

# Praying the Stations of the Cross

*Reflecting on Pope Francis' "Urbi et Orbi" blessing*



Holy Week in St. Mary's offers us the opportunity to gather as a school community, to pray and reflect on the Jesus' final journey. In the face of this global pandemic, so many things that we have become accustomed to have been redefined, altered and reworked. This Holy Week will be somewhat different from what we know as 'normal'. It will instead be marked by spending time in the safety of our homes, with our loved ones and our families.

Although we remain apart, we are still connected as a school community and so at some point this week, staff, parents, guardians and pupils can take time out to pray and reflect on the Stations of the Cross. Light a candle, gather together as a family or read them alone. Spend time in quiet reflection this Holy Week.

On 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Pope Francis imparted an extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi* blessing in response to the coronavirus pandemic. He stood in the door of Saint Peter's Basilica, at the head of Saint Peter's Square, without the presence of the public. The world looked on as he meditated on the gospel account of the 'Calming of the Storm' and the feelings of the disciples on that boat as they faced the storm.

He recognised the 'turbulent storm' we are facing in this global pandemic, acknowledging that we are '*all on the same boat; fragile and disorientated.*' Pope Francis' blessing will be our focus as we journey through the Stations of the Cross.

We as a school join together in prayer this week, drawing strength from our Holy Father's words- '*Do not be afraid*' as we walk, just like Jesus did, on this uncertain and unknown path.



### **1: The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death**

When Pilate condemned you to death, it seemed like there was no hope. You stood alone. At this time, we think about humanity standing in what seems a 'darkness', and as Pope Francis recognised we find ourselves 'afraid and lost'.

*Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
We remember your journey.  
Guide us on our way*

### **2: The Second Station: Jesus accepts his cross**

Jesus, having received your death sentence, you must now carry the instrument of your torture. The weight of it is far more than anyone can imagine. For in carrying your cross, you carry ours, too.

We think of those who carry a cross today: Those who are terminally ill, vulnerable to coronavirus, those who have suffered the loss of bereavement, failure or rejection. We remember in our prayers those who feel lonely or who carry the burden of past mistakes. May they be reminded of Pope Francis' words, '*The Cross is our Hope*'.

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### **3: The Third Station: Jesus Falls the first time**

Your humanity is clearly seen in this moment as you fell to your knees; buckling from the weight of the heavy cross you had to bear. Our Holy Father told us how "*we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm*".

Only through the help of Your Father are you able to slowly rise and continue.

In these troublesome and uncertain times, in your love and compassion, reach out to us and help us to take each day as it comes.

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### **4: The Fourth Station: Jesus meets his mother**

Jesus, amid all the noise from the crowd – one voice stands out. You see Mary, your mother. What do your eyes say to one another? Reassurance. Comfort. Strength. Love. She is here for you now; she remains by your side.

Help me, Jesus, to remember that I am never alone in my struggles. Pope Francis reminded us that "*All of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other.*" Not only can I turn to you, my Father, but to Mary, my Mother.

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## 5: The Fifth Station: Simon helps Jesus to Carry the Cross

Jesus, Simon's strength eases some of your burden, but only to a degree. He follows behind you, walking in your footsteps, helping you to move forward. You press on, knowing the worst is yet to come.

Pope Francis makes us aware that no man is an island- *"we too have realised that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this."*

Simon, we don't know anything about you except that on this one day you found yourself helping a poor, beaten and abused prisoner. We can draw lessons today from the many people who – even though fearful – have reacted to the current crisis by giving their lives, including medical personnel, supermarket clerks, cleaners, priests, police officers, and volunteers.

May their witness and true courageous and generous self-denial, help us to see those who need our assistance and may we seek to ease their burden like Simon did for you.

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## 6: The Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Veronica finds the courage to step out of the crowd, and wipes the blood, the sweat and the tears off your face. For that one moment, compassion clears your vision. You are so grateful.

The interaction between Jesus and Veronica affirms how it is these small gestures that offer hope and consolation to others, as Pope Francis told us *"It is the life in the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people."*

Show me how, Jesus, to help others wipe away their tears of sadness and loneliness. Help me remember that at this time, a smile, a kind word or a simple phone call can bring relief to souls who need it.

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## 7: The Seventh Station: Jesus falls again

The narrow street up the steep hill toward Golgotha is difficult. Jesus, you fall again to your bloody knees. It is so difficult to get up again. But you do.

We all fall at times on our journey. We do not know how difficult the days ahead will be. Lord, we pray that your presence will lift those who are bowed down, and bring them comfort and strength.

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## 8: The Eight Station: Jesus Meets women

Jesus, you hear the sound of the women wailing over all the other noise. It is so passionate that it catches your attention even in the midst of your own agony. You stop and challenge them to see the bigger picture beyond this moment in time.

Pope Francis reminded us of all those who are demonstrating calm in the face such stormy seas:

*“How many people every day are exercising patience and offering hope, taking care to sow not panic but a shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children, in small everyday gestures, how to face up to and navigate a crisis by adjusting their routines, lifting their gaze and fostering prayer.”*

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## 9: The Ninth Station: Jesus falls for a third time

Jesus emptied himself and took on the form of a slave. He humbled himself to death on a Cross. Your spirit is willing, Jesus, but your body is weak. Exhaustion builds.

It is during this global crisis that we recognise our frailty and deep humanity. Pope Francis reminded us *“we are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we flounder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars.”*

Let us hand over all to the Lord, give us courage before our trials, strengthen our bodies to get up and walk again, and when we can't move another step, move within us, Jesus.

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## 10: The Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

All that you had, the very clothes on your body are taken from you. We think of those who have had all that they own taken from them in the face of this pandemic- their jobs, their livelihoods, their possessions and their homes.

Although the level of loss is immeasurable, this is a time as our Holy Father told us to stop, reflect and reassess on the important things in life: *“You are calling on us to seize this time of trial as a time of choosing. It is not the time of your judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others.”*

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### **11: The Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross.**

After carrying the heavy cross you were nailed to that very cross. Never have You felt such pain and agony.

We fix our eyes on the symbol of the cross- not as a symbol of distress, hatred or condemnation. Rather, as a symbol of 'hope'. Pope Francis reminds us: *"We have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love."*

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### **12: The Twelfth Station: Jesus dies upon the cross**

As darkness descended over the land, Jesus, you found faith and trust in your Father in your final hour. You knew he would not abandon you as you said: "Father into your hands I commend my spirit". We think of those, who due to the circumstances of this pandemic, have died in isolation, alone and not in the presence of their families. Yet, as Jesus on the cross reminds us, with God, we are never alone.

Pope Francis told us that we too will not be abandoned by God in the face of this crisis: *"You, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: "Do not be afraid."*

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### **13: The Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross**

You gently rest in your mother's arms when taken from the cross, in pain no more. You died trusting a Father's care, faithful unto death.

Lord, may we always appreciate your unconditional love and be truly grateful for those who have stood by us in trying times. *"The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering."*

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## 14: The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb

Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus and buried him in a tomb near at hand.

Darkness fills the hearts of those who loved you, and those who love you now. Faith is shaken.

Love has died. But hope has not. Jesus' cross, said Pope Francis, is the anchor that has saved us, the rudder that has redeemed us, and our hope, because *"by His cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from His redeeming love."* *"In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things,"* he said, *"let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: He is risen and is living by our side."*

New life begins here with you.

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**"This is God's strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies."**

(Pope Francis, Urbi et Orbi)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOIYQB8Twdk>