



Camino of the Cross

Walking with Jesus through pain and glory



The Way of the Cross: a new Camino for 2021

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Introduction

Nearly twelve months ago, Pope Francis led an emotional Good Friday *Way of the Cross*, the *Via Crucis*. In previous years, we have seen the pontiff lead pilgrims around the Coliseum, the place that saw the martyrdom of so many early Christians, in the traditional devotion remembering the last journey of Jesus to Calvary. For more than half a century, since Pope Paul VI revived this ancient tradition in 1964, popes led the *Via Crucis*, with a vast crowd of pilgrims and tourists, and a global audience watching on television. Last year, we watched from our homes as Pope Francis presided over a profoundly moving, extraordinary Way of the Cross from the steps of St. Peter's Basilica on Good Friday evening, April 10, overlooking an empty square due to the coronavirus pandemic. The miraculous crucifix from the church of St Marcello in Rome, believed to have helped end the 'black plague' in Rome in 1552, stood facing the Holy Father, as he called in prayer for God to end this modern-day plague.

Our response to the demands of Covid-19 has called the Church to be creative and recognise the need to maintain our sense of community in the most difficult of times. There are so many versions of the Way of the Cross available and it remains a popular devotion especially in this time of Lent. In response to the call of Pope Francis to be pastorally creative, I offer these 'stations' or stopping points on the way to Calvary—we cannot stop there, as the death of Jesus points to resurrection and new life. The events of 2020/21 have brought hardship, pain and misery to countless numbers of people. We have suffered lonely bereavements and families have been broken up; bitter words have been said that cannot be undone; we have shared a global emptiness and loneliness that even the best social media could not cure. The events of this past year will be, for many, a defining moment in their lives: were we prepared to stand up and be counted? Did our faith crumble at the first hurdle of lockdown?

While we are an Easter People, this can only be achieved through an identification with the events of Holy Week in its totality. We might want to pick and choose what bits of the Easter story we want, but Christianity demands a total acceptance. The experience of walking with Jesus through pandemic will prepare us for whatever life may throw at us—good or bad. I have found that this past year has forced me to look at aspects of my life that have been hard and difficult; however, it has forced me to admit my weakness and my need to trust far more in the Lord. I was reminded at my Advent Recollection that I am not the master-builder, no matter great and important I may feel myself to be; I am, however, privileged to work for Him. I invite you now to prepare yourself for this special Camino with this beautiful prayer that helps us see the hand of God in our lives:

**It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
This is what we are about.**

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything,
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders;
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future that is not our own. Amen. ¹

Our Camino of the Cross is different to the devotion that you are more familiar with; I simply offer it to you as a contribution to the needed conversation that has to take place as we move towards a new normal. How are we going to be a Church community in the years ahead, learning from pandemic and daring to be creative?

Gerry O'Shaughnessy SDB

Bolton, March 2021.

First Station: THE LAST SUPPER

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

Because, by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet (Jn 13:14)

- When we look at all four gospels, we have a clearer picture of what this final meal was like for Jesus and his friends. John gives us the theme of service: Eucharist only makes sense if we are thinking of others. Jesus takes on to himself the job of the lowliest servant in washing the feet of his disciples. It is a task that we are called to do, and it never gets any easier. It is in this context of service and outreach that the synoptic gospels share the words of Jesus as he takes and transforms the simple gifts of bread and wine: 'this is my body ... this my blood of the new covenant ... do this in memory of me.' Every time we gather for mass, we remember and live out what Jesus told us and gave us. Our sharing in the bread of life and cup of blessing makes us a living part of that memory, as we become part of a living tradition.

Sadly, many still share a eucharistic famine as they are unable to attend mass because of shielding or reduced numbers being able to enter church buildings. We are sharing the experience of millions in the developing world that cannot have mass on a weekly basis because there are not enough male priests to serve remote communities.

- Is the Lord telling us something about ministry through this situation?
- What is your vision of a post-COVID-19 Church?



Leonardo da Vinci, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

There is an amazing story told about da Vinci as he was painting his masterpiece, *The Last Supper*. He searched the streets of Rome for different models to represent those sitting around the table of the Lord. His first quest was to find a suitable Jesus: he chose an excellent candidate, a student at the University with a strong bearing and noble looks. He was delighted with his find and with his Jesus painted in the central position, he went out to look for twelve models to represent the apostles seated with Jesus in this final meal. He easily found a John and Peter; Thomas and Andrew quickly followed. Eventually, he had painted eleven disciples in their places, but try as he could, he never found a model to represent the betrayal of Judas. Jesus must have seen something good and appealing in Judas; he **chose** him to follow the Way. He was part of that close band of apostles and was gathered at that meal until he freely chose to go out into the night and into darkness (see Jn 13:30).

After months of intense searching, in desperation, da Vinci ventured into Rome's worst slums and found an ideal model, begging on the streets. His 'Judas' had been racked by alcohol and drugs—his face displayed contempt and was ravaged by hunger and lack of care. The promise of money and food was enough to bring the beggar to the studio, where he broke down in tears. Pointing to the nearly completed masterpiece, the beggar said to da Vinci, 'do you not recognise me? I came to this studio many months ago and was the model for your vision of Jesus. Now look at me and see how far I have fallen!'

I cannot say if this story is true or not, but it does make a point: within each of us is the power to do great good. We can follow the example of Jesus and 'wash the feet of our neighbour' through our acts of random kindness; however, there is that side of our lives that shows meanness and contempt for others, where goodness is not revealed and we choose to live in the dark. The student was chosen by DaVinci as a role-model for goodness, and yet a short time later, he became a force for betrayal and rejection.

As you look at this world-famous painting, where do you sit around the table of the Lord?

