Stations of the Cross: a liturgy of remembrance

It is envisaged that the congregation will move slowly round the Stations, pausing at each for the liturgy. Ideally, one voice will name the Station and say the introductory words from the Bible, and a different voice will give the meditation and the prayer. The liturgy is essentially one of remembrance and of penitence, that we continue to crucify Our Lord in one another.

The first Station: Jesus is condemned to death

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, 'which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas!' Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus Who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let Him be crucified!'

Meditation

A 16 year old soldier has his first experience of life in the trenches

We set out after dark in single file, each man carrying a full petrol can of drinking water. .. when we were about 300 yards from our front line, all hell broke loose. A deluge of shells and trench mortar rifle and machinegun fire saturated the area. Every man plunged into a shell hole and I grovelled in the bottom of mine, petrified with fear. I expected to be blown into eternity every second, while showers of earth and stone fell upon me from nearby shell bursts and streams of machine gun bullets tore into the back of my shell hole just above my head. After about ten minutes the deluge suddenly stopped and our leader ordered us to dash to the front line. We delivered our precious water, and got out of this hellish place with all speed. I was very confused and bewildered. I now knew what to expect.

Let us pray

Lord, You did know what to expect. For all the years of Your earthly life, on the long journey to Jerusalem, You saw ahead of You suffering and an ignominious death. And You could have escaped, calling on Your Father to save You, and He would have done so. How could You bear to accept such treatment at our human hands? Forgive us for every act of thoughtlessness, of cruelty, of spite, and help us to be more like You, full of faith and courage whatever we have to face.

Lord, in Your mercy
Hear our prayer

The second Station: Jesus takes up His cross

So Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after flogging Jesus, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Meditation
A soldier returns to the front line after leave at home

My father came with me to the station. He said, 'Cheerio, son, look after yourself. I'll be glad to see you back again.' He was a gentle man, and yet he had nerves of steel. He'd never show his emotions, it would upset me, so at the station we shook hands. He would never show me that he was scared and I hoped I would never show him that I was scared either. It was no good standing on the station crying your eyes out because your son's getting in the train to go back to France. It doesn't help him, it doesn't help me. Our people at home had a duty to do - the same as we had - and their duty was not to make our lives harder than they were already. I knew that it could be the last time I saw him, and he knew that as well.

Let us pray

Lord, we pray for our own community, for our friends and for the people we meet each day. Help us to be aware of their needs, their loneliness or fear for the future, the isolation of the very old and housebound, the hazards of the young and inexperienced, and give us generous hearts to care for them with sensitivity and understanding. Lord, help us to show others the compassion that You show us.

Lord, in Your mercy
Hear our prayer

The third Station: Jesus falls for the first time

He was despised and rejected by others; a Man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity, and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised and we held him of no account.

Meditation

A cavalryman goes into action

We were galloping into carnage, for nobody knew what we were supposed to be doing and there was utter confusion from the start. All around me, horses and men were brought hurtling to the ground amidst fountains of earth, or plummeting forwards as a machine gunner caught them with a burst of fire. Ahead, the leading troops were brought up by agricultural barbed wire strung across the line of advance, so that horses were beginning to be pulled up when I heard a bugle sounding 'troops right wheel'. I pulled my horse round, then with a crash, down she went. I hit the ground at full tilt, and can now recall only an odd assortment of fleeting thoughts and sights - a single image of chaos.

Let us pray
Lord, sometimes life just gets on top of us, too much stress, too many demands on our time, too many catastrophes which are not of our making and which touch us only indirectly, but which impinge on our consciousness all the same. Help us to be still and to know that You are God, and that if we can trust all things to You, You will not fail us, and all will be well in ways which are beyond our understanding.

Lord, in Your mercy
Hear our prayer

The fourth Station: Jesus meets His mother

In the Temple, Simeon blessed the Holy Family, and said to Jesus's mother Mary: 'This Child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed - so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed - and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Meditation

A soldier's 10 year old daughter says goodbye to her father

At about six o'clock in the evening, my father called me in and said he'd got to go back to barracks. 'Will you walk with me a little way, just up the hill?' Of course I would. He said goodbye to my mother, who was crying, and we went off down the road. I really can't remember what we talked about. I held on to his hand so tight, and when we got to the top, he said, 'You must go back now, and I'll stand here and watch you until you're out of sight', and he put his arms round me and held me so close to him. I remember feeling how rough that khaki uniform was. I left him standing there and I kept looking back and waving and he was still there, just standing there. I got to the bottom and I stopped and waved to him and he gestured as much as to say, 'Go on, you must go home now', ever so gently, and he was still waving when I went, and that was the last time I ever saw him.

