



THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS IN ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL



FOR PERSONAL DEVOTION
BUT ALWAYS IN UNION
WITH THE WHOLE CHURCH



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.

To the right of the scene, Pontius Pilate is seen washing his hands; a servant holding the bowl and cloth for him demonstrates the power of his position; his wife at his side who told him that he should have nothing to do with Jesus as she had been troubled by a dream she had had.

To the left of the scene, the soldiers gather, all carrying weapons to guard Jesus. He said to them: all this time I preached and moved around and you never laid hands on me. Why do you come now with weapons?

Jesus is condemned to death. Injustice is done.

As believers in the authority of God, let us reflect on the judgements we make each day about others: judging by appearance; judging by hearsay; judging without full knowledge of the facts.

Lord, by merciful to me a sinner

Our Father...



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.

From the previous Station to this, from condemnation to carrying the Cross, Jesus has been dressed in a crimson robe. Here, it seems that his kingship is recognised even if not for the right reasons by his captors.

Far from any acknowledgment of Jesus' place in history or, indeed, as a leader of the people, whether or not popular, this gesture of a man being given a cross to carry is simply the mark of a common criminal.

The sadness of the Way of the Cross is found in our knowledge of who Jesus really was and is; Yet, those of us who now question why humanity could treat the Son of God in this way must ask two questions:

Would I have acted differently from those who displayed cowardice or unhelpful ignorance? If I can say with sincerity that I would not have treated the Son of God in that way, then do I still sometimes treat those whom Jesus calls 'Blessed' in a way that dehumanises them, even by everyday insults or spite or keeping people in our debt, of any kind?

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner Hail Mary...



The 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.

In this Station, we see something of Jesus' struggle and how those observing his journey and here, his fall, do nothing to assist him – even work against him.

One of his captors pulls him up by his crimson robe, while a soldier treads on his legs hindering any ability Jesus might have to get off the ground.

The brutality of the scene is confirmed by somebody visibly striking Jesus on the head. Maybe this was punishment for falling, but it would not have helped either in the process of recovery.

In the face of this physical struggle for Jesus, one consideration is: why this is happening to him at all. But the Stations of the Cross help us to understand what we mean by Jesus being 'fully human'. From his birth, God's Son chose to share in our human condition in all things but sin. We should never so spiritualise Jesus' sufferings that we make them beautiful artwork and forget the brutality and suffering he endured. We can think, too, of the many martyrs of our own country – and around the world – who endured similar levels of degradation and humiliation in imitation of Christ.

Help me, Lord, when I fall, to rise up and to know the dignity that cannot be taken away.

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner. Glory be...



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.

There is something about the Fourth Station that makes us stop and wonder: what must have been in the hearts and thoughts of this Mother and her Son at this encounter? Furthermore, you could imagine that neither of them would have wished to see the other in such distress: the Mother unable to protect her Son from his sufferings; the Son unable to shield his Mother from his appearance.

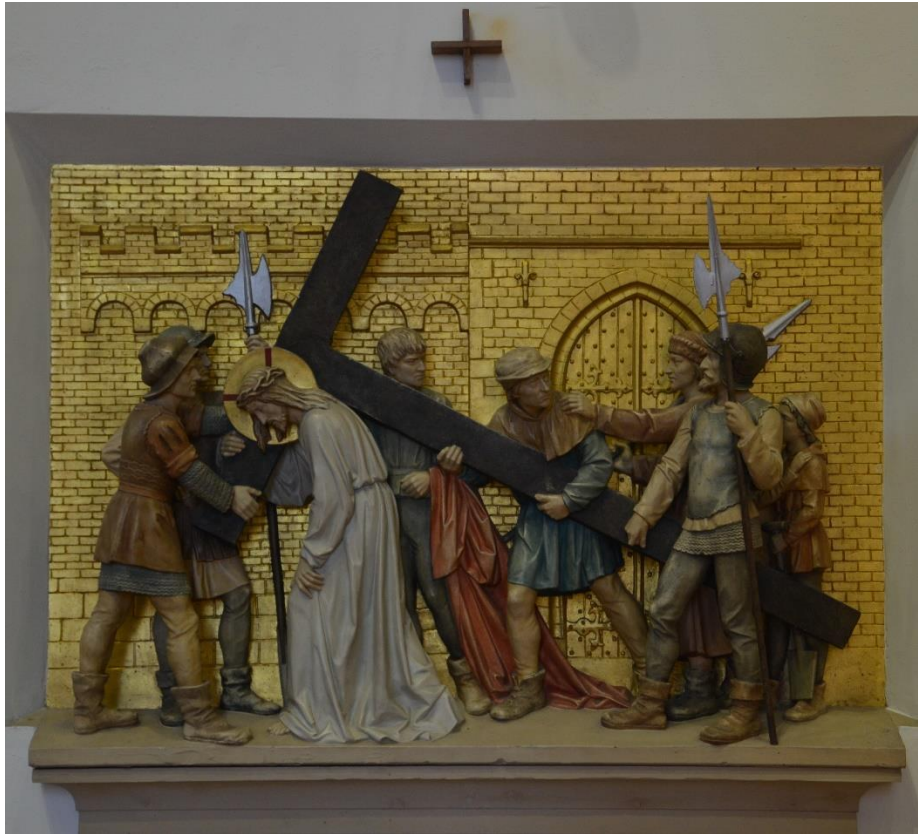
The Stations in St Chad's introduces St John the Evangelist as Mary's Companion – the one with whom we associate Mary at the foot of the Cross. Here he is, already offering comfort to Jesus' Mother.