Watch and Reflect: 'Evan Almighty': If you want to change the world, simple do one act of random kindness at a time. <https://youtu.be/80x9FmKsyg4>

We can pray:

As we do what he told us, we open our hearts to him;
we remember how he died and rose again to live now in us.
Together with him we offer you these gifts:
in them we give you ourselves.
Send your Holy Spirit on us and on this bread and this wine,
that they may be the Body and Blood of Christ,
and that, sharing your life,
we may travel in your company to our journey's end.
With all your people, we give you thanks and praise
through the Son and in the Spirit, now and for ever.
Amen.

from Eucharistic Prayer V of the Scottish Episcopal Church

Second Station: The Agony in the Garden

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

Because, by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James, and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:32-42)



Giovanni Bellini: The Agony in the Garden, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

The gospels tell us that Jesus took his friends to this garden after the Last Supper; he urges them to stay awake and pray with him. However, these friends, even the inner circle of Peter, James and John, fell fast asleep. Jesus is left to face his pain alone: this is something that we have all been aware of in this past year. Social distancing and shielding have meant that we have all had to face loneliness from time to time. If you have a wide social circle and enjoy company, then these past twelve months have been very difficult. If you are a natural introvert, it could be argued that this time has been a chance to relax without pressure. We are made for community and, extrovert or

introvert, we need to work and live with others. As a Church, we are not called to worship on our own, but share our insights and care together. Jesus has just enjoyed a wonderful table fellowship with his close friends and now he has to face the reality of his situation alone. We see that Jesus does not want to endure the pain and suffering—it comes with his act of love. It comes as a result of his trust. At the beginning of the gospels, we see a confused and frightened Mary accepting the will of God in her life: **‘be it done to me according to your word’** (Lk 1:38).

We all face problems and difficulties in life that only we can deal with—even with support and encouragement, we still have to make decisions that no one can make for us. Our faith helps us to understand that we are never alone; we always walk with God. We can follow Christ's example and humbly submit our looming concerns into our heavenly Father's secure hands. We can trust that God will be with us to help us through whatever we must endure. He knows what is ahead and always has our best interests in mind. Jesus' example ought to be a comfort to us. Prayer was a way of life for Jesus, even when his human desires ran contrary to God's. We can pour out our honest desires to God, even when we know they conflict with his, even when we wish with all of our body and soul that God's will could be done in some other way. Never be afraid to cry out to God in your weakness and pain—we have had to endure Covid-19 together, albeit physically distanced from others. However, God is never distant from us: it is precisely in our pain and darkness that God is with us, probably carrying us, the famous prayer, *Footprints in the Sand* reminds us:

I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord, and across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonged to me, and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of my life flashed before us, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life, there was only one set of footprints.

I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life. This really bothered me, and I questioned the Lord about it.

‘Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you would walk with me all the way; but I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints.

‘I don’t understand why in times when I needed you the most, you should leave me.

The Lord replied, ‘My precious, precious child. I love you, and I would never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering.

‘When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.’

Mary Stevenson

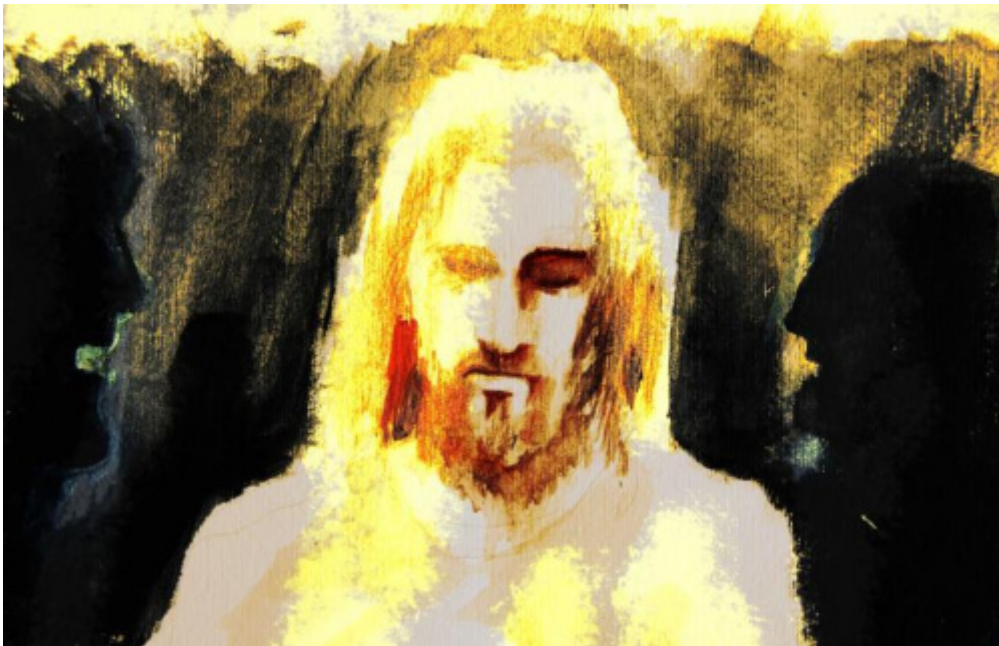
Watch and reflect: Jesus Christ Superstar, *Gethsemane* <https://youtu.be/Nv-CsctQ72g>

Third Station: Jesus before the Sanhedrin

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

Because, by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, ‘Well, aren’t you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?’ But Jesus remained silent. Then the high priest said to him, ‘I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’ Jesus replied, ‘You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, ‘Blasphemy! Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?’ ‘Guilty!’ they shouted. ‘He deserves to die!’ *Matthew 26:62-66*



Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Marcello Cerrato, 'Way of the Cross', via Qumran2.net

Throughout the gospels, we see Jesus in discussion with the very people who should support him, the religious leaders of Israel. The people on the edges recognise who Jesus is: the poor, the sick, the children, the blind, the deaf—even the evil spirits, but the religious leaders fail to see the significance of this great teacher who is hiding in plain sight. In the garden, he is betrayed by one of his own: the Judas kiss must have been hard for Jesus to endure. Judas uses a universal sign of love and care and turns it into treachery as he throws Jesus under the bus. To be condemned by those who do not know you is one thing, but to be betrayed by a friend cuts to the heart. Many of us have experienced such deep hurt and can identify with the pain that Jesus had to face. To be let down and abandoned by close family and friends is not acceptable; what does it take to offer a simple call of support or to send a card. Friendship is a two-way street, and we need to ensure that support. Perhaps, at this station, you could remember friends you have lost touch with, especially in these days.

