

Stations of the Cross: Live Simply 25th March 2023

We invite you to pray these Stations of the Cross and to reflected on the Pope's messages in Laudato Si' while we together strive to care for our common home. The Way of the Cross itself is a pilgrimage; a journey that follows Christ's path of suffering and death. Pope Francis encourages us to set out on a pilgrimage of conversion to become kinder, more generous people. Humanity, along with all of creation, is on a critical journey as we are challenged by climate change. Will we set out on a path of mercy, adjusting our patterns of consumption to lessen our carbon footprint and give Mother Earth a chance to heal? Will this journey become a pilgrimage towards sustainability, and ultimately resurrection?

1st Station: Jesus is condemned to death

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you; because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world. 'So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"' (Matthew 27)

Jesus was an innocent person condemned to death. He was abandoned and faced his death sentence alone. Our common home earth is also being condemned to death. Because of our patterns of overconsumption, global temperatures are rising, and plant and animal species are dying off. Whole populations of humanity feel abandoned and left to face the perils of climate change, even death, on their own.

Laudato Si': 'This sister [earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her ... This is why the Earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is the most abandoned and mistreated among the poor.'

Prayer: Heavenly Creator, open our eyes to our complicity in loss of life. Once acknowledging our failures to care for creation, renew our spirits to live mindfully and to work diligently for a better world.

2nd Station: Jesus takes up his cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you; because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world. 'And carrying the cross by himself, Jesus went out to what is called The Place of the Skull.' (John 19:17)

Jesus was forced to carry his cross, the very instrument of his death, to his crucifixion. There are particular populations of humanity who, like Jesus, are innocent and must carry the burdens of others' sins.

Laudato Si': 'The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming.'

Prayer: Jesus, may we make real sacrifices to lessen our carbon footprint so that others can live. Bring to mind those who suffer the most from climate change so that our resolve is strengthened and we find joy and purpose in what we give up.

3rd Station: Jesus falls for the first time

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you; because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world. 'Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases.' (Isaiah 53:4)

Jesus falls three times in the Way of the Cross. With each successive fall, he is weaker and struggles more to get back on his feet. People who suffer most from climate change disasters are those who are poor already and have little recourse to defend themselves or to get back on their feet. Often their home is the first to fall. Humble housing can't withstand the powerful earthquakes, winds and waters.

Laudato Si': 'The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet's capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world.'

Prayer: Gracious Spirit, when we fall into the temptation of overconsumption, remind us of those who suffer for it. When we learn of a catastrophe, help us contemplate the loss of people's homes and so be moved to lessen our consumption and to share our resources.

4th Station: Jesus meets his mother

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

'A sword will pierce your own soul too.' (Luke 2:35)

What utter pain Mary must have felt for her son. She had no recourse to soothe, heal and save her child. Mothers around the world grieve in helplessness as they see their children suffer and die. Over 3 million children die every year from malnourishment, while others die due to sudden disasters, to long and perilous journeys, and disease.

Laudato Si': 'Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus, so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power.'

Prayer: Help us to 'turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering'. 'May the sweetness of [Mary's] countenance watch over us in this Holy Year, so that all of us may rediscover the joy of God's tenderness.'
(*Misericordiae Vultus*)

5th Station: Simon helps carry his cross

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

'As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.' (Matthew 27:32)

Simon had come into the city on the day of Jesus' death. He found himself in the crowds along Jesus' pathway to Golgotha, and was picked out by the soldiers to carry Jesus' cross. Who carries the cross in times of climate crisis? The poor are always the first responders in times of disaster. While help from wealthy countries can take days and weeks, it is immediate neighbours who rush in to save, shelter and support as much as possible.

Misericordiae Vultus: 'Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!'

Prayer: In humility we give thanks to you, Oh God, for the generous poor in the world. Like them and like Simon, may we shoulder the cross that Christ carries in the world today.

6th Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

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

'Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him.' (Matthew 27:55)

Veronica's compassion for Jesus overcame any fear that she might have had in stepping out from the anonymity of the crowds to wipe Jesus' face in front of the soldiers. She didn't count the possible cost, but stepped forward and responded in love. Lebanon has taken in over 1.4 million refugees. What compassion and generosity!

Misericordiae Vultus: 'Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.'

Prayer: Holy Spirit, like Veronica, help us to forget ourselves and to step forward in a merciful and loving response to the pain that we see around us. Wipe away our fear to act, so that the suffering face of Christ that is present today can find consolation in our touch.

7th Station: Jesus falls for the second time

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

'But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.' (Isaiah 53:5)

A second fall and Jesus' struggle to rise up again is that much harder. Climate disasters not only destroy

homes, but also sources of livelihood. Fishermen lose their boats; farmers lose their crops, small enterprises are washed away. How to rise up again? Extreme weather and the rising sea leaves are devastating coastal communities. The floods come quickly and cause devastation of homes and land. Salt is left on the land so crops cannot be grown for families to eat.

Laudato Si': 'We were created with a vocation to work ... Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment. Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work.'

