

THEME:

**14 STATIONS OF THE CROSS
AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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Introduction

The stations of the cross on Good Friday this year are truly special. Geographically, we are unable attend mass together. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced everyone to stay home and attend mass online. Even during the Holy Week, we will attend the liturgy on the Internet. However, we believe that God himself comes to everyone at home. At this moment, we are in communion together on the journey Jesus took during the Passion. There we taste God's love, and realize that He has always done everything possible to bring salvation to us. Even during this plague, God has worked even harder to overcome this pandemic with humankind.

We ask the Holy Spirit to unite each person. Through the Internet, we are presented to a wider, more international community. With that in mind, we now begin to walk with Jesus in his Passion.

The First Station:

Jesus is Condemned to Death.

-The Holy Gospel according to Saint John:

It was preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your king!" They cried out, "Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!" (Jn 19:14-15)

- Reflection:

That day, the crowd swung its fists and loudly condemned Jesus. They succeeded in crucifying Him. In 2020, humanity is facing a novel corona virus. Many countries did not anticipate and even underestimated its destructive power. The death toll has exceeded the imagination of many. The number of people hospitalized increases exponentially. The number of quarantined and isolated people has brought society to a standstill. In this time of great fear and uncertainty, the Church invites people to return to God. Not to condemn Him as the crowd in the Gospel, but to realize how unjustly they are treating Jesus. However, Jesus has accepted it all, and journeys along with human suffering.

- Let us pray:

“Jesus, the pandemic makes us feel like evil is prevailing. We have a hard time accepting so much pain from this terrible virus. When we see the Lord accept the judgment in peace and trust, we ask you to give us the inner strength to follow You in this pain. No matter how strong the virus is, if we follow You in pain, then we can be with You in glory. Amen.”

The Second Station:

Jesus Receives the Cross

- The Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke:

Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Lk 9:23)

- Reflection:

The cross was a humiliating punishment for the people of that time. No one wanted to carry or die on the rough wood. With God and in God, the cross carries great meaning. The cross gives life to those who carry it with God. The pandemic is the heavy cross that humanity suffers and carries. Of course, God does not wish us to suffer from evil, Covid-19, or the cross. It is the reality that man is called to accept with God. “At once [Jesus] spoke to them, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” (Mt 14:27). Amidst this pandemic, Christians should cling to God and receive many graces which will help them gather the strength to cope with this outbreak.

- Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, humanity is suffering so much pain, please teach us how to accept the cross with peace in our hearts. For the victims of this virus especially, may they be able to connect the suffering of loss to the cross of God. Before we were sad and worried, but have quickly found the peace to accept the pain, surrender in trust and to journey with Jesus. Amen

The Third Station:

Jesus falls for the first time

- A reading from the Book of the prophet Isaiah:

Yet it was our pain that he bore,
our sufferings he endured.
We thought of him as stricken,
struck down by God- and afflicted. (Is 53:4).

- Reflection:

The epidemic broke out at the end of December 2019 in China. At that time, we saw many people collapse in the streets, in hospitals, and at cremations. They collapsed from exhaustion, fear and despair. They were patients, doctors, and those who have had their loved one die. These images remind us when God fell to the ground. The weight of the cross, in addition to the pressure of the crowd, caused God to lose his balance. God falls with each of us in this pandemic. From the depths of our pain, God encourages us to stand up. Although the road ahead is hard, God helps us not to give up.

- Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, as a child you may have fallen many times while playing around. God fell when he encountered obstacles during his public life, but this time, Jesus fell to share the weight of pain. Likewise, the coronavirus is causing humanity to fall down and awaken. May you lift us up, increase our strength, and give us hope so that we can see the beauty of the path ahead. Amen

The Fourth Station:

Jesus meets His Blessed Mother

- The Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke:

“(and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” (Lk 2:35)

- Reflection:

Jesus met His Blessed Mother in a brief moment. That moment is enough for both to see the Divine Will. It is the encounter between mother and son, between creation with the Creator. Jesus and his Mother both gain the strength to go forward.

During this pandemic, people must cancel countless meetings. Many borders are closed, many cities are in quarantine. In places of outbreak, people are not allowed to go on the streets, and the churches are deserted. Every meeting seems to take place only in the context of the family, or online on the Internet. The Church believes that God can sanctify such meetings. With Mary and Jesus, the Church wants to connect with each of us to accompany us during this time, to nourish our spiritual life, to meet our need for comfort, and be with us in the times we must say goodbye. "Our God is close" and "invites us to be close to each other, not apart from others."

- With Pope Francis let us pray together:

“O Mary, under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not disdain the entreaties of we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.” Amen.

The Fifth Station:

Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus to Carry His Cross

- From letter of St Paul to the Galatians:

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal 6:2)

- Reflection:

God also needed someone to help him with the tremendous weight of the cross. Simon, forced by the soldiers, took up the cross to help Jesus so that he could have some time to regain his strength and go on. Later, Simon also shares the joy of the Resurrection.

