

Stations of the Cross: Journeying with Jesus through the Pandemic

By Erin Tribble

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A Brief Introduction

A week ago, I was searching for resources to create a virtual Stations of the Cross for our Mercy family, who – like people all over the world – is unable to gather for our observance of Holy Week.

On my parish's web site I found a beautiful Stations of the Cross meditation by Maribeth Hopps from the Diocese of Saginaw in Michigan. She had written it in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and you can link to it here:

<https://saginaw.org/sites/default/files/StationsCross3-19-20-web.pdf>

I received permission from her parish to arrange her meditations into a slide show. As I was placing the final touches on it, I was suddenly inspired to write my own meditations. What follows are my own reflections inspired by what I see around me, not only at Mercy but in images and stories from around the world.

I dedicate this meditation to all of the employees at Mercy, and especially to the chaplains in our Pastoral Care department.

Peace to all,

Erin Tribble

Director of Pastoral Care

Opening Prayer

By Maribeth Hopps

In the name of the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord Jesus,
we offer our prayers to you today
for our world, our country, our state,
and our local community.
As we meditate on your sacred passion,
may we take the pain and
needs of all humanity
and unite them to you in your suffering.
In your precious name, Jesus, we pray.
Amen.

First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have
redeemed the world.*

R: Again the high priest asked him and said to him, "Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?" Then Jesus answered, "I am. And 'You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Father and coming with the clouds of Heaven.'" At that, the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further need have we of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as deserving to die. (Mark 14:61-64)

*At what moment did the reality of the coronavirus hit you?
At what moment did it take on flesh and blood
in the form of your patients, your coworkers, your loved ones, your community, yourself?
For people all over the world, the usual way of
life has come to a sudden halt.
All of us - both young and old – are confronted by the shock of mortality,
the reality of our fragility and impermanence.
Lord, in this frightening moment,
help us to place ourselves in your presence, knowing
that you, too, were not immune to fear and anguish.
Strengthen our faith that we may face what is here and
what is coming with charity and courage.
Amen.*

Second Station: Jesus Carries His Cross

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: It was preparation day for Passover, and it was about noon. And Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold, your king!" They cried out, "Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and carrying the cross himself, he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha.

(John 19:14-17)

*Each day the rules by which we interact, protect,
and care for each other change.*

*Each day we struggle to adjust and adapt,
create, and innovate.*

*This is how we are learning
to carry the cross of this pandemic.*

*This is how we are learning
to accept what each moment brings.*

*This is how we are learning
to ride the waves of fear and hope, sorrow and joy
as we witness both the tragedy of this disease and
the innumerable acts of kindness, generosity, determination,
and creativity that surround us.*

*Lord, continue to give us the grace to accept the cross of this pandemic,
trusting that you are with us, that we are not alone,
and that your love is available to us at all times. Amen.*

Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will have your faith shaken, for it is written, '*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be dispersed.*' But after I have been raised, I shall go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him, "Even though all should have their faith shaken, mine will not be." Then Jesus said to him, "Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times."
(Mark 14:26-30)

By now we know the journey through this pandemic will be long.

We cannot see the end and we are tired:

Working long hours

Worrying about our jobs

Answering anxious phone calls

Keeping abreast of new information

Devising new strategies

Caring for our families

Caring for the gravely ill

Trying to care for ourselves

Gracious God, we falter under the stress of these burdens.

Help us to accept our vulnerability and limitations.

Turn our hearts to you, O Lord, that we may rely on your grace

to make up for the energy and resources we lack. Amen.

Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour, the disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25-27)

*More than ever, we recognize how interconnected we are as a global family.
We see how swiftly the virus has spread from person to person,
city to city, country to country, continent to continent.
More than ever, we experience what it means to live in solidarity
with one another, to move beyond our individual concerns
into an awareness that what happens to one of us happens to all of us.
Lord, there is a blessing blooming in our shared struggle.
We are learning to face this moment together, as you and your mother did.
We are learning that we are, indeed, all members of one body in Christ.
Lord, transform us through this experience that we may never lose sight
of our connectedness to one another. Amen.*

Fifth Station: Simon Helps Carry His Cross

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him out to crucify him. They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, to carry Jesus's cross. They brought him to the place of Golgotha. (Mark 15:20-22)

We are like Simon:

Pressed into service by this spreading virus.

*Whether we like it or not, we are no longer bystanders
but active participants in this unfolding Passion.*

What is our attitude as we are drawn in?

*What are we learning as we bear one another's burdens,
as we carry for a while the cross of our neighbors?*

Lord, help us to help each other.

*Help us accept your invitation to the conversion and transformation
that come through serving one another.*

*This is how you save us, O Lord. This is how you heal us
by your holy cross. Amen.*

Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: The righteous will answer him and say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?" And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'" (Matthew 25:37-40)

We are like Veronica:

*Compelled by our innate compassion to wipe
the tears, sweat, and blood of our brothers and sisters.*

We have no thought for ourselves.

*We simply move toward the pain
and do all we can to assuage it.*

*Lord, in your great love and mercy,
send forth your blessings upon all the
nurses, physicians, first responders, service workers, and clergy
who lay their lives on the line to care for those in need.*

*Grant them your wisdom and protection,
and guard them and their loved ones from all harm. Amen.*

Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins. Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole. By his stripes, we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way. But the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

In our growing exhaustion, our spirits flag.

We ask ourselves:

How long will this go on?

How will we manage?

“How long, O Lord,

must we take counsel in our souls

and have sorrow in our hearts all day?” (Psalm 13)

We are filled with questions that cannot be answered.

Lord, when we are lacking strength, help us

rest in these sorrowful mysteries.

