

Stations of the Cross - 16th March 2024

Opening Words

During Lent we seek to find and reflect on the faith we profess by many ways. Our way today is to follow our Lords journey to the cross and his death. In Luke Jesus said that if anyone wishes to come after me, he must first deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Dear Lord, help us as we follow in your footsteps this day with an open heart and soul so that we can truly understand your suffering and your love. Amen.

1. The First Station – Jesus is condemned to death

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

Jesus is led before Pilate, head of the occupying forces at the time. Caiaphas and those around him have found him guilty by deception and guile and have approached Pilate to confirm the sentence of death. Pilate washes his hands of him and Jesus is lead out to be crucified with a crown of thorns about his head. Pilate could find no wrong but let them have their way. Did he believe Jesus to be innocent, did he care. His job was to keep the peace for Rome, better to let the Jews deal with their own. What was one life amongst so many.

We are all weak at times, not wanting to get involved, other pressures call to us, someone else will sort it. But here this was you innocently condemned to death.

Dear Lord Jesus, give us the courage to face our failures, the strength to stand up and be counted, to show your love in our actions to those around us and be true to your teachings, gospel and your sacrifice for us on the cross.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

2. The Second Station – Jesus carries his cross

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus takes up his cross and begins his walk to Golgotha and his appointment with death. His cross is heavy, it will be painful to carry, the guards are uncaring, it is a job. But this heaviness is also the cross of our own suffering, misery and experience. Also, of the wrongs we have done to others either deliberately, accidentally or by not caring. We would rather not carry it but, with courage, we must take up that cross in our ordinary lives. To acknowledge our sins and to seek to make our world a better place.

Lord Jesus, help us to remember your cross and journey as we take up our own cross and look to follow in your footsteps. Give us the strength to change for the better and to live and love as you taught us.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

3. The Third Station – Jesus falls for the first time

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

This cross is so heavy. The beatings and the lack of food and water are sapping his strength. It is too much, the weight of all our sins are too great to bear and he falls. The guards are angry and hit him to make him get up and continue. Time is wasting and they are on the clock. They want to get this unpleasant job out the way Our crosses too can become too much and we say to ourselves, I cannot do it, I cannot go any further just let me give up. However like Jesus we have no choice we must go on, however, unlike Jesus we are never alone because he is always with us.

Lord Jesus, you bore our sins, even though they sought to overwhelm you, help to remember your journey when we cannot go on and draw strength from you as you stand once again.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

4. The Fourth Station - Jesus meets his mother

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Surrounded by a baying mob Jesus struggles along the road. There is hate and venom all around, with spitting and lashes from the guards. Suddenly in front is his mother and the sounds, hate and venom are paused as they look at each other, she with all her mothers love, he with the ravages of what is happening showing on his face. He sees the tears and pain in her eyes, a mother's never diminishing love for their child. The same love of mothers across the ages and the world today. Some, like Mary, having to standby and watch their child being hurt, even unto death, unable to to change what is happening, yet showing that they are there.

Dear Lord, we give thanks for all mothers, particularly our own, for the love and strength they give to us even when things are against us. May we always know that love which has no bounds.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

5. The Fifth Station - Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus is exhausted, the crowd want him to get on so that they can see the final act before it gets too late. The soldiers want to get things moving so they look around for someone to help with the cross. It cannot be a local, so they pick on a passer by, Simon of Cyrene, a visitor to the town. This outsider could have turned away, said not my problem, but he did not. Did he know Jesus? Did he see the pain and exhaustion in his eyes. In this lenten time we are asked to reflect on our own lives and faith. How often have we, like Simon of Cyrene, unhesitatingly turned round to help a stranger in need. Jesus said that as much as you do to others, even the least of world, you do unto me.

Lord Jesus, through your love, help us not to close in our lives but to open them to all so that when others need us, though they be a stranger, we, like Simon of Cyrene, will step forward and give.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

6. The Sixth Station - Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus is carrying the instrument of his punishment, his cross. It is heavy and with the crown of thorns, the heat, the beatings and the spitting as he goes along, he is almost blinded with the blood, sweat and spittle. Veronica is in the crowd and sees him. Possibly she has heard him speak his message of love, maybe she is a disciple, he is her lord. She wants to do something to ease his suffering so she steps forward and with her cloth she lovingly wipes the blood, etc, from his face. A very small act but full of caring compassion. Like Veronica we can find ourselves in the midst of disaster or tragedy and wonder what we can do. Like Veronica we may only be able to do a small thing, a simple gift of compassion and comfort. An offer of a chair, just being quietly there in time of despair and hurt, a listening ear or a simple smile.

