

STATIONS OF THE CROSS 2023

Introduction [Prayer by priest]

Hymn 756 When I survey the wondrous Cross (first two verses)

Reader 1 :

Come with me.

We are going to walk with Jesus on his last journey, using some of the psalms he would have known so well, as well as we know the words in our Mass and hymn books. Maybe these are some of the songs, poems and prayers that would have been in his mind, to give him strength for these difficult hours. He would have known every one of them.

Glory be to the Father

Our Father

Hail Mary

THE FIRST STATION : JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DIE

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you
- because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.**

Reader 1 : Jesus must be so tired. He probably can't remember when he last slept, but he had no sleep last night. He has come up to Jerusalem with his friends for the great feast of Passover, like many other people, so the town is busy and full of noise. After dinner last night, they sang some psalms, and then went out to the Garden of Olives. His friends fell asleep, but Jesus does not sleep; he was praying in great distress, because he knew what was coming. Then Judas betrays him to the Temple authorities, and starts the legal process which has finally brought us here, to Pilate, the only one who has the authority to sentence him to death. Pilate tries to avoid doing so, but realises that Jesus' own people have left him no choice.

Reader 2 : Psalm 1 vv 1-2

Happy indeed is the man
who follows not the counsel of the wicked;
nor lingers in the way of sinners
nor sits in the company of scorners,
but whose delight is the law of the Lord
and who ponders his law day and night.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

SECOND STATION : JESUS RECEIVES THE CROSS

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you
- because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.**

Reader 1 : Everybody has burdens to carry, some mental, some physical. Jesus promises that his own yoke for us is easy and the burden he would give us is light. But here is a heavy and brutal burden for him, and he is already weakened by the events of the previous night. He could call all the hosts of heaven to his aid. But he doesn't. He accepts the cross and starts to walk.

Reader 2 : Psalm 6 vv 1-5

Lord, do not reprove me in your anger;
punish me not in your rage.
Have mercy on me, Lord, I have no strength;
Lord, heal me, my body is racked;
my soul is racked with pain.

But you, O Lord...how long?
Return, Lord, rescue my soul.
Save me in your merciful love.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

THIRD STATION : JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you
- because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.**

Reader 1 : How could Jesus help falling, under this heavy burden with its awkward shape? But whenever you fall, as an adult, it's a horrible shock, and it's hard to get up

again. The soldiers escorting Jesus will not have been gentle. Even a picture of a fall is painful to see, and this is our beloved Lord. And he is suffering like this, for us.

Reader 2 : Psalm 37 vv 16-18

I count on you, O Lord:
it is you, Lord God who will answer.
I pray : 'Do not let them mock me,
those who triumph if my foot should slip.'

For I am on the point of falling
and my pain is always before me.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

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.**

Reader 1 : Of course Mary and the other women have come to Jerusalem with Jesus and the apostles. They will have cooked the Paschal meal only last night.

Here we have one of the hardest Stations to contemplate, with its weight of sorrow. It is hard to see your child hurt in any way, any bump or scrape on that beloved little body that you once knew every inch of. But seeing him looking like that, and knowing where he is going? Mary's pain is almost unimaginable, and so is her bravery. We already knew she was brave, from that first hugely generous assent to God's plan. Simeon warned her, when the baby Jesus was presented in the Temple, that a sword would pierce her heart. It must already have done so on various occasions; but surely, never so bitterly as this time, on the way to Calvary.

Reader 2 : Psalm 39 vv 6-8

How many, O Lord my God,
are the wonders and designs
that you have worked for us;
you have no equal.
Should I proclaim and speak of them,
they are more than I can tell.

You do not ask for sacrifice and offerings,
but an open ear.
You do not ask for holocaust and victim.
Instead, here am I.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

FIFTH STATION : SIMON 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.**

Reader 1 : Simon is from Cyrene, not Jerusalem, so he's from out of town. The account says that he is 'compelled' to help Jesus, but we have no details, except an aside (from Mark's gospel) telling us that he is the father of Alexander and Rufus. This must mean that his sons became Christians later and were known to everyone. 'Compelled' he may have been, but Simon has the (awesome, but possibly unwelcome) privilege of helping Jesus. He is like one of the angels that show up in our own lives from time to time. Sometimes we can be angels for each other, God's messenger at a time of distress. Anyone can be an angel, but what an honour to be allowed to be an angel for Jesus.

Reader 2 : Psalm 41 vv 4-5

My tears have become my bread,
by night, by day,
as I hear it said all the day long:
'Where is your God?'