Jesus is sent to the religious court, the Sanhedrin, to face trial—the reality is that this court has very little power given that the people of Palestine were under Roman rule. It was Rome, and their local Judean Governor, Pontius Pilate, who would ultimately decide the fate of Jesus. This religious court has no doubt that Jesus is guilty of blasphemy and, as such, deserves to die. These wealthy and deeply religious leaders fail to see what others can see: in Jesus, God walks among us.

We can pray:

Jesus - why do the religious leaders hate you so much? What did you do to offend them so deeply? The high priest tears his garments, because he cannot believe that this man standing before him is God-in-the-flesh. You try to reveal yourself, but your accusers simply cannot - will not see. Lord Jesus, grant me the vision to see you for who you really are, in all your glory. Whatever preconceptions or limitations I have placed on you I lay at your feet. I too am somewhat 'religious' and I am sometimes tempted to make loving you into a duty. Forgive me. Help me never to miss your glory. So, we pray with those who have made the Stations across the centuries and around the world: We adore you Lord Jesus and we bless you, for by your very cross you have redeemed the world. In Your strong Name I pray. Amen

Glen H Teal

Watch and listen: from Jesus of Nazareth, Trial before the Sanhedrin <https://youtu.be/BwbT42IYU8>

Fourth Station: Jesus is tortured and crowned with thorns.

The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head ... They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' Jn 19:2-3

Jesus is moved from the home of the High Priest to the official court of the Roman rulers. It is obvious that Pontius Pilate does not want to get involved in what he sees to be a religious dispute,



Anthony van Dyck, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

but to keep the crowd happy and quiet, he orders that Jesus is scourged—a common punishment for petty crime at this time. The Romans rule through fear and often used extreme and cruel punishment to exert their power—there was no ‘Geneva Convention’ back in those days. Some of us have been victims of bullying that can be physical as we see with Jesus; bullies can also try to control us through psychological mind games. Either way, bullying is wrong and totally unacceptable; we must do all we can to make our Church a safe place for all. In these difficult times.

We see the cruelty of the Roman soldiers as they fashion a crown out of thorns; they mock his claim to be 'King of the Jews' and jeer him as 'royalty'. It is this poor vision of a man, destroyed and broken by wicked beating and wearing a fake crown, that Pilate presents to the crowd as he proclaims, 'Ecce Homo' — behold the man. What cruel irony! Jesus finally received the words he deserved: 'Hail, King of the Jews!' For once, he wore a crown upon his head. Yet it was not the golden crown of sovereignty or the olive crown of victory, but the thorny crown of suffering.

Scholars have shown that the thorns from which Jesus' crown was composed were long and terribly sharp. No doubt they dug deeply into the head of the suffering king. We cannot really imagine the physical pain, not to mention the emotional and spiritual anguish endured by the King of kings. What incomprehensible irony! Jesus, the true king of Israel, endured the pain and mockery of the crown of thorns as part of his humiliation for us and our salvation.

- How do you respond to the suffering of Jesus?
- What does it mean for you to honour Jesus in your life and work as your king?

We can pray:

Gracious, merciful Lord, how hard it is to read of the abuse you suffered even prior to your crucifixion. I cannot even begin to imagine what you felt, not only physically, but especially in your soul. What can I say in response but "Thank you" for walking the path of suffering and shame for my sake? You took the abuse that I deserved and gave me your glory in return. Help me, dear Lord, to honour you as my King in all that I do. May my words and deeds reflect your sovereignty and celebrate your glory. Amen.

The High Calling

Watch and listen: Jesus of Nazareth, Ecce homo <https://youtu.be/vaBrC5fYM-A>

Fifth Station: Jesus receives the cross

In the gospel of Luke, we see Jesus being taken for examination before the Sanhedrin, then to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, then to King Herod, the puppet ruler of the Roman occupation, before finally returning to Pilate who states plainly, '**I find no case against this man**' (Lk 22:4). How often have we gone the extra mile to persecute and bully someone—hatred can consume us as we look for any way to make a person's life difficult. Jesus experiences being passed from pillar to post, while all the time being insulted and persecuted—Herod even wanted Jesus to work his 'magic' for him. It is interesting to note, as an aside, that Jesus' ministry of reconciliation was able to bring Pilate and Herod together on that first Good Friday, '**even though they has been enemies before**' (Lk 23:12).

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him." But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will. Lk 23:20-25.

We see not only a weak and fickle leader, but a weak and fickle crowd: these are the same people who cried out 'Hosanna' (Lk 19:38) only days before, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem—there was a

recognition of his status and role even though he humbly travelled on a donkey. The crowd is now baying for his blood and wanting him officially killed to satisfy their anger. How many times have we done a similar thing in the way we treat others—we do not care who we throw under the bus, as long as we are happy.

This weak governor is prepared to let Barabbas, a rioter and a murder go free in order to please the crowd and **'handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they pleased'** (Lk 23:25). Leadership will sometimes mean that decisions have to be made that we might not like or want: nobody actually wished for twelve months of lockdown and strict rules governing even meeting our grandparents. However, rules had to be made; leadership had to be shown and where social distancing and the wearing of masks were ignored, we saw huge spikes in the COVID-10 rates.

Some argue that they have a right not to wear a mask and to mix with whoever they want; however, with ever God-given right comes God-given responsibilities.

We need to face the demands of peer pressure head on and not buckle at the first obstacle. We need to support each other as we carry our own crosses through life and not make crosses for them.



*Sebastiano del Piombo,
Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons*

We can pray:

Lord, you willingly subjected yourself to mockery and scorn. Help us not to ally ourselves with those who look down on the weak and suffering. Help us to acknowledge your face in the lowly and the outcast. May we never lose heart when faced with the contempt of this world, which ridicules our obedience to your will. You carried your own Cross and you ask us to follow you on this path (cf. Mt 10:38). Help us to take up the Cross, and not to shun it. May we never complain or become discouraged by life's trials. Help us to follow the path of love and, in submitting to its demands, to find true joy.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger for the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum, Good Friday 2005

Sixth Station: Jesus falls

Surely he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah. 53:4-6)

If you have been to Jerusalem and followed the *Via Dolorosa*, you will be aware of the tiny streets that wind through markets and homes. As a pilgrim, carrying the tiny cross, it is difficult enough, but we have to imagine the condemned carrying their crosses through these same narrow streets to the place of execution outside the city walls. Jesus has accepted the cross, the massive weight bears down on him and crushes him, and, like so many, he stumbles and falls. We all do it: we have so many good intentions and then, in a second, we break that promise and fall.