Over the past few months, the virus has linked humanity together to fight the pandemic. It is not a matter that concerns one nation, but a matter of the whole world. Eliminating an epidemic requires people to come together and work in harmony united with the purpose of helping each other: in families, communities, parishes, in hospitals and in each country. The least we can all do is unite in prayer. Each person contributes a little to lighten the burden of the disease. Sharing each other's burdens is a strong invitation to the cross. If carried together the cross is much lighter.

- Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, this pandemic has shown us the true measure of human hearts and the moral reality of society. There are greedy people, profiteers, and many indifferent people. As the children of God, we are called to pray together, so that our hearts may be the light in this pandemic. Please increase the love and compassion in our hearts, so that we can turn towards each other and become united. Amen

The Sixth Station:

Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

- The Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

“I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Mt 25:40)

- Reflection:

In the scorching heat and under the surge and flow of the crowd, Jesus was exhausted. He was not allowed to rest. He was thirsty, scratched by the cross, and the blows from the soldiers buffeted his body. At this time, a woman “faithfully photographed” our Lord's face. Her name was Veronica, meaning “true portrait of Jesus' face.”

During the pandemic, we can come across so many people like Veronica. They are the nurses, doctors, and medical staff. Despite these terrible times of the plague, they do not neglect their patients. Thanks to their medical conscience, they do as much as they can to accompany and treat those infected with this evil virus. They are mentally and physically exhausted, overwhelmed with the countless infected people, and with the many victims that have passed away. Instead of running away, they plunge into the epidemic to save as many patients as they can. Hopefully, like Veronica, they can keep their enthusiastic diligence for their patients so that the patient can be well cared for.

- Let us pray:

“Your face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not your face from me” (Ps 27,8). Veronica sought to see God among the crowd and she met God. In the Lord's suffering, she wanted to soothe him by wiping His face with a towel. Although it is a small gesture, but it reveals her deep love. Likewise, we now want to pray especially for the nurses, the doctors and all those on the frontline who directly treat those with the disease. Help the Church of God to lovingly wipe the faces of humanity from the traces of anxiety and disappointment, so that the image of God in them may be revealed and radiant. O God, give us courage, health, and insight to accept each other. Amen.

The Seventh Station:

Jesus falls for the Second Time

- A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter:

“When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly.”(1Pr 2:23)

- Reflection:

In the midst of his Passion, we see Jesus falling for a second time. God is bone-weary and unable to climb the Calvary hill ahead. If we were with God now, we would not hear Him

utter a single word of reproach. God does not put into question his suffering, , but embraces the pain of all of humankind. As a human being, God understands the paradoxes of human life. God falls with us in our pain, and rises to lift us up so that we can continue onward.

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Mt 11:28). By saying this, Jesus himself experienced the pain of plague, disability, and the path of the cross. Throughout the decades on earth, Jesus witnessed so many people who were poor, sick, sinful, and excluded from society due to the burden of law and oppressive social systems, ...they needed to be supported, healed and lifted up. Now the Lord wants to take our hands and say, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor 13:7).

- Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, we thank you for coming to earth. O God, you see everything that is happening, give us the strength to stand up, walk together and walk with You. Amen.

The Eighth Station:

Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

- The Holy Gospel according to Luke:

“Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children,” (Lk 23:28)

- Reflection:

Jesus’ forte is comforting and supporting people. Even those who are weeping for Jesus’ suffering, they receive words of loving encouragement from Him. More than ever, that message is happening to humanity. We are crying for the fate of everyone. It is now clear that the corona virus is bringing us closer to our country, our city, our village and our family. All of this information has left many people bewildered, worried, and overwhelmed. Many places have to suspend the celebration of mass and all religious activities with the participation of the community. When the church is closed, the Lord comes to every family in the online mass. Without direct confession, the Lord comes to reconcile with penitents. God wants to comfort us where we are, right in our homes and in our hearts.

- Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, more than ever, we need you now. The faster the pandemic spreads, the more we need to run closer to you. Please wipe the tears from many people's faces. Let us each take this opportunity to encounter Him and allow Him to change us. Amen.

The Ninth Station:

Jesus Falls for a Third Time

- A reading from the Book of the prophet Isaiah:

“Though harshly treated, he submitted
and did not open his mouth;
Like a lamb led to slaughter
or a sheep silent before shearers,
he did not open his mouth.” (Is 53,7)

–Reflection:

With the third fall during his Passion, Jesus stepped more decisively into human history, to accompany us at all times in the suffering of humanity. Since his time, pain and suffering has only increased and abounded. The prophet Isaiah describes the suffering servant, now fulfilled in Jesus “in a wounded form.” With Jesus, we now see the outbreak of COVID–19 spreading rapidly throughout the world. We still hope, but are all worried and exhausted. Despite having fallen a third time, God rises again to go forward, as an example for us so that we will not give up. Despite the pain and suffering, we will get through this together and everything will be fine!

- Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, at this moment we earnestly pray for the scientists who are racing to find a cure or vaccine. We entrust ourselves to the power of God, the merciful Father. May God bless these scientists so that they may soon find a cure and prevention. Amen.

