

# STATIONS OF THE CROSS MEDITATIONS 2019

## FIRST STATION

### *Jesus is condemned to be crucified*

We see you, Jesus, standing before the governor, who tries three times to oppose the will of the people, and finally decides not to decide. We see you standing before the crowd; they are asked three times, and each time they decide against you. The crowd is, in other words, everyone and no one. Hidden in the throng, we lose our individuality; we become the voice of a thousand other voices. Even before we deny you, we deny ourselves, diluting our own responsibility in the seething tide of a faceless crowd. And yet we are responsible. Misled by the rabble-rousers, by the evil that insinuates itself with a deceitful and deafening voice, it is we, all humanity, who condemn you.

Today we are horrified at so great an injustice; we do not want to be a part of it. But in this way we forget all those times when we ourselves were ready to save Barabbas over you. All those times when our ears were deaf to the voice of goodness, when we preferred not to see the injustice all around us.

In that crowded square, it would have been enough for a single heart to hesitate, for a single voice to be raised against the thousand voices of evil. Whenever life sets before us a decision to be made, let us be reminded of that square and that mistake. Let us allow our hearts to hesitate and command our voices to speak out.

## SECOND STATION

### *Jesus compelled to bear the Cross*

We see you, Jesus, crowned with thorns as you receive your Cross. You accept it, as you always accept everything and everyone. They burden you with its wood, heavy and rough, yet you do not rebel; you do not reject that unjust and humiliating instrument of torture. You take it up and begin to walk, carrying it on your shoulders.

How many times have we rebelled in anger against burdens we have received, viewing them as heavy or unjust? That is not your way. You take seriously what life offers you, every opportunity it presents, as if you wanted to go to the very heart of things; to discover that there is always something beyond appearances, something remarkable and meaningful. Thanks to you, we understand that this is a Cross of salvation and liberation, a Cross that bears us up whenever we stumble, a yoke that is easy, a burden that is light.

The scandal of the death of God's Son, a sinner's death, a criminal's death, grants us the grace to discover amid sorrow, your resurrection; amid suffering, your glory; amid anguish, your salvation. And the Cross itself, which speaks to us of humiliation and pain, is now revealed, thanks to your sacrifice, as a promise that from every death new life will arise, and in every dark place light will shine. And so we can cry out: 'Hail, holy Cross, our one hope!'

### **THIRD STATION**

#### ***Jesus falls under the heavy Cross***

We see you, Jesus, making your way to Calvary bearing our sins. We see you fall, hands and knees on the ground, in pain. With what great humility you fall! And what great humiliation you now endure! Your human nature, your true manhood, is clearly seen in this fragment of your life. The Cross you carry is a heavy one. You need help to carry it, but when you fall to the ground, no one helps you. Instead, people make fun of you, they laugh at the sight of a God who falls. Perhaps they are disappointed, perhaps they had a mistaken idea of who you are. Sometimes we think that having faith in you means never falling in life. Together with you, we also fall, and our ideas with us, those ideas we had about you. How fragile they were!

We see you Jesus, as you grit your teeth and, in complete surrender to the love of the Father, you get up and resume your journey. With these, your first, faltering steps beneath the Cross, Jesus, you remind us of a child taking his first steps in life. Losing his balance, he falls and cries, but then keeps going. He trusts in the hands of his parents and does not give up. He is afraid but he keeps walking, because trust is stronger than fear.

By your courage, you teach us that our failures and falls must never halt our journey, and that we always have a choice: to give up or to get up, in union with you.

## FOURTH STATION

### *Jesus is met by his blessed Mother*

We see you, Jesus, as you meet your mother. Mary is there, making her way through the crowded street, with many persons all around her. The only thing that makes her different from the others is the fact that she is there to accompany her son. Something we see every day: mothers accompanying their children to school or to the doctor, or bringing them to work. Yet Mary is different from other mothers: she is accompanying her son to his death. To see your own child die is the worst, the most unnatural thing that anyone could imagine for a person, and it is all the more atrocious if that child is dying at the hands of the law. How unnatural and unjust is this scene before our eyes! Our own mothers instilled in us a sense of justice and trust in life, but what we see today has nothing to do with that: it is senseless and painful.