Stations of the Cross, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, Patrick Furlong [CCBY2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/) via Flickr

Throughout his ministry Jesus raised up the fallen and hurt and, now on this journey to Calvary, he raises himself up again and gives us encouragement and support. That unconditional love of God is waiting there just for you: are you ready to accept it? Are you ready to share it?

Some people take delight in seeing others fail—perhaps a sign of their own insecurities. As a Church, we are called to be open to the needs and goodness of others. We cannot go through life on our own; we need those comforting words of encouragement and care. We need to allow ourselves to be supported and lifted; the sacrament of reconciliation brings us the gift of God’s unconditional love. Nobody is excluded from the love of God and we have no right to put up our own barriers and make people feel unloved and unwanted. The reality is that none of us is perfect: we have all made mistakes and we need that pastoral care and concern in our lives. We need to allow ourselves to be lifted up from the misery of our mistakes and problems, but we also need to lift others up. As we reflect on this station, who do you need to offer your forgiveness and support to? It is not too late—there can never be a time limitation on forgiveness.

This year we lost the great Captain Sir Thomas Moore; this World War II veteran inspired a nation as he prepared to celebrate his 100th birthday with walking a hundred laps around his garden. He raised millions of pounds for the NHS and reminded us all of the importance of trying and moving forward. He was of an age when a cup of tea and ‘Homes Under the Hammer’ would be a more than acceptable way of passing the morning; he chose to make a difference by setting himself a challenge.

What is your challenge today? How will you make that essential difference?

We can pray:

Lord may I be the cause of lifting up another today by my words and action; may I not condemn another to the ground by my bitterness and anger. Lord, I praise you for lifting me up and giving me examples of hope in the midst of dark despair. AMEN

Watch and listen as we walk on: *You’ll Never Walk Alone* https://youtu.be/LcouA_oWsnU

Seventh Station: Jesus meets his mother

In the angry faces of the crowd on that journey to Calvary, Jesus sees a face of love and compassion—a face that has shown him love and care since his birth in Bethlehem. Mary represents the mothers of the world today, who see their children hurting, especially as a result of bullying and indifference. In the noise, dust, abuse and hatred of this Way of the Cross, this encounter between Mother and son is the bridge of love. May we offer that same bridge of hope and love to those we know who are in pain today.

I remember well that, as a teenager and young adult, no matter how late I came home from a party or a night out with friends, my mum was always in the kitchen 'just making a cup of tea!' It was only years later that I realised that this is what mums do: no matter how old you are, you are always their child and they care deeply for you. My mum was just making sure I was in safe and sound. At this station we give thanks for the gift of all mothers in our world: those who offer us timeless and unconditional love. In this station we see the sad prediction of Simeon, the ancient prophet coming true:



PawełS [CC BY-SA 4.0](#) via Wikimedia Commons

Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed". And his mother kept all these things in her heart. (Luke. 2:34-35,51).

We see that sword piercing her heart as she witnessed the crowd's cry of 'crucify him'; she hears the anger in their voices and their bitterness against one who only wanted to bring good—a goodness he learnt in the home of Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. Above all the noises of hate, that exchange of looks between Mary and her child spoke volume: it was the look of love that says, 'I've got you—never worry!' Let us pray that we can have each other's backs in the difficult situations of life; this past twelve months have shown us clearly who is there for us when we need it. We might have been surprised and hurt that some of those we regarded as our closest friends dropped us and chose to ignore us. However, I hope you have been pleased by those who stood by your side, constantly checking in on you through Zoom or texts. It is sad to think that it has taken a global pandemic to show who your true friends are.

We can pray: Holy Mary, Mother of the Lord, you remained faithful when the disciples fled. Just as you believed the angel's incredible message, that you would become the Mother of the Most High, so too, you believed at the hour of his greatest abasement. In this way, at the hour of the Cross, at the hour of the world's darkest night, you became the Mother of all believers, the Mother of the Church. We beg you: teach us to believe and grant that our faith may bear fruit in courageous service and be the sign of a love ever ready to share suffering and to offer assistance.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

Eighth station: Jesus is helped

In the midst of all the bitterness and horror of Good Friday, there is a danger that we just concentrate on the evil. We see the wounds and the blood, we see the Crown of Thorns; we hear the hatred of the crowds as they jeer and scoff; we remember the roughness of the Roman soldiers wanting to this job over with so that they can return to the safety of the barracks for food and wine.

In this darkness we **MUST** recognise the glimmers of light and joy; Jesus would have seen closely that hatred in the eyes of the crowds literally crying ‘crucify him’ as they crowded around him, but there were also those courageous enough to help and show compassion. Think of those who feel totally alone today, who feel victimised, reviled and hated. Do I choose to add to that climate of bullying, even by simply allowing it to happen and saying or doing nothing to make a difference? Do I choose to break ranks and be a Simon of Cyrene, a Veronica? Can I choose to identify with the women of Jerusalem who wept for Jesus?



*Stations of the Cross, St Mary's Dingle, Ireland:
Gerd Eichmann [CC BY-SA 4.0](#) via Wikimedia Commons*

As Jesus moves forward, he receives compassion: a total stranger from North Africa. Simon is in Jerusalem for the feast and he is forced into helping Jesus carry the cross. How often have you received help from total strangers: a smile, a gentle, ‘how are you?’ Think of that army of Good Samaritans who have volunteered to help out in the present crisis. Then we have wonderful Veronica—she bursts through the wall of bitterness and hatred to wipe the face of Jesus. Thank God for those same Veronicas who are wiping the brows of patients up and down our land tonight. In the midst of the most appallingly dark wickedness, there is always the hope of goodness and light.

On meeting the women, Jesus instinctively wants to ease their pain, **‘weep rather for yourselves and your children’** (Lk 23:28). Right to the end, Jesus was thinking of others. On this Good Friday afternoon, in a journey of pain and suffering, we thank God for the goodness and witness of Veronica, the Women of Jerusalem and Simon.

Let us renew our call to be a Church of compassion NOW!