Let us pray

Lord, we pray for families, for those which are divided by war, by hunger, by religious division, by the breakdown of the love that once held them together.
We ask You to bless our own families, our parents and grandparents, our children and their children and all those whom we love; help us to support and care for one another as You support and care for us.

Lord, in Your mercy
Hear our prayer

The fifth Station: Simon helps Jesus to carry His cross

As they led Jesus away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

Meditation
A letter from a German soldier to British parents

On 11th of this month, through God's gracious guiding hand, I was led to discover your son in a shell hole, where he had been lying for three days with a gunshot wound in the upper part of his thigh. Acting on the command of our Lord Jesus 'Love your enemies' I bandaged him with the permission of our officer and provided him with bread and wine. I had a lot of conversation with your dear son, whose condition visibly improved by evening... I arranged to get him back from our front line position to the collecting centre for wounded. There I handed over your dear son to the care of competent hands, and now carry out my promise to your son when we were lying so happily together in the shell-hole, in spite of the rain of bullets, that I would communicate his deliverance to his dear father.

Let us pray

Lord, we pray for the peacemakers, for men and women of all nationalities who are prepared to carry out Your work of compassion and reconciliation wherever they see the suffering of Your people. We pray for ourselves, that even if, like Simon, we are brought face to face with human need and do not want to be involved, we may remember that in serving others, we have the great privilege of serving You.

Lord, in Your mercy
Hear our prayer

The sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Jesus said: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.'

Meditation

A nurse on the Western Front speaks of her experiences

One night, the bombers came and bombed the hospital. I kept walking up and down the hut as fast as I could, because I always thought that if I kept walking up and down, perhaps the bomb would drop one end while I was at the other. Everything would shake if a bomb dropped close by, and I would just hold myself tightly, but I always tried to keep a brave face. I thought in my own mind that it was very important that I didn't show any fear to try and help the men, to keep them all calm, because some had only just come out of the trenches and could not bear the thought of anything happening now they were out. We were all exhausted from the strain of work.

Let us pray

Lord, give us the gift of compassion. We are so often bound up with our own needs, our own concerns. Help us to remember that when we feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, visit the sick and those who are in prison, we will find You in them.

Lord, in Your mercy
Hear our prayer

The seventh Station: Jesus falls for the second time

The psalmist cries:
'My heart is in anguish within me,
the terrors of death have fallen upon me,
Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me.'

Meditation

A prisoner of war on the Russian Front writes to his father

We have been moved right up behind the firing line, and where we go to work is right in the Fire Zone, where the shells are dropping and it is very dangerous. The work we do is digging trenches and felling trees; also carrying them, which is very hard. We live in a tent, which is partly heated, but it is very cold. When we wake up in the morning our boots are frozen. If this goes on much longer, the sooner a bullet or a shell puts us out of our troubles, the better...if you have any idea what a Russian winter is like you will know how things are with us. God help us if we have to stop here much longer...we are all getting weaker every day.

Let us pray

Lord, there are times in our lives when we feel overwhelmed by pain and distress, when we cry with the psalmist that we would fly away and be at rest. Forgive us for the weakness of our faith; we forget that You have been in this place before us and that Your pain was borne for our sake. Help us to trust in Your love and Your strength to uphold us.

Lord, in Your mercy
Hear our prayer

The eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

A great number of the people followed Him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for Him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.'

Meditation

A dying soldier writes to his young daughter

Dearly loved daughter. This, my letter to you, is written in grief. I had hoped to spend many happy years with you after the War was over and to see you grow up into a good and happy woman. I am writing because I want you in after years to know how dearly I loved you. I know that you are too young now to keep me in your memory. I know your dear mother will grieve, be a comfort to her, remember when you are old enough that
she lost her dear brave son, your brother, and me your father within a short time. Your brother was a dear, brave boy, honour his memory for he loved you and your brothers dearly. May God guide and keep you safe and grant that at last we may all meet together in His eternal rest.

Let us pray

Lord, we pray for those who are bereaved, for children who have lost their parents and for parents whose children have died.

Lord, there is grief that is unbearable, that we can hardly imagine unless we have felt it for ourselves, the times when comfort seems impossible and we cannot understand how we can go on living.

Have mercy on all who suffer such anguish, and bring them the hope of Your salvation, for themselves and for those whom they have loved and lost.

Lord, in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

The ninth Station: Jesus falls for the third time

He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the punishment that made us whole, and by His bruises we are healed.