We see you, Mary, as you look at your poor child. He bears on his back the marks of the scourge and he is forced to carry the weight of the Cross; soon, no doubt, in his exhaustion he will fall beneath it. Yet you knew that, sooner or later, this would happen. It was prophesied to you, but now that it is taking place, everything is different. That is how things are: we are always unprepared before the harsh realities of life. Mary, now you are sorrowful, as any woman would be in your place, but you do not despair. Your eyes are undimmed; you are not forlorn and downcast. You are radiant even in your sorrow, because you have hope. You know that this journey of your son will not be a one-way trip. You know, you feel, as only mothers can feel, that soon you will see him again.

## **FIFTH STATION**

### ***Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene***

We see you, Jesus, crushed beneath the weight of the Cross. We see that you cannot do it alone: at your moment of greatest need, you remain alone, without those who called themselves your friends. Judas betrayed you, Peter denied you, the others abandoned you. Yet suddenly there is an unexpected encounter with someone unknown, a mere passer-by, who perhaps had only heard about you and not followed you. Yet now here he is, at your side, shoulder to shoulder, to share your yoke. His name is Simon and he is a stranger come from afar, from Cyrene. For him today something unexpected happens, which becomes an encounter.

Every day we experience any number of encounters and conflicts. We continually encounter new experiences and new people. In unexpected meetings, in accidental events, in strange surprises, there are hidden opportunities to love, to see the best in our neighbours, even those who seem different from ourselves.

At times, Jesus, we feel like you, abandoned by those we thought were our friends, crushed by a heavy burden. Yet we must not forget that there is a Simon of Cyrene ready to carry our Cross. We must remember that we are not alone and, in that realisation, we will find the strength to take up the Cross of those around us.

We see you, Jesus: now you seem to be experiencing a bit of relief. You manage, momentarily, to catch a breath, now that you are no longer alone. We also see Simon. Who knows if he has realised that your yoke is light, and if he appreciates the meaning of this unexpected event in his life.

## SIXTH STATION

### *Jesus rewards Veronica's charity*

We see you, Jesus, wretched and barely recognisable, treated like the least of men. You walk, faltering, to your death, your face bleeding and disfigured, yet, as always, meek and humble, looking up. A woman steps out of the crowd to see at close hand that face of yours which, perhaps, had spoken so often to her soul and which she loved. She sees its pain and wants to help. They do not let her pass, there are so many of them, all too many, and they are armed. But to her, none of that matters; she is determined to reach you and for a moment she manages to touch you, caressing you with her veil. Hers is the power of tenderness. Your eyes meet for a second, face meets face.

We know nothing about that woman, Veronica, or her story. She earns heaven with a simple gesture of charity. She approaches you, sees your suffering face and loves it even more than before. Veronica does not stop at appearances, which today are so important in our image-conscious society. She loves, unconditionally, a face that is unsightly, marred, unlovely and imperfect. That face, your face, Jesus, in its very imperfection, shows the perfection of your love for us.

## SEVENTH STATION

### *Jesus falls again under the Cross*

We see you, Jesus, fall once more before our eyes. By falling again, you show us that you are a man, a true man. And we see you get up again, more resolute than before. You do not get up with pride; there is no pride in your gaze, there is love. In continuing on your journey, getting up after each fall, you proclaim your resurrection. You show that you are ready, once again and always, to bear on your bleeding shoulders the burden of human sin.

By falling again, you sent us a clear message of humility. You fell on the ground, on that humus from which we 'humans' are born. We are dust, we are mud, we are nothing in comparison to you. But you want to become like us, and now you show yourself close to us, with our troubles, our weaknesses, the sweat of our brow. Now, on this Friday, as often happens to us, you are overwhelmed by sorrow. But you have the strength to go forward, you are not afraid of the difficulties that lie ahead, and you know that at the end of your struggle there is heaven. You get up precisely to get there, to open before us the gates of your kingdom. What a strange king you are, a king lying in the dust.

Suddenly we realise: we are not worthy of comparing our efforts and our falls to yours. Your falls are a sacrifice, the greatest sacrifice that our eyes and all of history will ever be able to see.