Reflect:

Only those afire with love are truly alive, those who bend low before Christ who suffers and awaits us in those who are suffering: today! Today! For tomorrow will be too late.

Cardinal Angelo Comastri

We can pray with Pope Francis:

The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of

the church must be ministers of mercy above all. The confessor, for example, is always in danger of being either too much of a rigorist or too lax. Neither is merciful, because neither of them really takes responsibility for the person. The rigorist washes his hands so that he leaves it to the commandment. The loose minister washes his hands by simply saying, 'This is not a sin' or something like that. In pastoral ministry we must accompany people, and we must heal their wounds.

Pope Francis

[Interview with Fr Antonio Spadara SJ for Jesuit international journals, September 2013](#)

Ninth Station: Jesus is nailed to the Cross

Then they handed him over to them to be crucified ... Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' (John 19:16,19).

Our Camino has now taken us out of the restrictions of the city lanes; we have arrived at the 'Place of the Skull' — the place of execution and death. We now see the horror and cruelty of Roman crucifixion, but it has a long history that goes back to the Assyrians and Babylonians. Thousands and thousands have been murdered in those most vicious way. Jesus has nails driven into his wrists and feet as he is lifted up before the world. We hear a cry from the heart as Jesus cries out in prayer from Psalm 22:

At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me (Mt 27:46).

Today, pray for those who feel abandoned and lost: those hurt, bruised and battered by cruelty and indifference. This cry comes from the very core of their being as many have to suffer in silence. They might put on a brave and shining face, but as a dear friend once said to me: 'who wears sunglasses when it's raining?' With pastoral care and concern, we stand beside those who feel the need to wear sunglasses in the most appalling of situations; we stand by the humiliated, the despised, the hurting. We cannot allow evil in the world to overwhelm us: we pray for those who are having to suffer and die away from their loved ones; those who are unable to be with their dying friends and relatives; those who have no support or companionship.

There is a stunning video installation by Bill Viola entitled, 'Earth, Air, Fire and Water', to be found in St Paul's Cathedral London. Viola hopes these videos become 'practical objects of traditional contemplation and devotion'. As the video progresses, each of the four performers stoically suffers an assault from the elements—earth, air, fire, water—as if nature itself has determined to test them. The lives of martyrs, writes Viola, 'exemplify the human capacity to bear pain, hardship, and even death in order to remain faithful to their values, beliefs, and principles. This piece represents ideas



*St Mary's College Chapel, Strawberry Hill,
Thomas Quine [CC BY 2.0](#) via Flickr*

of action, fortitude, perseverance, endurance, and sacrifice.’ For Christians, these values are embodied in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, but as Perov reminds us: ‘we are all capable of sacrifice.’



Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water) 2014

[CC BY 3.0](#) via [Molly Mitchell / Art Practice 2 \(2020-2021\)](#)

We can pray:

All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord.

And all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

For the kingdom is the Lord's

And he rules over the nations.

Psalm 22: 27-28

Psalm 22 is, thus, the prayer of a just one who suffers innocently, of one who is surrounded by enemies and mocked precisely because of his fidelity to God. When God hears this cry and delivers, the just one offers praise and thanksgiving to God.

Bro Michael D Guinan OFM

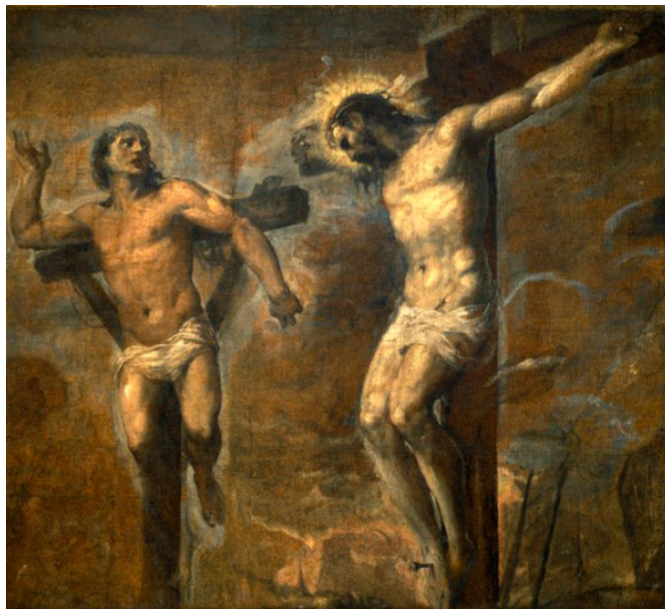
Remember victims of injustice and unfairness at this station

Tenth Station: the repentant thief

Traditionally we see Calvary as three crosses: one for Jesus, one for the ‘good thief’ and the final one for the ‘bad thief’. The reality was that Calvary would have been littered with crosses; as the place of execution for the city of Jerusalem, Golgotha, the place of the skull was rightly associated with death, pain and misery. The Romans used crucifixion not just as a method of torture and execution, but as a spectacle of humiliation, much like the public executions that are a part of our own history. The appalling public deaths of those deemed traitors for their faith in the 16th century are still prominent in our memory.

Luke recounts the tradition of the GOOD thief:

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. (Lk 23:39-43)



Titian, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

Even in his final hours, Jesus is a victim of misunderstanding—the ‘bad thief’ wants freedom from pain and humiliation, while the other recognises Jesus’ goodness and majesty that prompts him to proclaim, ‘REMEMBER ME!’ The promise to him by Jesus is a promise that we all want to share in. The Christian community took Jesus’ words here seriously; the thief who was saved was honoured as a ‘St. Dismas’—the anonymous ‘good thief’ of Luke is given a name.

His response to Jesus is a good example of the steps needed in true conversion away from sin: he came to an honest awareness of his faults and failures, seeking Jesus as the source of eternal life. The name ‘Dismas’ was adopted from the Greek word for ‘sunset’ or ‘death’, and began to be used in stories dating from the fourth century. One legend says that Dismas and his fellow thief held up Joseph and Mary when they were fleeing to Egypt with the child Jesus. Dismas is said to have been moved to compassion and bribed his companion to let the Holy Family pass safely. The world-famous Notre Dame University in Indiana supports a very vital work in its outreach to ‘Dismas House’ in South Bend; it is a therapeutic community founded to aid convicts on release from prison and help their reintegration back into society, having paid their debt. This inspirational work founded by the Jesuit, Fr Charles Dismas Clark SJ and attorney Morris Shenker in 1959, has spread across the globe, with St Dismas seen as the patron for thieves and convicts. He shares his feast with Mary on the day of Annunciation, 25th March—the Medieval date given for the crucifixion.