**The Tenth Station:
Jesus Is Stripped off His Garments**

- The Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped off his clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about him. Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Mt 27:28–29)

- Reflection:

Because of human sin, God accepted all the beatings, humiliation, and contempt. Before a tiny corona virus, humans are also stripped naked to see their miserable condition. Our world is a fragile, finite, polluted place filled with indifferent hearts. We have come to see that science is not almighty. So many people believed that they could do anything without limits, but have come to the humbling realization that we cannot destroy this common enemy who is attacking humanity. Is the COVID–19 virus the result of human misery and arrogance? Before, people divided themselves into fractions and fought each other and the consequences were death and mourning. This virus has made the world reflect on mankind’s self–created concept of heaven, a material paradise won through power, competition and selfishness.

- Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, may we recognize our place in your creation. As creatures, we are “created to praise, the Lord his God, and revere Him, and by serving Him be finally saved. All other things on earth has been created because of man himself, in order to help him reach the end of his creation.” (1) Help us to rely on God alone.

(1): Spiritual Exercises N#23, transl. by Pierre Wolff, 1997.

**The Eleventh Station:
Jesus is Nailed to the Cross**

- The Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

“After they had crucified him, they divided his garments by casting lots.” (Mt 27:35)

- Reflection:

In the Old Testament, a poisonous serpent killed many people in the desert. God offered a cure: those bitten by the serpent could be saved by looking up at a bronze serpent (cf. Num 21: 4–9). Today on the Calvary, they also saw the “Son of God” saving people. Many people ask where God can be found in the midst of this pandemic and why he remains silent. God is on the cross, crucified for human sin. On the cross, He told people: “I am thirsty!” He not only thirsted for water, but thirsts together with humankind for innovation, medicine, medical professionals, a cure, and kindness, ...

- Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, we look to You now on the cross. May God grant us peace for the people of Vietnam and all humanity. Please quench our thirst with Your power.

**The Twelveth Station:
Jesus died on the Cross**

- The Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34)

- Reflection:

Jesus was lonely at the end of his life. It seemed that God the Father was absent. The Son still made his plea for help. When everything was finished, our God gives the Spirit to the Father.

In recent weeks, the number of deaths increases each hour, and each day. Each number represents a life, mostly seniors, who have also died alone. May God have mercy on their souls. May they leave peacefully and be embraced by the Lord. ”

- Let us pray:

Almighty God, please save the souls of all those who have died, especially the ones who died from the corona virus pandemic. In particular we pray for the medical staff who have passed away during these times as they gave their lives while serving their patients. Please have mercy on them and welcome them into the eternal resting place. Amen.

**The Thirteenth Station:
Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross**

–The Holy Gospel according to Saint John:

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” (Jn 12:24)

–Reflection:

Jesus's bloodstained body was covered with wounds. Only a few people were present when the body of our Lord Jesus was taken down from the cross. It was a sad and somber scene of great mourning. In that moment, Mary lost a son, and the disciples lost their Teacher.

It certainly seems like everything is lost in this pandemic, too. Certainly, the corona virus has not only taken lives of many people, it also affects almost every aspect of everyone's life. It is like a war that the whole world must fight together since no one is immune to this virus. Just look at the great cities, and in particular the magnificent city of Rome, crowded with pilgrims before the Corona virus, but now empty with all public programs and masses suspended. We see much mourning in the hospitals where the cadavers are lined up to be taken away for their last rites, and relatives are not allowed to see them off. Everything is falling apart.

- Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, COVID-19 truly demands that we must "live as one body". It is true that before God, we do not want to live separately in quarantine. Please help us to see that there is no discrimination in terms of age, race, religion or caste. Each and every one of us are a part of humanity. Please save us all (2). Amen.

(2): Message of the Father Superior of the Society of Jesus: COVID-19: Discerning a path to God.

**The Fourteenth Station:
Jesus is Placed in the Tomb**

-The Holy Gospel according to Saint John:

When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit." (Jn 19:30)

Reflection:

God died for us to live. Jesus' corpse rested in his grave, awaiting the moment of Resurrection. In this sorrowful place of death, we recall the three times Jesus foretold His glorious resurrection. His resurrection is our faith, hope, and love. We entrust the dead from the pandemic to Jesus now. We petition Our Lady to increase our faith for the future ahead. Our Virgin Mother encourages, comforts, and tells us on the first day of the week: The Gospel of Resurrection will be spread throughout the world.

- With Pope Francis, let us pray together:

"O Mary,
you always shine on our path
as a sign of salvation and of hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm.
You, Salvation of the Roman People,
know what we need,
and we are sure you will provide
so that, as in Cana of Galilee,
we may return to joy and to feasting

after this time of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform to the will of the Father
and to do as we are told by Jesus,
who has taken upon himself our sufferings
and carried our sorrows
to lead us, through the cross,
to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.”

Conclusion

We give thanks to God for everyone who was called to accompany Jesus in His Passion. When we follow the Lord on the stations on the way of the cross, may we become a part of Him. Those who follow Him in pain can also dwell with Him in glory. God does not turn away from us especially during this time when a pandemic is threatening the world. He accompanies each and every one of us in our suffering. It is there that God gives us much hope, joy, peace, and life.

To conclude, let us recite an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and a Glory Be...

Hungary, The Feast of Annunciation, March 25, 2020