

**Stations of the Cross
in the time of the Pandemic Coronavirus, Covid-19**

At every station:

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

1 Jesus is Condemned to Death

Pilate is caught up in something, a national movement, something out of his control. And so he washes his hands of it. It is his only response, when his usual authority as a leader has been challenged. We wash our hands because we know it is an action that will gain us control of the situation, and will assure us that we are not powerless to act in the face of uncertainty and anxiety. Like Pilate, we fear what is happening in the crowds and gatherings around us, but we do not surrender when we wash.

Lord, be with us in this time of anxiety and fear; bring calm and comfort across the nations, especially where people are afraid to gather, to meet or to share; and grant us the peace that comes from the knowledge of your loving presence.

2 Jesus Receives the Cross

Jesus receives the heavy Cross, a burden he must bear. Does he know how long the journey will be? Does he know what will come at the end? He may, but his friends, his disciples, have still not fully understood what he has told them will happen. We are overloaded with information, a global picture that for many of us is too large and complex to comprehend. Experts are trying to learn more and more about this virus, to model and predict its behaviour, to combat the fact that so much is uncertain, unknown. Like the disciples, we are tempted to turn away and hide our face from the problem, but Jesus carries the burden for us, and leads us onward even under its weight.

Lord, strengthen us in the face of this new and complex situation; help us to discern with wisdom the right course of action, that we may act responsibly and sensibly; and we thank you that, when the burden seems too great for us to bear alone, you shoulder it for us and walk ahead of us.

3 Jesus Falls for the First Time

Even at the beginning of his journey, Jesus falls to the ground under the weight of his burden. He comes to the cross already weakened by what has happened before: the flogging, the humiliation, the rough treatment of the soldiers. When news of the new coronavirus first broke out of China, we were quick to bring our preconceived ideas and prejudices to bear on the situation. Was information being withheld? Were people being silenced? We fall even before our own journey has really begun.

Lord, help us not to judge others by our own ideas, and teach us to trust our neighbours who share in this plight with us; give those in authority the wisdom and courage to act in the best interests of all and to work in collaboration for the good of the whole world.

4 Jesus Meets his Blessed Mother

Mary stands before her son, and sees him in his distress. It was she who said 'let it be to me according to your word', and now she sees the fulfilment of that acceptance. She raised her son, taught him the ways of the world, and now recognises what atrocity the world can do. We fear for the welfare of loved ones, and know that we carry the greatest risk of transmitting a virus to those who are closest to us. Our signs of intimacy - handshakes, hugs and kisses - become moments of danger and risk.

Lord, protect those we love and hold dear; help us not to be driven apart as families, societies and congregations, as we introduce distancing measures to minimise the risk to our health; and may our bonds of prayer and service be strengthened through your grace.

5 Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

Simon is made to help a stranger, Jesus. Perhaps he has seen him before, or perhaps he is just one of the crowd, caught up in the fast-moving events of the day, and does not know anything about this criminal being put to death: but he must come close to him and assist him in his hour of need. Many people who work in key professions, especially healthcare and social welfare, as well as retail and food production and distribution, are being asked to work harder and longer to cope with the pressures brought by the disease itself and by the associated economic disruption. Many people are being retrained to work in areas in which they were never expecting to be deployed.

Lord, strengthen and encourage all those who are overworked in the current crisis; help them to protect their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing; and keep them always in the loving care of their families and friends.

6 Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Veronica wipes Jesus's face, and in doing so reveals the true human nature of the Son of God. His face would be sweaty, bloody, raw under the strain of this torture, and Veronica relieves for a moment this pain in her human compassion. We are faced with numbers, statistics and percentages in our news reports and advice, behind all of which are the faces of individual people. 2-3% or 1000 cases do not refer to test kits, paper trails or government reports, but to unique people, made in the image of God and loved by him.

Lord, remind us of the human suffering behind each illness and death; and let us never become immune to the reports of the spread of this virus, so that we always acknowledge your presence in the lives of your people.

7 Jesus Falls for the Second Time

Jesus falls again, now with the crowds gathering around him, the road steepening, and even though the burden has been shared with the stranger from Cyrene. The soldiers must be tired of him now, with the heat of the day approaching, and this fall only serves to compound their fury. If when the news first broke, we were quick to judge, when we heard of its spread to other parts of the world – South Korea, Iran, Italy – then lessons had not been learned. Still we asked, were people being complacent? Were there ulterior motives amongst businesses, governments or religious groups? We fall again, even more humiliatingly for a second time.

Lord, teach us your ways of loving-kindness and compassion; help us to love our neighbour, especially across cultural and religious barriers; and chasten us, that difference and distance do not become division.

