

St Stephen's Church
Meditations at the Stations of the Cross
2017

First Station: Jesus is condemned to be crucified

Pilate is a man with a divided heart. He knows that Jesus is innocent and looks for a way to free him, but at the same time he is afraid of the crowd; and so his own self-interest becomes more important than what is right. Justice is trampled underfoot by weakness, cowardice, and fear of the prevailing mood.

We acknowledge with penitence the times that we have failed to stand up for the truth through fear or indecision. We pray for the falsely accused and victims of injustice.

Second Station: Jesus compelled to bear the Cross

Jesus is made to carry the means of his own death. Wearing the mocking crown of thorns he appears as the true King, who reigns, not through violence, but through suffering love. He takes up the cross, bearing the burden of a sinful world, bearing our burden. He takes up the cross and begins to walk, showing the way that leads to true life.

We acknowledge with sorrow the burdens we have placed on the shoulders of others, or times when we have failed to ease the burdens of those who came to us hoping for consolation or reassurance. We pray for the grace to carry the crosses we have to bear, crosses of pain or responsibility of ourselves or others.

Third Station: Jesus falls under the heavy Cross

As Jesus falls beneath the weight of the cross, the whole meaning of his life is revealed. He empties himself and descends to the lowest point of human nature, so that he might lift us up again with him in glory. We so often fall into self-destruction

through pride or self-centredness, but the merciful love of the Lord reaches down to us even in those moments to save us and raise us up.

We acknowledge with thanksgiving that this fall of Jesus is no accident, but a part of his movement down to fallen humanity. We pray for the strength to leave the destructive pride which drags us down, and through our sharing in the humility of Jesus, to rise again.

Fourth Station: Jesus is met by his blessed Mother

Mary's heart was a treasury. In her heart she had kept the words of the angel, spoken to her at the beginning: 'do not be afraid, Mary'; and in her heart she had pondered all the events surrounding the birth of her Son. Her heart carried Jesus as she watched him grow and begin his ministry. Now in this dark hour, her heart knew the courage of a mother, the fidelity of a mother, and the faith of a mother as she followed along the way to Calvary.

We acknowledge the courage of Mary's love and pray that we may have some share of that faithfulness in our own discipleship. We pray for mothers who are carrying great burdens today, especially for those caring for their suffering children, or for those struggling to understand a child who seems to be lost to them.

Fifth Station: Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene

Simon was just going about his daily business when he happened across the sad procession of condemned men on their way to Calvary. As the soldiers force him into helping to carry the cross of Jesus, how angry he must have felt at this brutal interruption to his day. But St Mark's Gospel tells us not only his name, but the names of his children. They are known to the Christian community. This chance encounter touched Simon's heart, and he became a disciple.

We acknowledge in penance our own reluctance to help those in need if it interferes with our own plans or desires. We pray for the grace to share the sufferings of others and so to build up the body of Christ.

Sixth Station: Jesus receives Veronica's charity

In the Old Testament, we hear believers yearning to see the face of God. In Jesus Christ, that face is made visible. At first Veronica saw only a bloodied and bruised face, but as she stepped forward to bring comfort to this condemned man, the image of the true God was impressed on her heart. In the man of sorrows, Veronica sees the face of God.

We acknowledge with sorrow our blindness of heart which means that we only see the surface of things. We pray for help to see God's glory in the suffering, the poor and the oppressed and for the courage to serve him in those people and places.

Seventh Station: Jesus falls again under the Cross

The tradition of Jesus's falls beneath the weight of the cross remind us of the falls of humanity – from the moment of Adam's fall in the story of Genesis through to our own falls through moral weakness or selfish pride. It is humanity with its back turned on God that lies fallen in the dust. But Jesus shared our weakness so that we may share his strength. He falls in order to raise us up.

We acknowledge with sorrow our falls and failures, especially when others may have been depending on us. We pray for a clearer sense of God's presence in our lives, lifting us up above the forces of evil.

Eighth Station: Jesus speaks to the weeping women

The women of Jerusalem fulfil a pious duty to weep for a condemned man, but their grief is formal and ritualistic. Jesus's words to them point us to a deeper truth:

sentimental piety on its own is not enough, but must lead to a true conversion of heart. Do we stand and express sorrow and consternation at the world's woes, shed a tear, but then turn away?

We acknowledge with sorrow times of insincerity or shallow piety. We pray for the gift of real compassion that acts in the face of suffering, and for those who are the helpless witnesses of cruelty or pain.

Ninth Station: Jesus falls for the third time

The falls of Jesus speak to humanity and to our own falls through the weakness of sin. But the Church falls too: through our lack of unity, our failure to live up to the call of Christ, the sinful actions of her ministers and our petty squabbling and power struggles, while the gospel goes un-proclaimed. When the Church falls, we drag down the name of Christ, but he is yet the resurrection and the life – and his power can raise us up.

We acknowledge with sorrow the times we have wounded the Body of Christ. We pray for those who have lapsed from the Church because of the actions of her members – that the strong love of Jesus would draw them back.

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

As the soldiers remove Jesus's clothing they remove every last shred of his dignity. He becomes simply an outcast, despised by all alike, judged by the eyes he is exposed to. Jesus once more takes on the condition of fallen humanity, when we are stripped of all we surround ourselves with and come face to face with God.

We acknowledge the futility of the self-deceit and disguise with which we can clothe ourselves before God. We pray for the gift of self-knowledge and self-awareness. And we pray for all those who have had their dignity removed through the

inhumanity and cruelty of others, for victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation – and that the hearts of the perpetrators may be turned.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the Cross for us

In the terrible cruelty of the moment, Jesus deliberately takes the pain of crucifixion. As his arms and legs are stretched out and pinned to the beams of the cross, his whole body demonstrates the height and breadth and depth of the measure of God's love for us. He is fastened to a world's sin and failings and self-centredness, so that we might be joined to him for ever.

We acknowledge with sorrow times when we have preferred a faith that asks little of us or of a half-hearted following of Christ. We pray for the tortured and those awaiting execution, for those fastened to crosses of addictions of all sorts, and those who find no joy in being alive. May the love of God which triumphed in even this dark hour be their strength and stay.

Twelfth Station: Jesus by death redeems the world

Jesus has accomplished his task. He has thrown open the way to heaven, and given himself to the hands of the Father. With all creation, we stand in awe and wonder as Jesus, our Lord and God, dies.

A period of silence is kept.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the Cross

Jesus is dead. Yet before the body is wrenched from the cross and put into the arms of Mary, his side is pierced and water and blood flow out – an image of baptism and the Eucharist which will be at the heart of his Church. Even in this hour of immense grief, the hidden God is preparing the way for something new, as a community of faith begins to take shape.

We acknowledge with sorrow the times when we have been tempted to lose heart. We pray for all who cannot see beyond the darkness of grief, and for all who mourn, especially parents mourning the death of a child. May Mary, who knew the pain of grief, pray with them and for them.

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid within the sepulchre

It seems that it is all over. A disgraced body is placed in a tomb, with a great rock rolled over the entrance, like a giant full-stop. But Jesus is on the cusp of a new beginning. Ahead lies an unimaginable future which he will share with all whose lives seem to have reached a dead end. From this place of death will spring forth glorious new life.

We acknowledge with sorrow our failure to live up to our baptismal covenant. Let us pray for all the baptised, and for those preparing for baptism. Since in baptism we have share Christ's death in order to share his risen life, so through us may the word of God be alive and active today.