Dear Lord, often we can be unsure what we can do when there is tragedy and hurt around us. Give us the strength to be like Veronica, to step forward to wipe the tears and hurt and showing that we care.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

7. The Seventh Station - Jesus falls for the second time

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

The journey feels never ending, the cross is so heavy. Jesus stumbles and falls. He is berated and hit to get back up. He digs deep into himself and arises to complete the journey which is his destiny. We carry our own crosses in our walk along the path of our faith and we do and will stumble and fall more than once. The pressures of everyday life will crowd in on us, money, people, society, family and we are weakened in trying to live our lives as Christians. Dear Lord, like the footsteps in the sand when two sets became one it was not that you had deserted us but that you were carrying us when we had become lost. Thank you, Lord, for being with us and for giving us strength, through your love, to dig deep and return to our path.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

8. The Eighth Station - Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

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

Jesus saw the sadness of the women of Jerusalem in the crowds. They had seen his compassion when he had spoken with them of healing and freedom before being arrested. He treated them as equal, against the convention of the day. They have come in their grief to give him support amongst the mob driven hate. Jesus sees their grief and stops to give them comfort and encouragement not to give up on his words.

Dear Lord, you stopped, even though you were in pain, to speak with these women in their time of grief. We pray that we too can put aside the cares of ourselves to open our eyes to others in need and say, can I help.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

9. The Ninth Station - Jesus falls for the third time

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

The journey is nearly ended, the soldiers see that Jesus is almost broken, his racked body pathetic and disgusting, as he falls once again. They are almost at the crucifixion site so they get him up, with impatience, to finish the last bit.

In our lives there will be times when we feel alone, rejected, in despair, without hope and feeling that there is no point in going on. The surprise is that if we would but lift our eyes we will see that help is there in others and we must learn to trust in them to turn our world around.

Dear Lord thank you for being there for us when we have been so low and without hope. We pray that through you we can be your instrument of love and compassion to others who are also in despair and suffering.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

10. The Tenth Station - Jesus is stripped of his clothes

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

The carrying of the cross is ended, we are at the place of death. The soldiers strip Jesus of his clothes. Jesus stands naked and vulnerable, the indignity of him is complete and on show to all around. The soldiers divide the clothes into four lots and throw dice to see who gets what. Like the clothes there have been and divisions in the Christian church. Many of these have caused blood to be shed in the mistaken name of God. This is still happening today, they are the crosses on which Jesus continues to die and we should be ashamed. Diversity is not division. A diverse church is a healthy church it is a gift which Jesus bestowed upon us when he tasked us to spread his word to all, Jew and Gentile alike.

Dear Lord, we are sorry and ashamed that your church has become so polarised. We pray that we can embrace your gift and become, in your name, a better and more united church.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

11. The Eleventh Station - Jesus is nailed to the cross

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

The punishment of the court begins. Jesus is roughly stretched out on his cross. His arms are pulled wide and secured to the cross by nails driven through his hands, with nails his feet also so secured and the cross raised high for all to see. There is more blood flowing, the crowds are ecstatic and dance shout and sneer at this Son of God. This is the final act of abuse and discrimination against Jesus. Discrimination is still with us, we have not learned the lessons of Christ's crucifixion. It is direct, in the media, in parliaments across the world, in the actions of governments. Its form touches upon race, gender, religion, faith, age and many others. The reasons can vary but the hurt is still the same.

Lord Jesus, you loved us all and died for us. Help us to learn to live as you decreed and to see the wrong we do to others and to seek redress for our wrong, so that their hurt is no longer.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

12. The Twelfth Station - Jesus dies on the cross

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

Jesus hangs on his cross between two other criminals, one a penitent one not. He who is innocent of any crime is dying. Even now his love never wavers as he speaks with his mother, John and Mary Magdalene. He even asks his Father, God, to absolve the soldiers for what they have done, for they knew not what they did. All is now done and he gives up his last breath calling to his Father, "Into your hands I commend my spirit" and dies.

(A minute's silence is kept)

Lord Jesus, we bow heads in remembrance that you died for us on the cross. Help us to leave here, out into the world, better people, so that we may be worthy to be with you in heaven.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

13. The Thirteenth Station - The body of Jesus is taken down from the cross

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

The crowds and soldiers have gone. There is nothing more to see. Only those who love him remain. They take his body down from the cross with care and compassion. He is cleaned and covered and given back the dignity that he had lost. He is laid in his mother's arms who holds and cherishes him as only a mother can. No Mother should have to hold their child in death, killed for one reason or another. One can only feel for those who have done so over the last few months from one cause or another, here and abroad.

Lord, you died and your body cared for by those who loved you and whom you loved. We pray for all mothers and fathers whose child has died an untimely death that they may be comforted by your love.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

14. The Fourteenth Station - Jesus is laid in the tomb

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

Pilate permits that Joseph of Arimathea may bury Jesus. Joseph lays him down in his own tomb and his mother covers him and anoints him as is customary. They leave and a stone is rolled across the entrance and the journey which started with Jesus facing Pilate and condemned to death is now ended. We stand outside this tomb unsure, conscious of the pain, suffering and death Jesus endured so that our sins may be forgiven and that we may have eternal life.

Lord, we pray that with this journey ended we may be humbler and better in our love and faith to others as you loved us.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Jesus our companion and friend, our God. Thank you for journeying with us. Open the eyes of our mind that we may truly understand the mystery of your dying and living. Fill us with joy as we celebrate your holy eucharist, sustaining us with your word and nourishing us with the bread of life.

The Lords Prayer

The Grace

Donald Wainwright. March 2024.