If we read beyond the legend, we see a person totally excluded from society and facing the punishment for his crimes: in the midst of this pain, he finds salvation and love at the hands of the one unjustly condemned. This is a mission that we can all share in—it would be a wonderful world if people not only accepted forgiveness but were prepared to offer forgiveness too. The prayer of

Dismas, “**Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom**” has a prominent place in the Orthodox Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, where it is repeated three times as part of the Prayer before Communion. It is sung as a beautiful and popular Taizé chant, often used as a recessional in Christian funerals.

We can pray:

Glorious Saint Dismas, you alone of all the great Penitent Saints were directly canonized by Christ Himself; you were assured of a place in Heaven with Him “this day” because of the sincere confession of your sins to Him in the tribunal of Calvary and your true sorrow for them as you hung beside Him in that open confessional; you who by the direct sword thrust of your love and repentance did open the Heart of Jesus in mercy and forgiveness even before the centurion’s spear tore it asunder; you whose face was closer to that of Jesus in His last agony, to offer Him a word of comfort, closer even than that of His Beloved Mother Mary. St Dismas, pray for us. *Ancient prayer to St Dismas*

Watch and pray: ‘Jesus, Remember Me, Taizé <https://youtu.be/YjLZKR3c98>

Eleventh station: those gathered at the foot of the cross

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and John all make reference to the holy women gathered at the foot of the cross; while Peter, the ‘wobbly rock’ fled, it is the women who are there in Jesus’ hour of need. The Gospel of John tells us the apostle ‘John’ is standing with Mary through the trauma, while Luke simply states that **‘all his friends stood at a distance; so also did the women who had followed him from Galilee and they saw this happen’** (Lk 23:49).

However, you view it, there is a very strong tradition that it was the WOMEN who stood by and acted as witnesses to the death of Jesus—in the bitterness and hatred of the Cross, they stand like Simon and Veronica as shining lights of hope and did not abandon him. While Mary of Magdala and Mary, the wife of Cleopas are named, there are other anonymous women gathered there too.

One beautiful legend is linked to the previous station. The legend says that one of the women was the mother of the good thief, Dismas, standing beneath his cross while Mary stood beneath the cross of her son, Jesus.

Both are grieving the deaths of their sons and when they see each other, they sorrowfully embrace. Perhaps it is medieval imagination run riot, but it is a lovely thought at this station. Jesus welcomed Dismas in eternity as our first saint, a saint not noted for his good deeds, but a saint who has the courage to admit to his mistakes and seek reconciliation; Mary takes this bereaved woman into her embrace, a sign of that radical forgiveness that we are asked to embrace in the Church today.



Conwy: Stations of the Cross
Tom Parnell [CC BY 2.0](#) via Flickr

We think of Mary being taken into the family of John: as a Jewish woman without her husband and now, without her son, she becomes the widow, totally in need of God's intervention and care. In the Hebrew scripture, such people were known as the *anawim*. They were the poor of every sort: the vulnerable, the marginalized, and socio-economically oppressed, those of lowly status without earthly power. In fact, they depended totally on God for whatever they owned. The Hebrew word *anawim* means those who are bowed down. Mary of Nazareth belonged to the *anawim*. Her life of fidelity had singled her out for a special role in God's salvific plan. She was already betrothed to Joseph, and when God's plan was put to her, quite naturally, she asked how it would happen. Mary's free acceptance allowed the Spirit to work in her. In proclaiming her Magnificat, she acknowledged that the Almighty has done great things for her in her lowliness, in contrast to God's dealings with the proud (Lk 1:47).

Mary stood with these friends to witness the last hours of Jesus. It is compassion and love that moves Jesus to speak his words from the cross and the only ones specifically addressed to his supporters. A compassion for his mother that is undeniable. Jesus expresses his compassion and love for Mary with the words that we see spoken to her and to the Beloved Disciple. He says to Mary, **"Dear woman, here is your son,"** and to the Beloved Disciple, **"Here is your mother."** Words of tender compassion and love. His pain from the cross was not too much to care about the needs of others, especially Mary, in this moment. His love for his mother and making sure she was cared for was more important than his own pain.

Underlining Jesus' words to Mary and John is his desire to care for his followers, and the church that would be built following the resurrection. His compassion for Mary applies to the way we are called to relate to each other today. These words show us that the church is to be a place of community, friendship and love, where we are there for one another. There are a lot of words and phrases that can define what the church should look like and what the church needs to do today. The church should be a place where the Word of God is proclaimed and lived out. The church needs to be a place that focuses on reaching out into the community. The church should be a place of teaching what it means to follow Christ. The church needs to be a living and authentic community. All of this is true and undeniable. What holds it all together is how we live daily as a community of faith.

Who is God calling you to care for today?

We can pray:

Mother of mercy and love, blessed Virgin Mary, I am a poor and unworthy friend, and I turn to you in confidence and love. You stood by your Son as he hung dying on the cross. Stand also by me, one who has made mistakes, and by all the priests who are offering Mass today throughout the entire Church. Help us to offer a perfect and acceptable sacrifice in the sight of the holy and undivided Trinity, our most high God. Amen.

Carmelite Prayer to Mary at the foot of the Cross.

Watch and reflect: Many and John at the foot of the Cross <https://youtu.be/HLcHLpHHN3w>

We are called to share that compassion of Christ, Mary, John, Dismas and all those gathered in prayer on Calvary Hill

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies

PAUSE

Reflect with this video if it helps:

Jesus Christ Superstar – the Crucifixion.