## **EIGHTH STATION**

### *Jesus speaks to the weeping women*

We see you and we hear you, Jesus, as you speak to the women whom you meet on the way to your death. Each day you would meet any number of people; you would approach everyone and talk to all. Now you speak with the women of Jerusalem, who look at you and weep. But you, Jesus, speak words of warning that for us are striking: they are so concrete and direct. At first, they might appear harsh and severe, but that is because they are so direct. Nowadays we are used to a world where people beat around the bush. A cool hypocrisy veils and filters what we really mean. We are unwilling to correct others. We prefer to leave them to their own devices, not bothering to challenge them for their own good.

Whereas you, Jesus, speak to the women like a father, also admonishing them. Your words are words of truth and they are forthright for the sole sake of correction, not judgement. Yours is a language different to the one we speak. You always speak with humility and you go straight to the heart of the matter.

In this meeting, your last before the Cross, we see once more your boundless love for the least-esteemed and the marginalised. Women in those days were not considered worthy of being spoken to; whereas you, in your kindness, are truly revolutionary.

## NINTH STATION

### *Jesus falls for the third time*

We see you, Jesus, as you fall for the third time. Twice now you have fallen, and twice now you have got up. But now, there are no limits to your struggle and your pain. Now, in this third and final fall, you seem completely overwhelmed. How many times, in everyday life, do we fall! We fall so often that we lose count. Yet we always hope that each fall will be the last, because we need the courage of hope to face suffering. When a person falls that many times, ultimately all strength fails and all hope vanishes.

We imagine ourselves beside you, Jesus, as you make your way to your death. It is hard to think that you are the Son of God himself. Someone has already tried to help you, but now you are exhausted, at a stand-still and paralysed: it seems that you cannot possibly go any further. Unexpectedly, however, we see you get up, straighten your legs and your back, despite the weight of the Cross on your shoulder, and begin to walk once more. Yes, you are walking to your death, but you want to do so to the very end. Perhaps this is love.

What we understand is that it makes no difference how many times we will fall; there will always be one last time, perhaps the worst, the most terrible trial, when we are called to find the strength to endure to the end of the journey. For Jesus the end is the crucifixion, the apparent absurdity of death, which nonetheless reveals a deeper meaning, a more sublime purpose, that of saving us all.

**TENTH STATION*****Jesus is stripped of his garments***

We see you, Jesus, naked, as we have never seen you before. They have stripped you of your garments, Jesus, and are casting dice for them. In the eyes of these men, you have lost the last shred of your remaining dignity, your one possession on this, your journey of suffering. At the beginning of time, your Father had sewn garments for humans, to clothe them in dignity; and now humans strip that garment off your back. We see you, Jesus, and we may think of a young migrant, his body ravaged, who arrives in a land that all too often is heartless, ready to strip off his garment, his one treasure, and to sell it. To leave him alone with his Cross, like yours, alone with his disfigured skin, like yours, alone with his eyes brimming with tears of pain, like yours.

Yet there is something we often forget about dignity. It is found beneath our skin; it is part of us, and it will always be with us. All the more, at this moment, in this nakedness.

We see you and we understand the grandeur and the splendour of your dignity, the dignity of every human, which no one will ever be able to erase.

## **ELEVENTH STATION**

### ***Jesus is nailed to the Cross for us***

We see you, Jesus, stripped of everything. They wanted to punish you, an innocent person, by nailing you to the wood of the Cross. What would we have done in your place? Would we have had the courage to acknowledge your truth, which is our truth? You had the strength to bear the weight of the Cross, to meet with disbelief, to be condemned for your provocative words. Today we can barely swallow a critical comment, as if every word was meant to hurt us.

You did not stop even before death. You believed deeply in your mission and you put your trust in your Father. In the world of today's media, we are so conditioned by everything that circulates, there are times when we doubt even our own words. But your words are different; they are powerful in your weakness. You have forgiven us, you held no grudge, you taught us to offer the other cheek and you kept going, even to the total sacrifice of yourself.

