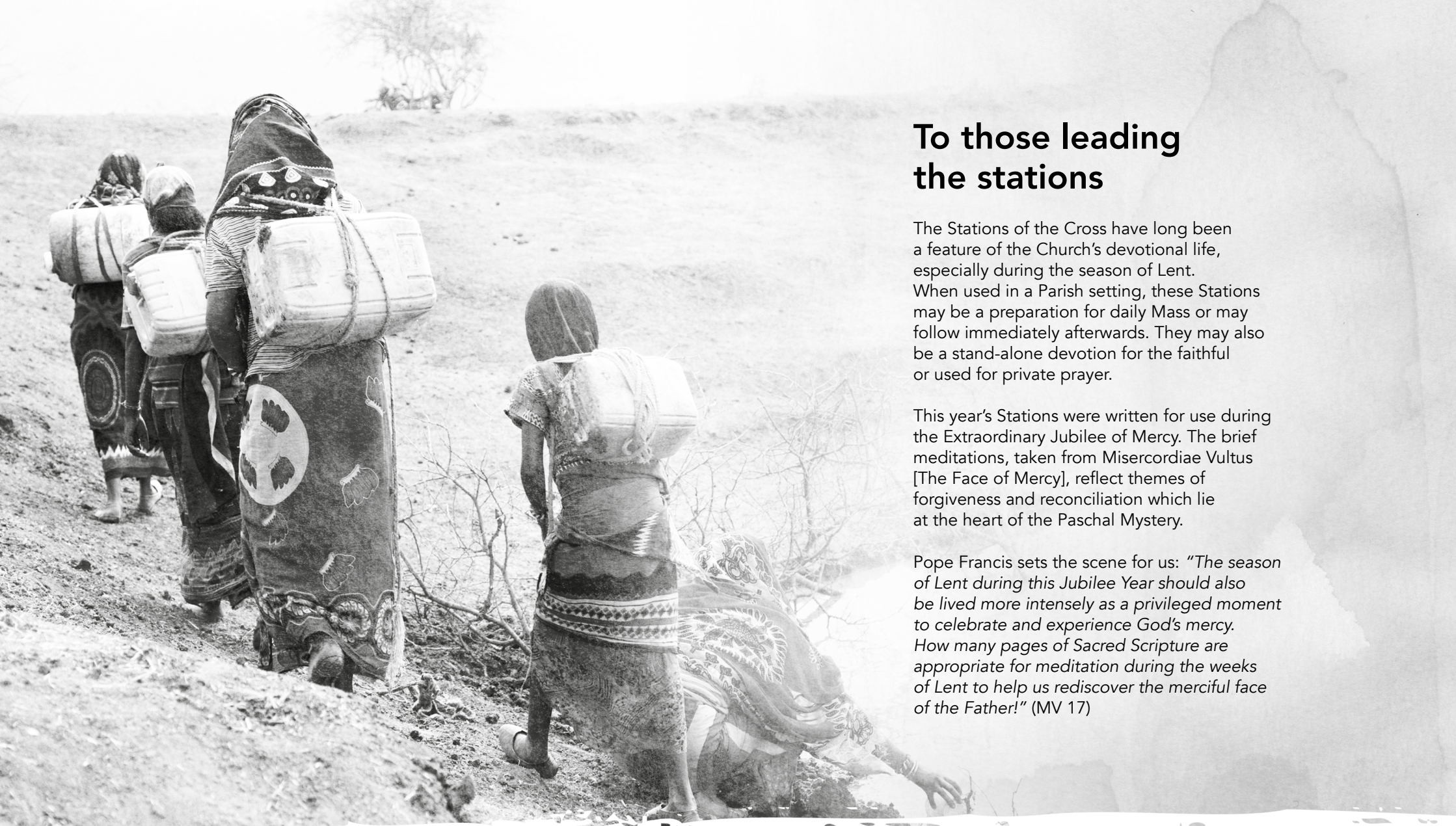




Stations of the Cross and prayers for Lent 2016

Written by Fr John Bollan





To those leading the stations

The Stations of the Cross have long been a feature of the Church's devotional life, especially during the season of Lent. When used in a Parish setting, these Stations may be a preparation for daily Mass or may follow immediately afterwards. They may also be a stand-alone devotion for the faithful or used for private prayer.

This year's Stations were written for use during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. The brief meditations, taken from *Misericordiae Vultus* [The Face of Mercy], reflect themes of forgiveness and reconciliation which lie at the heart of the Paschal Mystery.

Pope Francis sets the scene for us: *"The season of Lent during this Jubilee Year should also be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy. How many pages of Sacred Scripture are appropriate for meditation during the weeks of Lent to help us rediscover the merciful face of the Father!"* (MV 17)

All photos were taken by Sarah Hunter. They feature SCIAF's work with communities in the Borana region of Ethiopia

Opening prayer

God, our Father,

You are the source of grace and mercy. Your Spirit drives us into the desert where we too, like your Son, make our own Lenten journey.

But your presence makes the parched land springs of water and the wilderness a garden of life.

As we follow in the steps of your Son's Passion, may we grow more merciful. As we carry the cross with him, may we become more aware of our own need of mercy.