<https://youtu.be/FvttUTeKDq4>

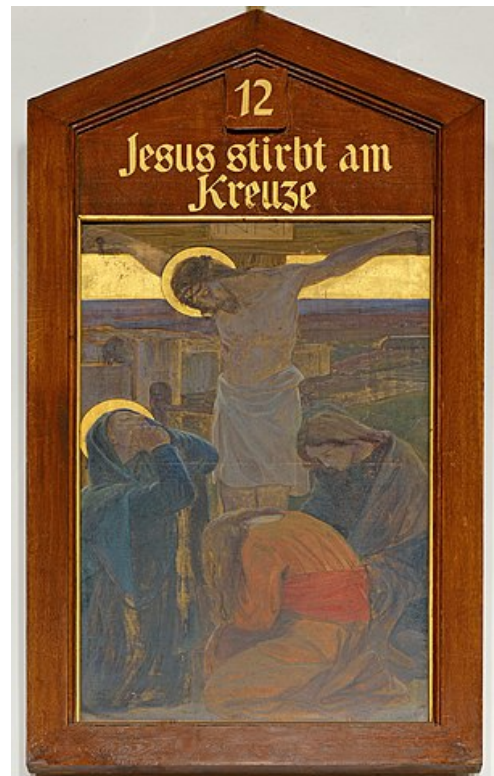
It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” (Lk 23: 44-47)

At 3.00pm on a hill outside Jerusalem, Jesus ‘breathed his last’; the Saviour, the King was gone.

We might think that the ‘darkness that covered’ the earth brought with it a huge downpour, as the world grieved the loss of its Lord. The man of peace, who preached forgiveness; the man who healed the sick and forgave the most wicked; the man who fed the hungry and gave gallons of wine to the newly-weds; the man who calmed the storms and told wonderful stories of life was now dead. In the rain and the mud, his followers gathered in distraught sorrow around the cross; in the safety of lockdown in the Upper Room, Peter and the apostles cried their own bitter tears, as they realised HE was gone and they had done so little to help him in these last hours when he needed them most.

We Salesians embrace Don Bosco’s notion of *presence*—Mary, John and the others gathered at the foot of the cross, could not stop the madness of this execution, but they were there. In life there are things that we cannot stop, but we can be there; not offering answers and quick solutions but being a caring and understanding presence. Many of us in pastoral ministry have found that we need to be good listeners: I pray that we can all share this heart of fellowship and care. In these times, we need to offer people a chance to tell their story of lockdown; the propaganda after the First World War was very blatant: a little girl sitting on her father’s knee, looking earnestly into his eyes and appealing to him, “what did YOU do during the war, daddy?” Future generations are going to ask a similar question of us: ‘what did you do in the pandemic, my friend?’ Your presence can mean so much; realising that others are thinking of you in your darkest hour is a comfort.

I highly recommend the movie, ‘Pay it Forward’: it tells the tale of a young boy who wants to make the world a better place and suggests that any kindness you receive, should be paid forward—you do something to help another individual, instead of paying the kindness back. He starts off a whole revolution in kindness, but sadly, dies at the hands of bullies when he comes to the aid of a classmate. The final scene sees his mum and teacher watching a home video of the child talking about his simple philosophy: ‘you can fix a person’. The final music track is the hauntingly beautiful *Calling all Angels* written and sung by Jane Sinberry; as she sings, we see the hundreds, influenced by this child and his message, arriving at the home with their candles for a vigil of thanks. The song is



Parish church of Feldthurns in South Tyrol, Wolfgang [CC-BY-SA-3.0](#) via Wikimedia Commons

about how there is pain and suffering in this world, and we are all bleeding and broken, but it is that very pain and sorrow that allows us to see the beauty in the good times. One day, we'll leave this imperfect world for one where there is no pain, but for now the angels will help us through this one:

**Oh, but if you could, do you think you would trade in all
All the pain and suffering?
Oh, but then you'd miss the beauty of the light upon this earth
And the, and the sweetness of the leaving**

**Calling all angels, calling all angels
Walk me through this one, don't leave me alone
Calling all angels, calling all angels
We're tryin', we're hopin' but we're not sure how it goes.**
Calling all Angels' Jane Sinberry

- **What does the world mean to you?**
- **How can you pay it forward?**
- **Have you ever done anything to change the world?**

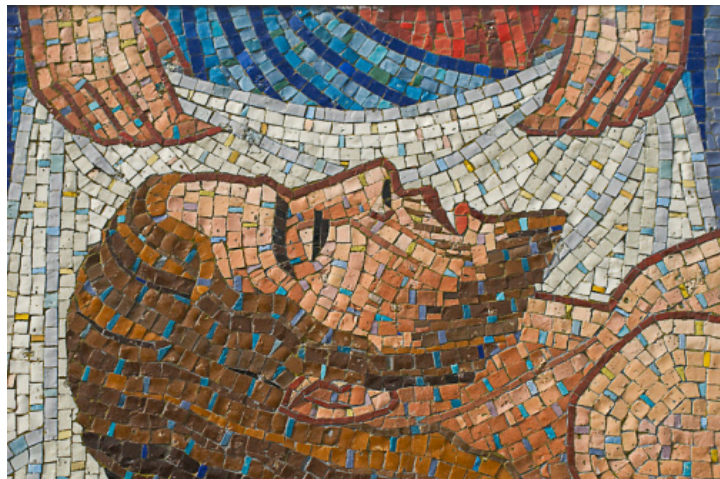
We can pray:

Oh Lord, thank You for going before me and for being with me through the changes in my life. I know that You will never leave me nor forsake me, therefore I will be fearless when life begins to take unexpected turns or uncertain paths. Thank You for being the rock that I can lean on; the rock that never crumbles so that I may walk firmly in change, Amen. (Deut 38:8)

Watch and reflect: Pay it Forward, *Calling All Angels* <https://youtu.be/ZOZ-15blCnA>

Thirteenth station: Jesus is placed in the tomb

For the Roman and Jewish leadership in first century Palestine, this marks the end of Jesus' role in their society; even today, many might acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth was a good man, but his burial marked the end of his life. They might see him as one in a line of great Hebrew prophets, who was trying to change the world. Like so many before him, he was not accepted by the leadership and was killed. The tomb is the place of the dead and that should end the story:



Santa Barbara Mission, 14th Station: Damian Gadal [CC BY 2.0](#) via Flickr

Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. It was Preparation

Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandments (Lk 23: 50-56)

At his birth, Jesus and his family had no proper accommodation to call their own—he was born in a borrowed stable. At the end, his body is taken down from the cross and laid into the arms of his weeping mother; this family from Nazareth have to rely on the kindness of strangers as they have no family tomb in the big city. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of that very Sanhedrin who tried Jesus, bravely goes to Pilate and asks permission to bury the body. It was granted and the body was taken down—Pilate, do doubt delighted that another problem had been taken care of. Joseph, helped by Nicodemus, wrapped the body in cloth, with the addition of myrrh and aloes. They buried Jesus in an unused tomb that Joseph may have intended for himself, where it was protected by a heavy stone rolled against the opening. The stone was seen by many, to seal the story of Jesus—no more could he cause problems for either the religious leaders or the occupying force from Rome. It was the end.

