

## CAFOD's Way of the Cross

As we reflect on the final journey of Jesus, leading to his death on the cross, we also contemplate the lives of our sisters and brothers around the world living in extreme poverty. People like those living in drought-stricken Ethiopia, featured on the CAFOD 2021 Lent appeal.

### **The first Station: Jesus is condemned to death**

"The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas'. Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!'... When Pilate saw that it was no use to go on, but that a riot might break out, he took some water and washed his hands in front of the crowd .... Pilate released Barabbas for the crowd; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified." *Matthew 27:21-26*

*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.*

Jesus stands silent and composed as the crowd calls for his death. Pilate finds no guilt in Jesus, yet he is still condemned.

In our world today many are condemned to lives of hardship and poverty. Ethiopia has one of the lowest worldwide carbon footprints and yet is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change. Many people are impacted by the severe drought this causes.

What is our response? Do we wash our hands of our brothers and sisters or seek to act in solidarity?

**Prayer:** Jesus, you know what it means to stand alone in front of those who reject you and don't understand you. Walk with us. When we feel that we can't make a difference, help us to keep going. Teach us to share your love.

### **The second Station: Jesus carries his cross**

"After mocking Jesus, the soldiers stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him." *Matthew 27:28-31*

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The guards dress Jesus up as a king, with a crown made of thorns, and mock him. They give him a heavy wooden cross to carry. Jesus knows that the way will not be easy and that it will lead to his death. And yet he shoulders his burden and starts on his way.

The burden of carrying water over long distances is one that too many people must bear, including children. Mohammed is 11 and twice each day must journey alone to fetch water. It takes him three hours.

We all have burdens to carry. We also place burdens on others. In what ways do I place unnecessary loads on other people?

**Prayer:** Jesus, your love led you to take up the cross. Walk with us. When we feel afraid, help us to be brave. Give us the courage to speak out to change our world, so that all our sisters and brothers can experience justice.

### **The third Station: Jesus falls for the first time**

“He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” *Isaiah 53:5*

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Burdened by his heavy cross, worn down by fatigue and pain, Jesus falls.

Abdella knows what it is to be totally exhausted. This young farmer who lives in northeast Ethiopia, one of the hottest parts of the world, must spend ten hours every day on the long walk to collect water for his family. Abdella says, “I don’t have any more words to express how hard this is. I’m so tired, I’m struggling to give you words. The journey for water is so long.”

The choices we make have an impact on other people both near and far. In what way do my choices cause others to stumble?

**Prayer:** Jesus, you know how it feels to struggle and to fall. Walk with us. Show us how to walk with others to know what it feels like to be in another’s shoes. You reach out to us with caring hands. Show us how to join our hands with communities around the world who are bringing hope to their people.

### **The fourth Station: Jesus meets his mother**

“Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’” *Luke 2:33-35*

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This was the fulfilment of Simeon’s prophecy, the sword that ran through Mary’s soul. She who nurtured Jesus as a baby, witnessed his first steps and words, now meets her son on this final journey. What pain Mary must have felt, unable to reach out to help or comfort Jesus. Yet she remains present and steadfast.

So many mothers throughout the world grieve; with empty hands unable to feed their hungry children or get medicine and care for their families.

Let us look to the example of Mary and not turn our faces away from those who are suffering.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you looked through the crowd and saw your mother's eyes. Her love gave you the strength to carry on. Walk with us. When we don't want to listen, open our ears to hear. When it would be easier to look away, open our eyes to see.

### **The fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene carries the cross**

"The soldiers compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus." *Mark 15:21*

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Simon of Cyrene comes into the city of Jerusalem on the day of Jesus' death. He finds himself in the crowds along Jesus' pathway to Golgotha and is enlisted to help carry his cross. He does not know Jesus but lends his strength to carrying the heavy weight of the wood.

Abba Tesfalem lives in northern Ethiopia, in an area prone to severe droughts. There is very little paid work available and it is often a struggle to support his family. At one point he was forced to take a loan just to buy bread for them to survive. Despite his own hardship, Abba Tesfalem still reaches out in generosity and kindness to others in need.