These things will I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I would lead the rejoicing crowd
into the house of God,
amid cries of gladness and thanksgiving,
the throng wild with joy.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

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.

Reader 1 : And here is another angel come to help. By now Jesus is in a really bad way. Remember what he has been through, the various trials and fake trials, the scourging, the bullying. By now, the crowd is not far short of a lynch mob. The soldiers are keeping order around Jesus, but the whole scene must be terrifying. Veronica can't do much to help, but she makes her way to Jesus, already quite an achievement, and simply wipes his face (his hands are probably tied, and he certainly has no clean cloth). She does for him as much as she can, and does not hang back simply because she cannot achieve more. The smallest act of love must have been so welcome.

Reader 2 : Psalm 30 vv 12, 14-16

In the face of all my foes
I am a reproach,
an object of scorn to my neighbours
and of fear to my friends.

I have heard the slander of the crowd,
fear is all around me,
as they plot together against me,
as they plan to take my life.

But as for me, I trust in you, Lord,
I say, 'You are my God.
My life is in your hands, deliver me
from the hands of those who hate me.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.

SEVENTH STATION : JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME

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

Reader 1 : Even with Simon's help, Jesus falls again. These falls are not part of the Gospel accounts, they are traditional, but they have such a strong hold on our imagination because we know life is like that; we keep falling over again and again, we make the same mistakes, we commit the same sins. But we have to keep going, getting up and trying again, as many times as it takes. It is very hard to watch someone that you love struggling like this.

Reader 2 : Psalm 120 vv 1-4, 7-8

I lift up my eyes to the mountains:
from where shall come my help?
My help shall come from the Lord
who made heaven and earth.

May he never allow you to stumble!
Let him sleep not, your guard.
No, he sleeps not nor slumbers,
Israel's guard.

The Lord will guard you from evil,
he will guard your soul.
The Lord will guard your going and coming
both now and for ever.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

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.**

Reader 1 : Not everyone in the crowd is hostile; now Jesus meets a group of women from the town, who are following him and lamenting. Jesus takes the time to 'turn to them'. They are expressing their grief for him as an individual, and he must have been a truly pitiable sight; but he is sorry for them rather than for himself. He knows that he is innocent, which gives him strength; but they (and we) are not. As he has done before, he grieves for the coming sorrows of Jerusalem, foreseen in the psalms.

Reader 2 : Psalm 78 vv1-5

O God, the nations have invaded your land,
they have profaned your holy temple.
They have made Jerusalem a heap of ruins.
They have handed over the bodies of your servants
as food to feed the birds of heaven
and the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth.

They have poured out blood like water in Jerusalem,
no one is left to bury the dead.
We have become the taunt of our neighbours,
the mockery and scorn of those who surround us.
How long, O Lord? Will you be angry for ever,
how long will your anger burn like fire?

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

NINTH STATION : JESUS FALLS THE THIRD TIME

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you
- because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.**

Reader 1 : Jesus falls for the third time, and we know, because of all the rules of story-telling, that this must be the last time. The end must be coming near. There has never been any chance of escape on this journey, no question of a rescue. Jesus is there because he chooses to be a willing victim; he accepts the suffering on behalf of everyone else. His mother is still there, watching; she cannot intervene. God is watching his only and dearly-beloved Son on this road to Calvary, and he will not interfere. The sequence has to unroll to the end.

Reader 2 : Psalm 90 vv 10-15

Upon you no evil shall fall,
no plague approach where you dwell.
For you has he commanded his angels,
to keep you in all your ways.

They shall bear you upon their hands
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
On the lion and the viper you will tread

and trample the young lion and the dragon.

Since he clings to me in love, I will free him;
protect him for he knows my name.

When he calls I shall answer: 'I am with you.'
I will save him in distress and give him glory.

**Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

TENTH STATION : JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you
- because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.**

Reader 1 : All Jesus has left is the clothes he stands up in; now he loses even these. The executioners divide his clothes among them – presumably, this was one of the perks of the job. His tunic is woven in one piece (who made it for him? Probably his mother?), and to cut it up to share it would unravel it, so they cast lots to see who gets it. John gives us these details in his Gospel because he remembers the words of Psalm 21, and sees Jesus fulfilling yet another prophecy. This is the same psalm which Jesus starts to pray, on the cross : 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?', so we know with certainty that this psalm was going through his mind.