In our own nation, legends abound about this mysterious helper from Arimathea: some say that he was the great uncle of Jesus and brought the teenage boy to the West Country of Cornwall and Somerset! Others say he was a merchant who came to Cornwall to buy tin, while some maintain he was a missionary to England with St. Philip, building the first church in our land. Perhaps the most famous tradition is that he brought the cup used at the Last Supper to England; after landing on our shores, he made his way to Glastonbury and stuck his pilgrim's staff in the ground at Wearyall Hill, and overnight, it turned into a flowering thorn tree. According to the legend, Joseph converted thousands to Christianity, including, it is said, 18,000 in a single day at the town of Wells. He also converted Ethelbert, the local king. Joseph went on to found Glastonbury Abbey and became so well-known and admired that when he died at the age of 86, his body was carried by six kings in the funeral procession. The Glastonbury Thorn is said to flower on Christmas Day every year, and blossom from the plant in the churchyard of St John's Glastonbury is said to be used to decorate the Christmas breakfast table of Queen Elizabeth at Sandringham Palace each year. Most historians agree that Joseph never came to England and it was a useful story put out to promote the shrine at Glastonbury. Although it is generally accepted as mythic, some believe the holy grail is more than just a figment of medieval literature: one legend has it that on the spot where he buried the grail, the water runs red because it runs through Christ's blood, though scientists agree this is just the effect of red iron oxide in the soil. It is good to have these stories as part of our heritage, and it is good to reflect with the poet William Blake, as we sing a rousing chorus of 'Jerusalem' with the WI or the England rugby squad:

**And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?
And did the countenance divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among those dark satanic mills?
*Jerusalem, William Blake***

Watch and reflect: Bread and Fishes <https://youtu.be/9BGyE1stWNU>

We can pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, in your burial you have taken on the death of the grain of wheat. You have become the lifeless grain of wheat which produces abundant fruit for every age and for all eternity. From the tomb shines forth in every generation the promise of the grain of wheat which gives rise to the true manna, the Bread of Life, in which you offer us your very self. The eternal Word, through his Incarnation and death, has become a Word which is close to us: you put yourself into our hands and into our hearts, so that your word can grow within us and bear fruit. Through the death of the grain of wheat you give us yourself, so that we too can dare to lose our life in order to find it, so that we too can trust the promise of the grain of wheat. Help us grow in love and veneration for your Eucharistic mystery - to make you, the Bread of heaven, the source of our life. Help us to become your "fragrance", and to make known in this world the mysterious traces of your life. Like the grain of wheat which rises from the earth, putting forth its stalk and then its ear, you could not remain enclosed in the tomb: the tomb is empty because he - the Father - *"did not abandon you to the nether world, nor let your flesh see corruption"* (Acts 2:31; Ps 16:10 LXX). No, you did not see corruption. You have risen and have made a place for our transfigured flesh in the very heart of God. Help us to rejoice in this hope and bring it joyfully to the world. Help us to become witnesses of your resurrection.

Pope Benedict XVI

Fourteenth station – the empty tom



Nikolay Ge 'Heralds of the Resurrection' Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

So our Camino/pilgrimage around the streets and lanes of Jerusalem has ended. We are now called to move forward and leave our broken past behind. Easter joy can only be achieved through the pain and heartache of Good Friday: as Christians we need to be a people of hope. If we remain at the tomb, we are a Church of death and not of resurrection.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” Then they remembered his words. (Lk 24:1-8)

When that wonderful and charismatic ‘apostle to the apostles’, Mary of Magdala goes to the tomb, she finds it empty. In the gospel of John, when she meets the ‘gardener’, all he has to say is her name, ‘**Mary**’ (Jn 20: 16), and she recognises her Lord and saviour. Her response is not to hold on to the Lord selfishly but share this good news with the disciples in the upper room—she is a missionary to the sceptics and even the unbelievers like Thomas. The central message of new life, through resurrection, is found in the witness of Mary and the other women—the ones who remained faithful right until the end.

While the Gospels tell us the male disciples fled to Galilee, the women stayed by Jesus’ side through crucifixion, death burial and resurrection. This is why all four Gospels show women as the first witnesses. They knew where Jesus had been buried. And the women were then commissioned to ‘Go and tell your brothers’ the good news of Jesus’ victory over death.

Sr Chris Schenk

The image of resurrection in the gospels is not dramatic, like some Hollywood blockbuster, keeping all the best effects to the end: we are given an empty tomb. We are given messengers who want us to look for the living and not the dead; we are given a God who calls us by our own names. We are given friendship and care.

Today call out loud those you love by name: hold them in your heart and mind, and ask the Lord of LIFE to bring them healing and the fullness of love, which is the right of everyone.

A very happy and blessed Easter from the Presentation and Salesian families



We can pray, with great joy, at this station:



NOTES

¹ We are prophets of a future not our own'. Popularly known as the *Romero Prayer*, this was actually composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, Michigan, as part of a homily to be given by Cardinal John Dearden at the annual Diocesan Mass for departed priests in November 1979, five months before Archbishop Romero was assassinated. Some years later, Bishop Untener contributed an article to a book of reflections for the anniversary of Romero's martyrdom, entitled *The Mystery of the Romero Prayer*, which is that, although the words are attributed to Oscar Romero, but they were neither spoken nor written by him.

Cover Image: 5th Station – Simon of Cyrene carries the Cross. Photo: Damian Gadal [CC BY 2.0](#) via Flickr. Stations of the Cross created in mosaic by Fr Nevin Ford OFM, from 1960 to 1963, at Santa Barbara Mission, California.