Do we look for opportunities to help others, or do we try to keep out of the way, telling ourselves that it is not our responsibility?

**Prayer:** Jesus, you know what it means to depend on someone and to need their help. Walk with us. When my friends need help, teach me to work with them to lighten their load. Show me how to listen carefully so that I can offer what they need. We are your global family of many different colours, cultures and religions. Make us one family united in you.

### **The sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus**

"And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of our family, you did it to me.'" *Matthew 25:37-40*

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Moved by Jesus' pain, Veronica's love overcomes her fear and she courageously steps forward to wipe the blood and sweat from Jesus' face. She cannot change his fate, but recognising his dignity, she faithfully performs her small act of compassion. As the guards force Jesus onward, the image of his face is left on Veronica's veil.

We too are called to compassion. It is easy to be discouraged by the scale of poverty and need in the world, but each day offers us the opportunity to perform small acts of kindness and generosity. In so doing, we recognise the face of Jesus in our neighbour and he imprints his face on each of us.

Do we look for opportunities to do small acts of generosity and love? Are we attentive to the face of Christ in our brothers and sisters?

**Prayer:** Jesus, you know how it feels to be hurt and to cry out in pain and fear. Walk with us. Show us how to walk together with others. Show us how to love the people around us and to be there for those who need us.

### **The seventh Station: Jesus falls for the second time**

“Come to me all you who labour, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.” *Matthew 11:28-30*

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Under the weight of the cross, Jesus is once again brought to his knees. After this second fall, Jesus’ struggle to rise up again is much harder.

We think of the people of Ethiopia, many of whom have faced poor harvest after poor harvest due to droughts. They show great resilience and strength in continuing to work for a better future. We think of those who are struggling to hold onto hope due to the daily struggle against natural disasters and lack of opportunity.

How can we live in solidarity with those who feel despondent or invisible?

**Prayer:** Jesus, you stumbled and fell. You lost strength and became tired. And yet you carried on. Walk with us. When we find it hard to keep going, give us the strength we need to finish our work as well as we can and show love to others.

### **The eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem**

“A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him.” *Luke 23:27-28*

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As Jesus draws closer to the place of execution, he encounters the women of Jerusalem weeping for him. There is a shared empathy here as Jesus recognises their difficulties and tells them not to weep for him, but for themselves and their children.

As we recall this exchange, we remember the many societies where women face huge challenges.

Almaz lives in northern Ethiopia, where drought and lack of safe water are daily problems. She reflects; “The role of the woman in the home is very difficult. So difficult. All the activities in the home belong to me. I have to get food for my children and my husband – even preparing their clothes, washing. To get water, we travel long distances. When we gather, there are many people at the water point and you wait your turn, many times about five hours.”

What causes us to weep? Which situations in the world make us cry out to God?

**Prayer:** Jesus, you cared and spoke out, even on the road to your death. You knew and felt the struggles of others. Walk with us. As we hear the stories of our sisters and brothers who live in poverty, give us the courage to raise our voices, so that together we can work for change.

### **The ninth Station: Jesus falls the third time**

“For nothing will be impossible with God.” *Luke 1:37*

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Jesus falls a third and final time. He must surely now be completely drained, and yet he finds the strength to rise and continue on his path to Calvary.

Sometimes we may feel overwhelmed by difficulties: illness, caring responsibilities, loneliness, anxiety, our own moments of weakness and failure. Sometimes the challenges of facing our global family – climate change, poverty and injustice – can feel overwhelming, impossible to address.

Love gave Jesus the strength to stand again and continue onwards. We pray for ourselves, and for all those who need strength and courage, that in the face of so many struggles, Christ’s love will urge us on.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you felt the darkness around you, the crowds surrounded you. You fell once more. Walk with us. When we lose hope, when everything is just too difficult, show us how to reach out to each other and hold hands, so that none of us have to do everything on our own. Help us to know that you walk alongside us even when we feel most alone.