Prayer: Enkindle within us a sense of shared responsibility in times of climate disaster. Move us, dear Jesus, to share the wealth from our employment so that others can regain their livelihoods, their 'path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment'.

8th Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you; because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world. 'But Jesus turned to them and said: Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children.' (Luke 23:28)

There is mutual empathy in this encounter between the women of Jerusalem and Jesus. There is shared pain. Women and children are disproportionately affected by climate change. While women themselves suffer, they share the pain of their children's suffering as well. It is future generations who will bear the brunt of climate change, especially those from the most vulnerable countries.

Laudato Si': 'Our goal is ... to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.'

Prayer: Creator God, deepen our sense of suffering within our global family and move us into action. Help us 'to discover what each of us can do about it'. May we step out of our relatively comfortable lifestyle and have the courage to change our way of living to one of simplicity and contemplation.

9th Station: Jesus falls for the third time

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you; because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world. 'Upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.' (Isaiah 53:5)

How can Jesus recover from a third fall? How can farmers suffering a prolonged drought rise up year after year and carry on?

Laudato Si': 'Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry ... There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation.'

Prayer: Loving God, 'renew the face of the earth'. May this ecological crisis be a 'summons to profound interior conversion' so that we live 'our vocation to be protectors of [your] handiwork'.

10th Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you; because by your Holy Cross, you have redeemed the world. 'They divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' (Psalms 22:18)

Jesus suffered the added indignity of being stripped of his garments before the world. The ongoing war in Syria – a war whose root causes are tied to prolonged drought – has created over 3 million refugees. After losing home, livelihood and land, they are forced to pick up and leave everything. They sometimes suffer the added indignity of being met with hostility and mistrust when they try to find a new country of refuge.

Laudato Si': 'Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded.'

Prayer: Divine Mercy, may those who have lost everything find shelter in our welcome. May our own life's pilgrimage intertwine with those whose journey has taken them far from their homes and familiar customs.

11th Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

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

'When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus.' (Luke 23:33)

So utterly wasted through whipping and bearing the heavy cross, Jesus must still endure the searing pain of being nailed to the cross. What are the physical pains that people endure today that are due to climate change? Around the world there have been many deaths due to extreme heat. The elderly, very young and the sick are those who suffer most. It is estimated that climate change will contribute to 250 thousand additional deaths per year.

Misericordiae Vultus: 'His flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled ... to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us. Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: "as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love."'

Prayer: Infinite Love, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future. May we yearn for the coming of your reign of justice, peace, love and beauty.

12th Station: Jesus dies on the cross

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

'Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.' (Mark 15:37)

Pause

We contemplate the starkness of Jesus' death. He was condemned to death; he was tortured and hung on the cross. He breathed his last and died. Unless, the human family changes course, can we expect anything less than death for those condemned to suffer the consequences of climate change?

Untimely death is inevitable if we chose not to change.

Laudato Si': 'What [does] the commandment "Thou shall not kill" [mean] when "20 percent of the world's population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive".'

Prayer: Jesus, we commit to examining our lives and changing course onto a healthier path. 'You dwell in our hearts and you inspire us to do what is good. Praise be to you!'

('A Christian prayer in union with creation', Laudato Si')

13th Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

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

'Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.' (John 19:38)

There is still not rest in death. The hour of Passover is approaching and Jesus' body must be quickly removed. So too is there haste in the care of bodies when the number of deaths is overwhelming in disasters and warfare. There is haste when fleeing where some die on the dangerous journey. There is no time for a proper burial or a proper goodbye.

Laudato Si': 'Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change ... A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.'

Prayer: Hasten our spirits to a life of conversion, love and generosity. Quicken our steps along this path of renewal for the sake of the most vulnerable, for our own descendants, for the earth, our common home.

14th Station: Jesus is placed in the tomb

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

‘So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock.’ (Matthew 27:59–60)

Jesus had a dignified burial. Joseph of Arimathea had taken care to honour his body. Who are the Josephs of today? It is harsh and sometimes dangerous work for those who must bury the dead from disasters or warfare. The images of the countless people who do this noble work are on the daily news. They are unknown faces who provide dignity and decorum in times of sorrow and destruction. We feel gratitude toward them.

Laudato Si': ‘We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.’

Prayer: Give strength, Oh Loving God, to those who toil in times of disaster. So too, bless those around us who work to educate our communities; who encourage and inspire their neighbours to take action for the common good.

Closing Prayer

Divine Love, we chose the path of mercy, a new journey of living simply and sustainably so that the earth heals and all of humanity and creation rise again. We ‘entrust the life of the Church, all humanity, and the entire cosmos’ to you. ‘Pour out Your mercy upon us like the morning dew, so that everyone may work together to build a brighter future’. Amen

(Misericordiae Vultus).

Sign of the Cross.

Credit: Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace

Credit: Trócaire

Trócaire was established in 1973 as the overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The organisation was created in response to the widening gap between rich and poor and our collective duty to reduce it. In the words of Trócaire’s founding document, in which the bishops of Ireland gave the organisation a strong and clear mandate, ‘These duties are no longer a matter of charity, but of simple justice.’