The Church gives us Our Lady of Sorrows: a parent's sharing in the many experiences of the lives of their children, often powerless to influence but ready to stand alongside. God blesses parents with special graces as their role is never complete and their concern for their offspring – of whatever age – continues throughout their life. This Station reminds us that a parent's reassuring gaze can speak more than any words.

Even at this moment of encounter, Mary continues to say 'Yes' to God.

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner

Our Father...



The Fifth Station – Simon of Cyrene carries the Cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you

Because, by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Simon of Cyrene is often spoken of as the unsuspecting helper of Christ along the Way of the Cross.

We see that the crimson robe has come off again.

As presented in our Stations, Jesus does not appear to see who is helping him.

May all of our charitable works be done not for gratitude but because they are done out of selfless giving for the good of others.

Pope Francis writes: *God infinitely transcends us; he is full of surprises. We are not the ones to determine when and how we will encounter him; the exact times and places of that encounter are not up to us.* (Apostolic Exhortation *Rejoice & Be Glad*, 41, March 2018)

As it is a consolation for us to know that Christ was not alone in this most agonising time, so we are reminded that we are never alone in what seem to be the bleakest of times.

Whatever the trials of life, Christ endured so much that we can turn to him for help or, at least, understanding.

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner

Hail Mary...



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.

Here in the midst of shocking violence and hatred towards Jesus, we see a moment of courageous tenderness.

Veronica's gesture of compassion is not appreciated by the soldiers.

But at this point, their appreciation of Jesus' humanity is already long gone.

Veronica gives us cause to consider how often tenderness is courageous, it involves going beyond the comfort zones of life. How much more awkward the encounter with a homeless person when, accompanied by friends or family members who do not share your viewpoint, you are less sure of how to extend the hand of compassion.

Pope Francis addresses a world in which life behind digital screens works against the tendency to reach out with compassion: *the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas,... The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.* (Apostolic Exhortation The Joy of the Gospel, 88, November 2013)

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner

Glory be...



The 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.

The toughness of Jesus' captors is evident: in the centre of the scene, one raising a hand with some rope or other implement to strike him. To the far left, another, apparently shouting at him to get up.

In his book *The Name of God is Mercy*, Pope Francis paints a simple but encouraging picture of the need to help the remorseful penitent. It seems to be a story aimed at the priest who has the power to make the Sacrament of Reconciliation one of lifting a burden.

Pope Francis says: If I am walking along with my donkey and my donkey stumbles and falls to the ground, it does nothing to punish the donkey for its fall. It is already struggling. No, what I must do is show kindness to my donkey, and tend to his injuries. I must help him back to his feet and, together, we must continue gently and carefully on our journey onward.

The falls of Jesus on this journey punctuate the steps along the road. They speak to us of physical exhaustion and pain. They also give us reason to consider what happens when we encounter moments of real struggle in life: how we get up again; who helps us up and encourages us onward; to what extent we have the self-belief to continue after setbacks.

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner

Our Father...



The Eighth Station – Jesus meets the mournful women

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you

Because, by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

To the left of the scene, what appear to be three generations of women mourning for Our Lord's Passion:

The Mother with two daughters: an infant in her arms and her older daughter with her head in her hands.

Then an older lady sitting on the ground: maybe the grandmother.

There is something about generations of families witnessing to faith and passing on the truths they have experienced.

One of the saddest experiences in a child's life is seeing grief in the eyes of a parent. So often, parents try to hide grief from their children in order to protect them. But when grief cannot be hidden, then the harshness of life is seen but also shared.

Tradition has it that Jesus says to the women who mourn: Weep not for me but for yourselves and for your children.

Given the number of people who allowed Jesus this road to the Cross without even stopping to look at him, we give thanks for the Daughters of Jerusalem and for their grief for Our Lord.

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.

Hail Mary...



The 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.

If you look back over all of the Stations from the first to the eighth, you will see that the background is very much one of a cityscape. At this point, it is clear that the artist points to the journey taking them outside the city walls. The sometimes confusing Holy Week hymn title 'There is a green hill far away *without a city wall*' means 'outside the city wall'.

As his body collapses once more, the exhaustion on the face of Jesus is shown.

Some more kindly faces appear in the scene now as well as the soldiers.

On the left of the scene appear to be the other two criminals being led to Calvary Hill (from this view, one is visible, but from the side view, both criminals are being led away).

In the background, one of the soldiers blows a horn signal - maybe to those awaiting their arrival that they are almost there. Different portrayals of Calvary suggest that it was a deserted place where Jesus died with very few onlookers, or perhaps that there was a great air of anticipation with the Son of God crucified in front what was referred to as a 'rude and scoffing multitude'. It is hard to know which is worse: a crowd or a disinterested few?