### **The tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments**

“The soldiers took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic...” *John 19:23-24*

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Jesus has nothing left. Arriving at his place of execution, even his clothes are taken from him. Stripped of his dignity he holds nothing back.

The refugees of our world have been stripped of their homes, their families, their communities, and their hopes for the future. Often they face the added difficulty of being met with hostility and mistrust when they try to make a new home in a safer place.

Do we recognise the dignity of all human life? What am I being called to do for those who have been stripped of so much?

**Prayer:** Jesus, you sacrificed everything and endured mockery for our sake. Walk with us. When we value possessions more than people, or look down on someone who has less, show us your face in theirs.

### **The eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross**

“When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.” *Luke 23:33-34*

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The soldiers drive the nails into Jesus' hands and feet. Yet even in this moment he shows his compassion, praying for those who crucify him.

Jesus continues to be crucified in all who suffer in our world. He is present in those whom society marginalises, people who are hungry or homeless, refugees or asylum seekers. He is crucified in the exploitation of our common home, the earth and its resources.

As followers of Jesus, may we show his compassion and so be a source of hope for all our brothers and sisters, our global family, and our common home, the earth.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you cry out in pain. Walk with us. Challenge us –when we hold people back, when we don't treat them with respect. Help us to remember that everyone is equal, that we are all made in the image of God.

### **The twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross**

“Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” *John 19:28-30*

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Just before he dies on the cross Jesus cries out that he is thirsty. We can hear him continue to say these words to us, in our brothers and sisters who each day must strive for enough water simply to survive. These last words of Jesus challenge us. They call us to see his face in all those who thirst and reach out to them in love. They invite us to make the connections between how we live as individuals and nations and the devastating effect climate change is having on our vulnerable world.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you know what it's like to feel alone, lost and afraid, betrayed and abandoned. Walk with us. and show us how to walk with others, who live in fear and face death through hunger, thirst and conflict. Show us how to pray for sisters and brothers that we have never met, but who are always loved by you.

### **The thirteenth Station: Jesus' body is taken down from the cross**

“Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed the body.” *John 19:38*

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The bodies of those crucified were usually left on the cross to decay. Joseph of Arimathea has been a secret follower of Jesus, but now he finds the courage to go to Pilate and ask for Jesus' body. He acts despite the fear he must have felt, in order to ensure the lifeless body of his teacher is, at least now, treated with dignity and gentleness.

We pray that at times of difficulty we too will choose to do what is right. That we will commit to compassion and uphold dignity.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you knew what it meant to have friends, who risked their own lives to take your body from the cross. Walk with us. Show us how to be friends to those close to us and to those far away. Teach us to see you in everybody, to be kind, loving and strong. To be like you.

### **The fourteenth Station: Jesus' body is laid in the tomb**

“Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body was laid.” *Mark 15: 45-47*

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There has been little time to prepare Jesus' body for burial. Joseph has to move quickly to place it in the tomb before the Sabbath begins. He wraps it in a simple linen cloth and rolls the stone over the door. The disciples have scattered in fear and grief and it seems like the end.

We too must act quickly if we are to protect our common home, the earth, for future generations. We pray that we may have a sense of urgency and hope, even in dark times, as we seek to make a difference.

**Prayer:** Jesus, as you were sealed in the tomb those who loved you felt sad and alone. They did not know what to do. Walk with us. Guide us in difficult times, so that we can share you with our sisters and brothers when they feel sad and alone.

### **The fifteenth Station: Jesus rises from the dead**

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.” *Luke 24:5*

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Jesus is alive. He has conquered death and is here among us. His resurrection opens the way of hope and assures us that injustice, pain and death can be overcome. As we reflect on Jesus' final journey, we pray for the strength to live each day as people transformed through God's love. May we radiate God's love to all of creation.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you share your life, your light and your peace with us all. Walk with us. Show us how to live out your love so that our sisters and brothers, here and around the world, may know the joy of new life. May we all be changed by living in your light.