried out, "Take him away, take him away! 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: 6, 15-17

NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

As the Spirit of God continues to hold you firm in this moment, even though there might be the temptation to look away, allow yourself to recognise the different feelings and responses that are arising in you as Jesus accepts the Cross and begins to walk towards the place of crucifixion. By now he knows that he is condemned and that even more suffering is just moments away. What touches you at this moment? Is there anything you feel you want to say to him or is there some gesture, some touch that you would like to make?

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, give us the same strength that Jesus had when he was made to carry his cross to Calvary. We often have crosses to carry too, and for some of us these are very heavy. When that happens we can be quick to turn away from you, and that makes it hard for us to live with ourselves. It's not easy when our difficulties seem too much for us.

As we look at Jesus falling for the first time, help us to see what our sins, and the sin of the world, really are. Help us to face up to our selfishness and admit that we have a part in the injustice of the world. And help us, like Jesus, to get up and begin again, knowing how much you want to forgive us.

But although this was not easy for Jesus either, he went on his painful journey because he knew that you were with him. Much of the pain that your son Jesus was feeling came from our sinfulness and selfishness. He loved everyone but not everyone accepted his love or returned it. That must have felt heavy in his heart, as heavy as the Cross was on his shoulders. Help us, Lord, to see that you love us and support us in the tough times of our lives.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.
Glory be...

VIII
Jesus is Helped by Simon the Cyrene to Carry the Cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "Lord, place me in the situation of this Cyrenian, and I shall ponder what I might have done if they had asked me to help. Imagining that moment, what response do I notice in myself? A desire to help or a desire to slip away?".

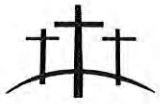
PRAY

We listen to the words of the Gospel and imagine this surprising moment for this man Simon, and for those around him. Completely unexpectedly, he was grabbed by the soldiers and police and roughly forced to help to carry the Cross. They could see that Jesus was faltering and had already collapsed under the weight of the cross, and his wounds, three times. They might have thought that death was already closing in on him. They were not to be denied their moment; they wanted Jesus's humiliation to be total and they are annoyed at any delay, as the day moves towards nightfall. As we contemplate this moment, we might notice how we might have reacted if we had been forced to do this, like Simon was.

Reader

As they were leading him away they seized on a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus.

Luke 23:26-27, cf. Mark 15: 21



NOTICE - *A silent contemplation moment*

Remaining in a place of contemplation, we try to picture this incident and even be part of it. Simon from Cyrene never expected any of this to happen and was probably in Jerusalem for other business. He would have been attracted to the scene, with many other passers-by, because of the noise and commotion. Suddenly, he was forced to help Jesus carry His cross. How did he react – was he annoyed? Frightened? Embarrassed? Or maybe something else moved within his heart, that he hadn't known before ... Jesus's eyes would have met Simon's. What was in that glance of Jesus? How might it have touched Simon? He would see a suffering man, cruelly mistreated but maybe at that moment he saw more than the injured body. What is this that began to move in Simon's heart?

Listening to these events, what would I think and feel if I had been in Simon's shoes? Would I have resisted? Would I have complained, "why me?"? Or, would I have answered a deeper inner movement that drew me, attracted me like the commotion superficially drew Simon?

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, I think that I would always want to help others when they need my help. But sometimes I get annoyed when this happens. I would rather follow my own plans and I don't like it when I have to do what someone else wants or needs from me. I don't always make the first move.

Help us to know that your good spirit was in Simon, although he probably didn't know it, and this was stronger than the selfish spirit. Help us to learn, like he did, to resist our own selfishness when we are asked to help others. And help us to be grateful for all the help that people give to each other. Through each other, you show us the true meaning of love.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.

Glory be...

IX
Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "Spirit of God, continue to hold me in this place and time of prayer, supporting me as I contemplate these events in the Passion of Jesus. I desire to be aware of this moment when Jesus encountered the mourning women. Give me the grace to know how he felt compassion for them even as they wept for him".