As we look upon the Pierced One, may we be refreshed and washed clean in his love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen

1. Jesus is condemned to death: fear is the enemy

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

God's mercy, rather than a sign of weakness, is the mark of his omnipotence (MV 6).

It was in Pilate's power to be merciful. We know that he was moved to release Jesus but his instinct for mercy was held in check by fear: the fear of being thought weak. So he called for water to wash his hands of Jesus and of blame.

Lord Jesus, how many have been like Pilate – afraid to show mercy because mercy is confused with weakness? Teach us that mercy is strength.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

2. Jesus takes up his cross: the cross

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

God's justice is his mercy given to everyone as a grace that flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus the Cross of Christ is God's judgement on all of us and on the whole world, because through it he offers us the certitude of love and new life. (MV 21)

This is why Jesus accepts the cross, embraces it: he knows that through it, God will give new life to his people.

Lord Jesus, as you bow down to take the cross upon your shoulders, you carry us and the burden of our brokenness. Help us to see our cross as a promise of love and life.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

3. Jesus falls the first time: for a stronger faith

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus speaks several times of the importance of faith over and above the observance of the law. It is in this sense that we must understand his words when, reclining at table with Matthew and other tax collectors and sinners, he says to the Pharisees raising objections to him, "Go and learn the meaning of 'I desire mercy not sacrifice' (Matthew 9:13, MV 20).

Perhaps those who watched Jesus stumble saw this as a vindication of their own faith? Here God was humiliating a man who had tried to humble them, to undermine their authority.

Lord Jesus, we see you through the eyes of faith: through this fall we ask you to strengthen our faith and make us compassionate towards others. May we live mercy and not merely talk about it.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

4. Jesus meets his mother: mother of mercy

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh (MV 24).

The mother of mercy - who had indeed given flesh to the Word - saw that flesh torn by the rage of hatred and sin. Yet she too enters into this mystery of Divine Mercy, even though it means suffering with her son.

Blessed Mother, by sharing in your son's Passion you become for us a sign of life and hope – especially in our darkest moments. Come to meet us on our own way of the cross.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

5. Simon of cyrene helps jesus: god makes haste to help us

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

What a beautiful thing that the Church begins her daily prayer with the words, "O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me" (Ps 70:2)! The assistance we ask for is already the first step of God's mercy toward us... Day after day, touched by his compassion, we also can become compassionate towards others (MV 14).

When Simon takes up the cross he becomes, the channel of God's presence and closeness to his Son. The rough hand of a guard pulling Simon from the crowd becomes the compassionate touch of the Father.

Lord Jesus, it can be hard for us to admit when we need help; even harder to accept help when it is offered. Give us the grace to recognise our 'Simons' and, in turn, to help those who need it most.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

6. Veronica wipes the face of jesus: the face of mercy

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him (MV 1).

In return for her act of compassion, Veronica is left with an imprint of Jesus, the face of the Father's mercy, on her cloth. That likeness was also imprinted upon her soul - she too becomes an image of God's tender mercy.

Lord Jesus, help us to rediscover that face of mercy within each of us: that we might restore the dignity of those who are exploited, excluded and ignored.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

7. Jesus falls the second time: a renewed hope

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it... Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man (MV 2).

Hope is precious. In this second fall we see those who had placed their hopes in Jesus begin to feel the crushing weight of hopelessness as their Saviour stumbles in the dust.

Lord Jesus, we ask that you renew our hope. Despite our own repeated falls, open our hearts to that hope that we too might be loved forever.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem: the little ones

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

In each of these 'little ones', Christ himself is present. His flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled (MV 15).

As he nears the end, Jesus encounters the women of Jerusalem. Though they mourn for him, his thoughts are with them and their children. He shows the Father's love for the 'little ones', those on the margins of society.

Lord Jesus, you show us the true power of compassion. Even in the midst of your suffering, your concern is for others. Help us to break free from self-pity and make our own times of suffering occasions of grace and mercy.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

9. Jesus falls the third time: redeeming love

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

God never tires of casting open the doors of his heart and of repeating that he loves us and wants to share his love with us (MV 25).

We speak of 'falling in love' with another person. This fall of Jesus' is an act of love for humanity – and not for some faceless 'mass', but for each one of us. His Passion is the overflowing of God's redeeming love for his wounded creation.

Lord Jesus, only love can redeem us because only love is the deepest expression of the eternal life you share with the Father and the Holy Spirit. That is why it is the greatest of all gifts and the one which endures: may we open our hearts to this healing love.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

10. Jesus is stripped of his clothing: restoring eden

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

The Church's first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of oneself (MV 12).

The men who stripped Jesus of his clothes were completing a plan set in motion at the original sin. In the moment that nakedness became a source of shame, God had already fixed upon a remedy in Christ. To save us, Jesus must strip himself of his equality with God and become the servant of his Father's love.

Lord Jesus, you have shown us how to strip ourselves of our obsession with power and status: help us not be ashamed to make our lives a gift to others.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

11. Jesus is crucified: nails, words and other weapons

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip (MV 14).