Reader 2 : Psalm 21 vv 17-20

Many dogs have surrounded me,
a band of the wicked beset me.
They tear holes in my hands and my feet
and lay me in the dust of death.

I can count every one of my bones.
These people stare at me and gloat;
they divide my clothing among them.
They cast lots for my robe.

O Lord, do not leave me alone,
my strength, make haste to help me!

**Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

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.

Reader 1 : We hear a lot about Jesus' hands in the Gospels. He lays his hands on people. He is not afraid to touch anyone, even the people that everyone else is avoiding. He takes bread into his hands and blesses it, and then shares it round; he picks up a child and puts it on his lap; he doodles in the dust when he is thinking; he makes mud pies to anoint a blind man's eyes; he rolls up his sleeves and washes his friends' feet. He has gentle, giving hands; -- and now the soldiers put nails through them to hang him from the cross.

Reader 2 : Psalm 58 vv 1-6

Rescue me, God, from my foes;
protect me from those who attack me.
O rescue me from those who do evil
and save me from blood-thirsty men.

See, they lie in wait for my life;
powerful men band together against me.
For no offence, no sin of mine, Lord,
for no guilt of mine they rush to take their stand.

Awake, come to my aid and see!
Lord of hosts, you are Israel's God.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.

Hymn 253 Jesus, remember me

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.

Reader 1 : Three hours. There are no words for us for this stage, just waiting, until the poor, tortured body finally expires. Waiting beside a deathbed is hard, listening for

each breath, longing for the next one, but here even Jesus' friends must have been relieved when he cried out and yielded up his spirit. Relieved and yet devastated. How has it come to this?

Reader 2 : Psalm 38 vv 5-7, 8

O Lord, you have shown me my end,
how short is the length of my days.
Now I know how fleeting is my life.

You have given me a short span of days;
my life is as nothing in your sight.
A mere breath, the man who stood so firm,
a mere shadow, the man passing by.

And now, Lord, what is there to wait for?
In you rests all my hope.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- grant us peace.**

THIRTEENTH STATION : 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.**

Reader 1 : Finally Jesus' body is taken down from the cross and given back to his mother, and the women with her. Now there is nothing left to do that can make any difference; but there are things to do to show their love. Like the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair, they have tears to wash his face and try to put him back together after the damage of the crucifixion. Did they try to comfort each other, or did they just feel numb? What could anyone do?

Reader 2 : Psalm 87 vv 1- 6,10 -11

Lord my God, I call for help by day;
I cry at night before you.
Let my prayer come into your presence.

O turn your ear to my cry

For my soul is filled with evils;
my life is on the brink of the grave.
I am reckoned as one in the tomb:
I have reached the end of my strength,

like one alone among the dead;
like the slain lying in their graves;
like those you remember no more,
cut off, as they are, from your hand.

I call to you, Lord, all the day long;
to you I stretch out my hands.
Will you work your wonders for the dead?
Will the shades stand and praise you?

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

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.**

Reader 1 : Joseph of Arimathea 'takes courage and goes to Pilate'. This is where we began the journey. Pilate was the only person with the legal power to condemn Jesus to death, now he is the person who can release the body. Joseph is rich and influential; Pilate agrees to his request.

There is not much time left before the beginning of the sabbath, when everyone is required to be at home. Joseph brings a new linen shroud and Nicodemus brings spices, and they wrap the body and place it in Joseph's own tomb, until after the sabbath.

The women are following, including Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. They watch from a distance, taking careful note of where the tomb is and how the body has been left. They will need to come back once the sabbath is over, to do what needs to be done. For now, all they can do is go home, prepare what they will need to lay out the body, and reflect on what has happened.

Reader 2 : Psalm 70 vv 5- 6, 16 -17, 20 - 21

It is you, O Lord, who are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, since my youth.
On you I have leaned from my birth,
from my mother's womb you have been my help.
My hope has always been in you.

I will declare the Lord's mighty deeds
proclaiming your justice, yours alone.
O God, you have taught me from my youth
and I proclaim your wonders still.

You have burdened me with bitter troubles
but you will give me back my life.
You will raise me from the depths of the earth;
you will exalt me and console me again.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be

**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
- have mercy on us.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God,
by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit
your death brought life to the world.
By your holy body and blood
free me from my sins and from every evil.
Keep me faithful to your teaching,
and never let me be parted from you.**

**Our Father
Hail Mary
Glory be to the Father**

Hymn 756 last three verses

CONCLUDING PRAYER AND BLESSING [by priest]

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