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner

Glory be...



The 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.

Just to the right of the centre of the scene, somebody appears to be offering Jesus a drink. It is hard to know whether this is the wine or vinegar usually attributed to Jesus' exclamation 'I thirst' on the Cross itself.

A father and his children are walking away from the scene.

The flesh of Jesus is exposed. Have you ever made the connection between this moment and the Incarnation: The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Our experience of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament: adoring the Sacred Body, the Word Made Flesh, in a way that speaks only of dignity.

We can speak with regretful tone that the people of his day, did not show due honour for God's Son standing in their midst. Jesus had a response of his own to that: *Father, forgive!*

If we are so inclined to think of the people of Christ's day not showing him deserved respect, then in his life and mission, his preaching and teaching, he challenges us: inasmuch as you did this for the least of mine, you did it for me.

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.

Our Father...



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.

Mary looks at the horrific action of the driving of the nails into her son's hands.

St John's eyes are fixed on Jesus.

The soldiers begin discussions on who should have Jesus' garments.

The Cross that has been carried, torturously, now becomes the instrument of torture.

Christ who has not needed to be imprisoned now becomes attached to the wood of the Cross, his freedom curtailed in the most merciless fashion.

How can fellow human beings inflict such harm? How can there be such hatred towards somebody known to be equal? Even today, when we hear of inhumane acts anywhere in the world, in the face of horror, the greater sorrow is the loss of soul of the perpetrators.

And the only question necessary is: why?

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.

Hail Mary...



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.

Mary remains dignified and St John protecting her.

Other women supporting but coping in different degrees.

To the right of the Cross, it is as though the spectrum of what this moment and this man mean to different people is expressed:

The soldiers seek to get the job done and to put an end to this whole episode of a troubling 'blasphemer'; while at the foot of the Cross, a woman kneels in adoration of the Son of God.

By tradition, whether in the proclamation of the Passion Gospel during Holy Week, or in personal reflection on the Way of the Cross, at this moment, we stop, we are still and we contemplate the scene.

Save us, Saviour of the World; for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free!

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.

Glory be...



The 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.

For the first time, we see now only people who care for Jesus:

The principal characters are St John cradling Jesus' head; a holy woman allowing his feet to rest on her; and Mary, his Mother, who first treasured the gift of her child at Bethlehem now looking heavenward as she offers him back to God.

*Now the Church is Christ's body: he is its head.
God wanted all perfection to be found in him,
and all things to be reconciled through him and for him,
everything in heaven and everything on earth,
when he made peace by his death on the cross. (Colossians, Chapter 1)*

This is where the raw grief of Good Friday moves into the stillness of Holy Saturday.

We pray for all our loved ones who have died in the peace of Christ, awaiting his Resurrection.

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner. Our Father...



The Fourteenth Station – Jesus is laid in the Sepulchre

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you

Because, by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world.

Mary caresses the face of Jesus one last time before his body is laid in the tomb.

A holy woman kisses the shroud in which his body will be laid.

Others express grief and prayer.

The golden backdrop which has been the cityscape and then the countryside is now the garden where Christ's Body is entombed, the three Crosses of Calvary just visible to the right of the picture.

We can never know what lack of hope characterised these moments. For all of Jesus' words, this was really not how it was supposed to end. For those who had put their faith in Jesus, this was the wrong outcome.

Now that we wait, we have the comfort of knowing that this is not the end, but the time of waiting with Mary and her companions is in itself an endurance. Time to reflect on the journey.

Lord, be merciful to me a sinner

Hail Mary...

NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS IN ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL, BIRMINGHAM, ARE THOUGHT TO BE ORIGINAL TO THE BUILDING. THEY ARE A FINE AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING EXPRESSION OF THE WAY OF THE CROSS.

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS ARE A FEATURE OF EVERY CATHOLIC PARISH CHURCH. THEY CAN HOLD OUT TO THE LIFE OF FAITH THE FAMILIAR STORY OF JESUS' JOURNEY TO CALVARY: IN WOOD, IN STONE, IN GLASS.

OUR STATIONS HAVE WEATHERED THE YEARS AND ARE NOW IN SOME NEED OF REPAIR.

THESE REPRESENTATIONS OF THEM HAVE BEEN PICTURED TO GIVE THE FAITHFUL – WHETHER PARISHIONERS OF ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL OR VISITORS TO OUR WEBSITE OR CATHEDRAL – THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRAY AS THOUGH IN THE CATHEDRAL DURING LENT AND HOLY WEEK 2020 WHEN THE CATHEDRAL, ALONGSIDE ALL OTHER CHURCHES IN OUR DIOCESE AND THE COUNTRY, ARE CLOSED TO THE FAITHFUL AS A RESULT OF COVID-19, THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC.

AS YOU PRAY, PLEASE REMEMBER THE GENEROUS BENEFACTORS WHO GAVE US THESE BEAUTIFUL STATIONS AS PART OF OUR HERITAGE OF FAITH.

PHOTOGRAPHS	ANDREW DE VALLIERE
REFLECTIONS	FR TIMOTHY MENEZES