PRAY

We listen to the words of the Gospel of Luke, which is the gospel of women. We can see and hear the loud laments they make for him then we also hear how He consoles them. Help us to hear what he says to them as also addressed to us at this moment.

Reader

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. For look, the days are surely coming when people will say, 'Blessed are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne children, the breasts that have never suckled!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!'; to the hills 'Cover us!' For if this is what is done to the green wood, what will be done when the wood is dry?"

Luke 23: 27-31

NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

Staying in the mood of contemplation and prayer, we hear the deep grief of these women who can by now see very clearly what is about to be done to Jesus. They saw this more clearly than most of the men present. Many, maybe all of them were women whom he had encountered in his ministry; many would have been among his followers. His attitude was always inclusive, welcoming and open to all. One of those women may well have been Mary, his mother. How did he address them? What stirs in my own heart as I hear him speak these words, the only time he speaks in the entire Way of the Cross?

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, sometimes we cannot bear to see someone else's pain and we get very upset. You understand that, Lord, as you were upset when you met these women. But you drew on the last of your strength to teach them to be there for each other and for everybody, just as you were. Help us to pull through when we feel that there is nothing that we can do and no-one to turn to. Teach us to be sensitive to the needs of others. Help us to learn from your Way of the Cross. Lord, we sometimes collapse under the strain when we feel that it is all too much for us. But you understand this and you teach us that this is not what you want from us. Help us never to be discouraged and help us never to despair or to think that it is all too much.

When we get frustrated and not being able to do things, we remember that you felt like that too. The women among us know very well what it is like to be degraded and mistreated, not least in your church but also in many societal situations. We can so easily disappoint ourselves when we harm others with our human weakness. Sometimes the task of living well feels too much a burden, sometimes our temptations will seem too much. But your example helps us to struggle on, for you fill our hearts with hope, if we let you.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.

Glory be...

X
JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "God Our Lord, give us the grace not to turn away from this moment when the unjust verdict against you is carried out. We ask that we might share in the pain that is yours at this moment."

PRAY

Lord, as we contemplate this final moment of the Way of the Cross, when you reached the place of crucifixion, may we know your anguish at this deepest insult and indignity, together with your physical pain. We are shocked by the way you are mistreated even before they bound and nailed your hands and feet to the Cross. May your sorrow pass into our hearts too as we contemplate all of this.

Reader

When they reached the place called The Skull, there 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." Then they cast lots to share out his clothing. The people stayed there watching. As for the leaders, they jeered at him with the words, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." The soldiers mocked him too, coming up to him, offering him vinegar, and saying, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription: "This is the King of the Jews".

Luke 23: 33-38

NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

We try to notice what reactions arise within us as we witness these events, perhaps even imagining ourselves as present, witnessing it all at first-hand. We become aware of his physical suffering and of his indignity as he is mocked by the police and officials, his clothing gambled for and as he is treated, in their eyes, no better than the convicted criminals beside whom he is to be executed. Jesus was terrified at this moment. What moves me, inwardly, at this moment, as I contemplate this horror and Jesus's shocking suffering?

REFLECTION

Good and gracious God, all over the world, peoples' dignity and human rights are still being stripped away, even now in our time. Every single person has a dignity that you, Lord, have given to us, because we are made in your image. The people who trample on others' dignity are just like the people who stripped your clothes off in public; they had no respect for you or for anyone else.

Jesus knew very well, as everyone did, that crucifixion was a cruel terrible punishment; death would sometimes take days. It was always carried out in public, its victims writhing in agony, and was the state's chief deterrent, to frighten the general population. All human dignity was stripped from the condemned one.

Sometimes, Lord, I feel stripped of my own human dignity because of the way someone else has treated me without respect. Sometimes, I feel that my individuality, or perhaps my disability, has stripped me of dignity because others do not accept me for who I am. I can sense the risk of losing my own self-respect at such moments. Help, me, Lord, to keep my own self-respect. Help me to know that you value me and that I am precious in your eyes. And even help me to forgive anyone who treats me badly.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.
Glory be...