8 Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

These women Jesus meets along his way are different to the rest of the crowd. They are not joining in with this spectacle in the same way as everyone else, and Jesus acknowledges their perspective on the situation. He speaks to them in this time of mourning, and invites them to consider what his death will mean for them. We know that the marginalised will have a different perspective on this time of crisis to that reported in mainstream media. There are many who are not able to choose to work from home; many for whom lost income will mean no food or no heating; many who do not have a safe place in which to self-isolate, or for whom home itself is not safe.

Lord, be with those for whom emergency measures will bring further destitution, especially the poor and the socially isolated; and inspire us all to work to connect and relieve them in their needs, and bless the work of volunteer networks, food banks and community organisations.

9 Jesus Falls for the Third Time

For the third time, Jesus falls to the ground. Nearing the end of his journey, the road climbs the hill to Calvary, and the final steps become the most difficult and the most painful. We responded to the outbreak in China and in other parts of the world from our own place of privilege, and then we were faced with the outbreak in our own country and at our own door; and still we forgot to be compassionate and tolerant. Were lives being cheapened, expended, ignored? Were people acting in their own interests? There were many scenes of stockpiling essential goods as people acted out of fear and not out of love.

Lord, keep us from all selfish thoughts and desires, and make us always mindful of the needs of others; as we seek to preserve our own livelihoods, may we not neglect our social and environmental impact on this world we share with so many.

10 Jesus is Stripped of his Garments

By this point, Jesus is already half-naked, his flesh torn by the whip, the cross and the road. What clothing he wears has been given to him out of mockery and spite, and yet even this is taken from him, and the robes of his humiliation gambled off to the benefit of those who persecute him. We find ourselves stripped of those identities that would usually help us find our place in society. We are unable to fulfil the roles we usually adopt, and find it hard to be a teacher, a friend, a priest, a neighbour, a mother, a son when we are prevented from doing the outward signs of those vocations.

Lord, direct our thoughts, words and deeds that we may glorify you in our lives; speak to us through the confusion and uncertainty of the present age; and teach us that our identity is in Christ, and the life he gives us as members of his risen body.

11 Jesus is Hung on the Cross

Jesus was nailed to the wood of the cross, and the heavy beam under which he struggled and fell is now held so closely to him that he cannot break free. Many of us have suffered with the disease caused by this coronavirus, and many more will. For some it will be a mild inconvenience, and for some it will be a life-changing ordeal. Some of us will self-isolate and recover at home, and some will require medical attention and hospitalisation.

Lord, comfort those in pain and distress, all those who suffer in body, mind and spirit as a result of this virus, and especially the elderly, the infirm, and those with underlying health conditions; and soothe our hearts with the knowledge of your mercy.

12 Jesus Dies on the Cross

Hung on the cross, tortured, humiliated and consigned to death, Jesus breaths his last and accepts the final point of human suffering. He dies of asphyxiation, his legs broken to ensure he can no longer fill his lungs. We know that many have died following a positive diagnosis of Covid-19, and many more will do so. Many of these deaths come before we are ready to accept this fate, and we lament the passing of so many who had lived fruitful and blessed lives.

Lord, receive all who have died into the peace of your everlasting kingdom, and make us ready to greet them when we come to stand, by your mercy, in the splendour of your heavenly glory. May they rest in peace.

13 Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

Jesus is taken down from the cross into the arms of his mother, Mary, who has stood by him throughout this ordeal. She is able to hold him now, unencumbered by the wood of the cross, his lifeless body free of the instrument of his death – but for what? Our society will be changed by this pandemic, and we will lose many things that we once held dear. Businesses, industries, social groups, traditions and customs may all come to an end as the world changes at a rapid pace.

Lord, help us not to cling to things of this world, but to give thanks for what has been and accept with hope what is to come; and keep us steadfast in our faith in you, the unchangeable and ever-present God.

14 Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

A new tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea stands empty, ready to receive the Christ. There, Jesus's body will rest, wrapped in linen and prepared with oils and spices. Though it is a place of darkness and lifelessness, yet it is a place pregnant with the hope of rebirth. For now, this feels like the end of the story, but we know that there is another chapter, a new beginning, a fresh start that comes with Christ's resurrection. For us today, it can be difficult to see a way out, an end point to the suffering around us. But we must hold firm, trusting that many have gone before us and have come through great tribulation, and keeping hope in the promises made to us in Christ our Lord.

Lord, you have promised to us salvation and deliverance through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ and made known your loving-kindness and mercy: renew in our hearts the knowledge of this eternal love, and let us cling closely to the hope that is set before us, as we look for the coming of your kingdom in this world and the next.