Help us rest in You as the answer to all

that remains unsolved in our hearts. Amen.

Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children." (Luke 23:27-28)

Lord, in your journey to the cross, many women accompanied you.

They wept for you. They wiped your face.

They stood by you at the foot of your cross.

*Today, as many lie dying alone in their hospital beds,
those who would draw close and minister to them are bound
by charity to love from afar.*

No longer can we hold their hands or whisper prayers in their ears.

*No longer can we sit beside them in a silence replete
with mercy and compassion.*

*Lord, in your great love, bless chaplains and ministers whose
calling to be with the sick and dying
is now frustrated by the realities of this pandemic.*

*Help them trust that your love and grace transcend
the boundaries of time and space.*

Help them trust more deeply in the power of prayer. Amen.

Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows, what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8: 26-27)

As this journey wears on, we are at the point of collapse.

Our hospitals overflow.

Our colleagues fall ill.

Our supplies run out.

*Our scarce resources compel us to
make excruciating choices.*

*Lord, as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
let us fear no evil, for you are at our side,
with your rod and your staff that comfort us (Psalm 23).*

*May your Holy Spirit inspire and guide our government and business leaders
to be innovative, generous, and just in their design, production, and distribution of much-needed
resources. Amen.*

Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: They gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall. But when he had tasted it, he refused to drink. After they had crucified him, they divided his garments by casting lots. They sat down and kept watch over him there. (Matthew 27:34-35)

*The virus has exposed our vulnerability:
to illness, death, financial ruin.
It has exposed the weaknesses and inequities
in our social systems and institutions.
It has stripped away our comforts and habits.
For many, it has stripped away the dignity of work
and being able to provide for loved ones.
The sense of powerlessness disproportionately afflicts
the poor and the marginalized: the homeless, the imprisoned, the refugees.
Lord, in you love and truth meet; justice and peace kiss (Psalm 85).
Help us remember and care for those lacking resources.
Help us face the brokenness around us with courage and hope.
Let it call forth from us the giftedness you have gifted us:
our skills, talents, creativity, generosity, and compassion. Amen.*

Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (Luke 23:33-34; John 19:18)

We are all nailed to the cross of this moment.

None of us can escape.

We are confined to our homes,

confined to the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Lord, help us to find wisdom in this moment of no escape.

Strengthen our fortitude and perseverance.

Deepen our capacity to be with our own and others' suffering.

Help us discover inner resources we never knew we had.

Renew in us a steadfast spirit. Amen.

Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. The veil of the temple was torn down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." And when he had said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23: 44-46)

As of April 4, 2020 at 12:43pm,

62,376 people have died of coronavirus.

We know that many more deaths are to come.

*We pray for the peaceful repose of the souls
of all who have died, and for the peaceful passage
of all who are yet to die.*

*God of Love, may they and their loved ones and all who care for them
experience the comfort and consolation of your presence.*

*May they recognize you in the corporal and spiritual acts of mercy
performed by your holy people:*

the neighbor, the nurse, the friend, the doctor,

the brother or sister, the parent or child, the minister, the first responder,

the delivery driver, the grocery store cashier,

*the stranger who, for a few moments, becomes an intimate partner
in a shared experience of both fear and hope. Amen.*

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of preparation and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid; then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. (Luke 24: 52-55)

*Lord Jesus, after you died, Joseph of Arimathea took your body
down from the cross and gently wrapped it in a linen shroud.
He laid you in a rock-hewn tomb,
and the women who followed you from Galilee went to prepare
spices and ointments according to their burial custom.
In the wake of this pandemic, O God, we are unable to care for our
dead according to our own customs and practices.
We cannot gather around the body to pray.
We cannot touch or kiss our beloved one last time.
God of mercy, we ask your blessing upon those who may still touch
and tend to the bodies of our dead:
nurses, doctors, transporters, pathologists, funeral directors.
Guard and protect them.
Fill them with your Holy Spirit, that they may prepare
and accompany the dead in a reverent and prayerful spirit. Amen.*

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

R: Taking Jesus's body, Joseph of Arimethea wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his new tomb, which he had hewn out of rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Matthew 27: 59-61)

*At the moment of our greatest need - to mourn the loss
of our loved ones - we have no recourse to our traditions,
to the rites and rituals that carry us along this passage through grief
and give it shape and substance, comfort and meaning.
Our churches, synagogues, and mosques are shuttered.
We are running out of tombs in which to lay the bodies.
At most, we may gather at the graveside in tiny groups of ten
unable to embrace each other for fear that our tears and running noses
are reservoirs of contagion.
How long, O Lord, must we bear pain in our souls? (Psalm 13)
Teach us to be psalmists, O Lord. Teach us to trust in your steadfast love
and to sing to you despite everything, remembering how bountifully you have treated us in the past,
remembering your promise of mercy and eternal life.
Amen.*

Fifteenth Station: Toward the Resurrection

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

A: *Because by your holy cross
you have redeemed the world.*

R: Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and what he told her. (John 20: 11; 14-18)

*As we approach Easter in the peak of pandemic,
we struggle to find the joy and hope we would normally feel at such a time.
We are like Mary peering into the darkness and emptiness of the tomb, believing that the Lord has been
taken from her.
Some of us struggle to see God in the midst
of so much confusion and devastation.
And yet all around us the earth is greening.
People are inspired and invigorated
to research vaccines and therapeutics,
to sew masks, to sing to each other, to write music,
to find new ways to connect.
Risen Lord, as we stand before the empty tomb of this moment,
help us recognize it as a sign of new life.
Help us to perceive you with new eyes and
to hear your voice calling our name.
We ask these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*