XI
Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "We ask to be amazed at hearing the words of forgiveness uttered by Jesus to one of the thieves crucified with Him; and even to hear those words addressed to ourselves too."

PRAY

Lord, you have been at this point lifted high on the Cross and your pain is beyond anything we can imagine. And a soldier pierced your side with his lance, causing blood and water to flow. Yet you found, and showed to everyone, the strength to speak words of forgiveness. That came directly from your pierced heart. May we hear those words again addressed to us too? May we know them as spoken from your sacred heart. And may they stay with us, encouraging us to be people who forgive, not people who condemn.

Reader

One of the criminals hanging there abused him: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us as well." But the other spoke up and rebuked him. "Have you no fear of God at all?" he said. "You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He answered him, "In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Luke 23: 39-43

NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

We try to understand, in our hearts as well as in our minds, how even at this extreme moment Jesus still desired to speak words, not of bitterness and anger, but of kindness and forgiveness to one of these criminals crucified beside him. What do we notice about our reaction to this episode? Is it the amazement that we asked for as we began this Station? Or perhaps it is the two very different reactions from each of the two criminals crucified with him. With which one do I sympathise more? One is still trapped in his bitterness and anger while the other is on his way to healing and mercy, despite these external signs of suffering and cruel punishment. We might notice elements of each reaction surfacing within our own hearts as we contemplate this extraordinary scene. Offer anything that needs to be healed to this crucified saviour, now. Let that blood that began to flow from his pierced heart be healing for us.

REFLECTION

Not only did Jesus accept the cruelty that was being done to him, but he actually wanted to forgive. He knew very well that, in being crucified between these two, the state's torturers and executioners were making it clear that he was to be seen as a common criminal. Sometimes we prefer to get even with the person who has wronged us. But when we watch Jesus here, we learn that this will never be God's way.

Good and gracious God, I often find it very hard to forgive someone who has been cruel to me. It is sometimes very difficult to stop myself thinking about getting revenge or making someone apologise to me. At such times, I might fall into the temptation to stay with my anger and hurt rather than to learn from it and grow. I refuse your mercy even if I believe that you offer it to me and to all. But, you teach us all that forgiveness has to come first, and you teach us this even while they are nailing you to the cross. Help us to believe that you want to forgive us, as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Help us to ask for your forgiveness, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and give us the strength to be forgiving people.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.
Glory be...

XII
Jesus Speaks to His Mother and the Disciple

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: we could dare to ask this crucified saviour, before our eyes now: "give us the gift, the privilege, of sharing something of this most personal moment, when you spoke for the final time to two people who meant the most to you, out of all your friends". And we can turn to Mary and ask her to intimate to us her own sorrows – what did she recall that, as she had perhaps feared, indicated that this awful moment would come? What is the sword that pierces her heart at this moment?

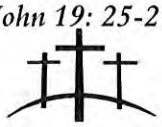
PRAY

Lord, from the Cross, despite agony that we cannot imagine, you still find the very last remnants of strength to speak to your mother and your beloved follower. These few words would have been such an effort, but you knew that they had to be said. In the power of the Spirit, help us now to a deeper inner knowledge of what you desired to give us here; your blessed mother becomes fully, at this moment, our mother too. Show me, show us, Lord Jesus, that this is given to me too.

Reader

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, 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 to the disciple he said, "This is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

John 19: 25-27



NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

We are aware, by now, of the flight of most of his followers; the "inner circle" of disciples and the larger group of followers, of whom there were possibly as many women as men and, likely, even more women. Save for one man, identified only as the "disciple whom he loved", the few who remained were women. As, through tears, sweat and blood, he tried to focus his vision, these few were, other than his executioners, the only people whom he could recognise. Everyone else had fled.