Jesus was crucified, not just by the nails which bound him to the wood of the cross, but by the mocking words flung at him from the crowd. Cruel speech is an instrument of torture, a way of crucifying others.

Lord Jesus, remind us of the power of words to heal, or to wound. When we surrender to jealousy or envy, we allow these poisons to paralyse our hearts and barb our tongues. Help us remember that, even on the cross, you spoke only of forgiveness and compassion.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

12. Jesus dies on the cross: it is accomplished

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

God's love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus' entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously... Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion (MV 8).

Jesus died as he lived: a sign of the Father's merciful love. Even in death he is filled with compassion. From his pierced side blood and water flow – a gift of new life through the saving sacraments.

Lord Jesus, for us death means going away, for you it is about finding new ways of touching our lives with your power. Give us signs of your life-giving presence in our families and communities – especially where there is need of forgiveness and reconciliation.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

13. Jesus is taken down from the cross and placed in the arms of his mother: the passion of mary

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

At the foot of the Cross, Mary, together with John, the disciple of love, witnessed the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus. This supreme expression of mercy towards those who crucified him show us the point to which the mercy of God can reach. (MV 24).

Having met her son on his final journey, Mary walked with him. Her own cross, the vision of her child who's suffering not even a mother's love could lighten. Now, at the end, she must contemplate that face which first looked up at her with new-born eyes. She must close those eyes in the sleep of death.

Sorrowful mother, whose heart lies broken at the foot of the cross, be close to all mothers who stand by the crosses of their children, unable to lift them down or take their pain away. Show them the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

14. Jesus is laid in the tomb

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

God's forgiveness knows no bounds. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God makes even more evident his love and its power to destroy all human sin. Reconciliation with God is made possible through the paschal mystery and the mediation of the Church (MV 22).

Not even the tomb can contain the power of God's mercy. The great stone which seals the entrance will become the first Holy Door through which the light of a risen sun will pour. But for now the Church must observe this Sabbath of uncertainty and sadness, and wait.

Lord Jesus, make of every heart a holy door. As we make our own journeys of forgiveness in this season of grace, fill us with your healing power: that we may, in turn, share your loving mercy with others.

I love you Jesus, my love above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.

Concluding prayer

God our Father,

You watch the road for our coming back to you: You run to meet us on our way rejoicing that we have come back to life.

We can only do this because you have sent Jesus, your first-born and our brother, to show us the path of mercy which is the Way of the Cross.

He has paid the price of our ransom, he has freed us from death. Make us joyful witnesses of his risen love and help us, in our own lives, to show that face of mercy to all we meet.

Amen.

**Our Father
Hail Mary
Glory Be**

Prayers for Lent

Mercy Prayer

God of love and kindness,

Grant me merciful eyes,
So that I might always see
the best in others;
And never look away
from the suffering of my neighbours

Grant me merciful ears,
that I might hear the cry of the poor;
And a merciful tongue
that I might be a voice
for those who go unheard.

Grant me merciful feet
That I might rush to those who need my
help;
And merciful hands,
that I might share what I have
with those who have nothing.

Above all, loving Father,
grant me a merciful heart
that I might offer comfort
and compassion to the sorrowful,
Forgive those who would do me wrong,
And spread your love throughout the world.

I ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen

Lenten Grace before Meals

Father,

As we bless you for this food,
Help us to feast on all that brings us life:
truth, love and peace,
and to fast from all that brings sadness.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Lenten Grace after Meals

Father,

We thank you for the strength
which comes from this food
and from the grace
you pour into our hearts.

May the sign of the cross (+)
remind us always of your love
and help us to share it with others.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Prayers of the faithful

Opening Prayer

*My brothers and sisters,
Now that we have listened to God's word,
let us ask the Father to listen to our prayers
for his children throughout the world.*

*We pray for Pope Francis and all who walk
with us on our pilgrimage of faith:
may they be joyful ministers
of the Father's healing and mercy.*

Lord, in your mercy:
Hear our prayer.

*We pray for the ongoing work of SCIAF
with Ethiopian farmers:
that our material support may be matched
by the prayers of this community.*

Lord, in your mercy:
Hear our prayer.

*We pray for a greater appreciation
of the gift of water:
that we may value this precious source of life
and do all we can to share it with those who
have no access to clean water.*

Lord, in your mercy:
Hear our prayer.

*We pray for families and communities which
experience division:
that the Father's merciful love
may bring healing and reconciliation to
those who have become estranged from one
another.*

Lord, in your mercy:
Hear our prayer.

*We pray for children and young people:
that the Gospel will inspire them
to ever greater acts of love and service.*

Lord, in your mercy:
Hear our prayer.

(Other local intentions may be included here)

Concluding Prayer

God our Father,

*today you wish us to rejoice
because the feast of our redemption
draws near.*

*Pour out upon us this day
a spirit which delights in peace and
compassion.*

*Hear these, and all our prayers,
which we make through Christ our Lord.*

Amen.



Please feel free to copy these prayers
or call us on **0141 354 5555** for extra prayer books.

You can download a PowerPoint presentation
to accompany these Stations at **www.sciaf.org.uk**

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