We look around us and we see eyes glued to telephone screens, people trolling the social networks in order to nail others for their every mistake, with no possibility of forgiveness. People ruled by anger, screaming their hatred of one another for the most futile reasons.

We look at your wounds and we realise, now, that we would not have had your strength. But we are seated here at your feet, and we strip ourselves of all hesitation. We get up in order to be closer to you, even if by a fraction of an inch.

## TWELFTH STATION

### *Jesus by death redeems the world*

We see you, Jesus, but this time we would rather not see. You are dying. You were beautiful to behold when you spoke to the crowds, but now all that has come to an end. We do not want to see that end; all too often we have averted our gaze, we have become almost accustomed to flee pain and death. We have become numb to them.

Your cry on the Cross is loud and heart-rending. We were not prepared for all that pain; we are not, and nor will we ever be. Instinctively, we flee, in panic, before death and suffering. We reject them; we prefer to look away or to close our eyes. Instead, you remain there, on the Cross; you await us with open arms. You open our eyes.

This is a great mystery, Jesus. You love us by dying, by suffering abandonment, by bestowing your spirit, by doing the Father's will, by withdrawing. You remain on the Cross, and that is all. You do not try to explain the mystery of death, the destruction of all things. You do more: you cross over it completely in body and spirit. A great mystery. One that continues to question us and to unsettle us. It challenges us and it invites us to open our eyes and to see your love even in death, indeed even starting from death itself. It is there that you loved us as we really are, truly and inevitably. It is there that we grasp, however imperfectly, your living and authentic presence. We will always thirst for this: for your closeness, for your being God-with-us.

## THIRTEENTH STATION

### *Jesus is taken down from the Cross*

We see you, Jesus, remaining there, on the Cross. A man of flesh and bones, with all a man's frailty and all a man's fears. How greatly did you suffer! It is an unbearable scene, perhaps because it is so drenched in humanity. This word is the key, the cypher of your journey, filled with such suffering and fatigue. It is your humanity that so often we forget to acknowledge in you and to seek in ourselves and in others, for we are all too caught up in a life ever more fast-paced, blind and deaf to the difficulties and the pain of others.

We see you, Jesus. Now you are no longer there, on the Cross. You have gone back from where you came. The suffering is now past, vanished. This is the hour of mercy. Your lifeless body continues to speak of the strength with which you faced suffering; the meaning that you gave it is reflected in the eyes of those still there at your side and will always remain there in love, given and received. Before you, and before us, opens a new life, heavenly life, marked by the one thing that resists and remains unbroken by death: love. You are here with us at every moment, at every step, in every uncertainty, in every shadow. While the shadow of the tomb lengthens on your body, held in the arms of your mother, we see you and we are afraid, yet we do not despair. We trust that the light, your light, will shine once again.

## FOURTEENTH STATION

### *Jesus is laid in the tomb*

No longer do we see you, Jesus, now all is dark. Long shadows fall from the hills, and the Shabbat lamps light up Jerusalem, outside homes and within. They beat against the gates of heaven, closed and impregnable: for whom is all this solitude? Who can sleep on a night like this? The city is filled with the sound of children crying, mothers singing, soldiers making their rounds. The day is dying and you alone are sleeping. Are you sleeping? And on what bed? What blanket hides you from the world?

From afar, Joseph of Arimathea followed your steps, and now, with quiet steps, accompanies you in your sleep, withdraws you from the stares of the indignant and malicious. A sheet enfolds you in the chill of death and dries your blood, sweat and tears. From the Cross you descend, but lightly. Joseph carries you on his shoulders, but you are light: you no longer bear the burden of death, of hatred and anger. You sleep as you did on the warm straw when you were wrapped in swaddling clothes and another Joseph held you in his arms. Just as there was no room for you then, so now you have nowhere to lay your head. Yet even on Calvary, there grows a garden in which no one had yet been buried.

Where have you gone off to, Jesus? Where have you descended, if not into the depths? Where if not in a place still untouched, in an even tighter cell? You are caught in our snares, imprisoned in our sadness. Like us, you walked on the earth, and now, like us, under the earth, you make room for yourself.

We would like to run far away, but you are there within us. We need not to go out to seek you, because you are knocking at our door.