REFLECTION

Sometimes we meet others who are really struggling and we know that they need our support. With your help, Lord Jesus, we can be like Mary, who loved you, her son, so much; help all mothers through her prayers, when they see their own children in pain and difficulties. Only a mother can really know what Mary knew at this point. Bless all of our mothers today and keep them safe.

Sometimes we have known the loneliness of abandonment by friends, people whom we thought we could trust but who, at the critical moment of our need, ran away. Except for these few, all Jesus's friends, whom he had come to know so well over three years of extraordinary ministry and working closely together, found his Passion more than they could handle. Filled with fear, they ran, although perhaps there were one or two who, confused, frightened and bewildered, watched from a safe distance. Reflecting on this, we realise that we have felt that pain too. And we recall, uncomfortably, occasions when we've let down another person at her or his moment of greatest need. Such insensitivity really hurts.

Help us, Lord, also to know when our words are weak and there is nothing to say. Help us to know that it is sometimes best to keep silent and just to be there for someone else. Give us the grace to be generous with our love and support for anyone we meet who is in pain.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.
Glory be...

XIII
Jesus Dies on the Cross

For this station, it is appropriate now to pause in complete silence: standing, sitting, or kneeling as we are physically able, our heads bowed. We keep silence for some moments.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: to know, interiorly, the redemptive power of this cruel death; that this death is not the end even although the suffering we have seen has horrified us. Ask to know, deeply, how Jesus finally understands that he is about to die and how this moves him to speak these extraordinary final words.

PRAY

It is accomplished, Lord; I can only watch in profound sadness, and perhaps I cannot even do that. When you breathed your last, all was silence. With your help we might begin to understand that in this silence is not emptiness, meaninglessness, but a journey from this world to the Father, to the heart of the Trinity.

Reader

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 commit my spirit." With these words he breathed his last.

Luke 23: 44-46

NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

We should all pray quietly for a moment, kneeling if we are physically able, while we think about the death of Jesus on the cross ... let St. Luke's words gently be repeated in our hearts, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit".

REFLECTION

Good and Gracious God, you gave your body and your human life to us, even though we had sinned and had not followed your ways. You still offer us your Body and Blood every time we gather for Mass with the community of our parish. Your Son was killed for us so that we might have your life in us. Help us to appreciate what you have done for us in your Christ. Bless all the people we love who have died and who are with you in heaven. And help us to know that death is not the end but a new beginning, for us and for all your people.

We have contemplated the saviour as he was crucified and as he died. We cannot forget the sight of those wounds and scars but among them, in his side, is one that flows with his life-giving blood for us in his church. Directly from his sacred heart, blood and water flowed. The people of God have understood that this is the fountain of sacramental life in the church. From the pierced heart of the saviour, at the moment of his total abandonment and utter loneliness, our life-blood flows.

Lord, be with us now and at the hour of our own death. Help us to see that you died for us, for the people you call your own. Help us to say what you said: "Father, into your hands I give my whole life".

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.

Glory be...

XIV
Jesus is Placed in the Tomb

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
All: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

ASK

Quiet moment of asking: "We can ask for the grace of the same deep sorrow that Joseph of Arimathea felt at this sombre moment. This is even more deeply the sorrow of Mary the Mother of Jesus and our mother; indeed, she is Our Lady of Sorrows. In this petition, we can turn to her, as with every petition we have."

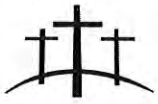
PRAY

We listen to Matthew's Gospel which preserves for us the story of Joseph of Arimathea's pious and respectful deposition of the body of Jesus. Although Mary's presence is not specifically mentioned in this story, it is impossible to imagine that she was not here. She would surely have helped Joseph to lay out the body of her dead son. Ask her to allow you to comfort her and share this moment of bereavement with you; be with her, and let her be with you. With her, and with this good man Joseph, rest in silent mourning by the tomb for some moments, then let Joseph, or even help him, to roll the stone over the entrance. Then depart in silence.

Reader

When it was evening, there came a rich man of Arimathea called Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. So Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean shroud and put it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a large stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away.

Matthew 27: 57-60



NOTICE – *A silent contemplation moment*

The Lord has been taken away from us. His mortal remains are gently taken down from the Cross and this good man Joseph has, taking a huge risk, asked permission from the authorities to care for the body, which he does with great tenderness and respect. In silence, let us sit by the tomb with him, with Mary and with those few who have not run away. This is a time of bereavement and grief, when words are inadequate, so we let our shared silence speak for us.

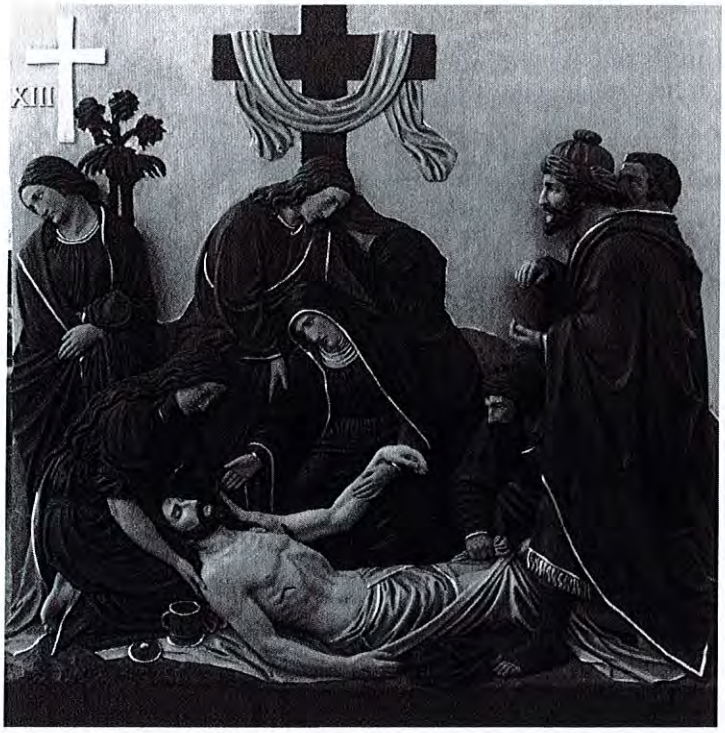
REFLECTION

This is Holy Saturday. It is a day, in the church, when the Eucharist is not celebrated anywhere in the world before nightfall. The altars in our churches have been stripped bare and the tabernacles stand open and emptied. We need to be present to this emptiness, this desolation, paying close attention to the variety of feelings and emotions we sense right now. We might desire to avoid this silence, replacing it with activity and noise, but we really should stay in the silence as long as we can. Then we might notice that, in the midst of all this apparent triumph of hate and evil, there are still some good people who show compassion, not odium. In this compassion there is, surely, hope.
Good and gracious God, you are with us when we go through the loss of someone we love because you too have felt the loss of your only Son. You are with us, too, when we feel that all our hopes have come to nothing, because you took the risk if becoming one of us and emptying yourself of power. You know what it is like to feel hopeless and powerless, because you were there too in Christ your Son.
But your power working through our human weakness is greater than anything that we can do for ourselves. Help us to trust in your power and to learn more about you. Make us better people as we follow in the footsteps of Christ. May we never lose hope in you or in ourselves, and bring us closer to you each day that we are here and for the rest of our lives.

Together we pray; Lord, we want to walk beside you in your suffering. Forgive us; and help us to see you in the suffering of the poor.
Glory be...

For more information on the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, and praying with the Pope, please visit:
popesprayer.net

For a wealth of Ignatian spirituality resources, including audio and video reflections on the Stations of the Cross, the Rosary, Imaginative Contemplation and more, see:
pathwaystoGod.org



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