Meditation

A soldier recalls meeting a Welsh padre early one morning

I met the padre this morning, half an hour ago, just as it was getting light. He was going to do a bit of burying. I thought he looked queer...he was talking to himself, praying maybe, and I couldn't make much of it. I got talking to him, and I asked him why he was up so early, He said he hadn't been to bed. He went out yesterday evening looking for a grave. Someone you knew, said I...Yes, my own boy's grave, said he. He had heard yesterday evening that his boy was killed the day before, so he went off at once to try to find his grave. He walked about for hours, but couldn't find anyone who knew where it was, nor could he find the padre who buried him. He walked until he could walk no more, got a cup of tea from some gunners, and had a rest, and then walked back here. And now he's out again. Going to bury other people's boys, he said, since he couldn't find his own boy's grave to pray over... there was some shrapnel overhead, but I saw him going up the slope as if he were alone in the world.

Let us pray

Lord, there are times when faith is hard, when You seem very far away from us. Forgive us when the burden of our life drags us down, when we can hardly bring ourselves to look up and see Your merciful eyes looking down at us and Your hands reaching out to lift us towards You.

Help us to remember that You, the One Who was without sin, suffered for us, loving us to the end.

Lord, in Your mercy
Hear our prayer

The tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of His clothes

They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on His head.

Meditation

A soldier remembers the effects of shell shock

I was in part of a trench that was being dug when suddenly everything went black. The next thing, well, I just came round and to my utter amazement I was in bed in hospital in England. The whole thing took time to sink in - I had shell shock, you see. I didn't care whether I lived or not. In the first stages, you're much more likely to shed a tear, to feel the depression. Every day I thought, 'Oh dear, another day, oh Lord.' You lived hour to hour. I don't say day to day, for the simple reason that Tuesday or Wednesday didn't exist as such. You didn't know where you were, you would have no pain as such. It would simply be that the mind would not work, you didn't know day from night and you didn't know about eating, whether it was lunchtime or teatime. It's a shocking state to get into, being mentally wounded.

Let us pray

Lord, we pray for prisoners of conscience and for all who suffer unjust imprisonment, for those who are persecuted because of their faith. Have mercy on them, most merciful Saviour, and help them to know that You, who have suffered as they do, are always with them.
We pray for all who are sick in body, mind or spirit, and for those who care for them.

Lord, in Your mercy
Hear our prayer

The eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on His right and one on His left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'

Meditation

British soldiers meet a prisoner

We took a young prisoner. The enemy had pulled back and had had to leave him. I was assisting the intelligence officer and they brought the boy in; he was only about sixteen and the area just above his hip had been shot away with shrapnel. It was a bad wound, it was bleeding a lot at the back. This poor child could speak a little English; he was a nice-looking boy, a healthy-looking lad with a big face. The fellows came in to look at him and they were giving him chocolate. They felt he was their own brother, there was
an atmosphere of love, he wasn't the enemy then, he was a mother's son. The stretcher-bearers put him in a blanket and carried him. He died on the way down.

Let us pray

Lord, in a world, Your world, which is so full of violence and hatred, men and women so often think that they know exactly what they are doing: they are defeating an enemy, getting rid of a hated persecutor, wreaking vengeance on those who, in their turn, have brought suffering and death.

But they do not know that they are crucifying You again and again; they do not even notice the wounds on Your hands and Your feet, the spear thrust in Your side.

Father, forgive us all for the sins we commit knowingly and for those which we do not even recognise as nails hammered into Your hands. Father, forgive us.

Lord, in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

The twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross

Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit'. Having said this, He breathed His last.

Meditation

A young British soldier waits to go over the top

The air is alive and shaking with fire. It is hardly dawn yet, just grey and black. I do not feel at all afraid. A boy is lying near me on his back in the rain. He was tall and lanky and K-legged, and had a very small, grey face. He looked like a stalk a minute or two since, when he was standing up with his groundsheet round his shoulders. I noticed him suddenly then, and remembered that I had seen him before somewhere. He is on his back now, and his legs are wide apart. He has been killed by a stray bullet. No one knows who he is, or what his name is, or where the bullet has hit him, and no one has bothered to notice him. He looks quite natural, gazing up at the sky. But he is dead. I think, myself, that he was always tired, tired beyond anything anyone can know, and that he is resting now.

Let us pray

Lord, we pray for those who have died, that they may be held in Your loving hands for all eternity.

We pray for those who mourn, that You will be their strength and their Comforter.

We pray for ourselves, that You will be with us at the hour of our death.

Lord, in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

The thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross
Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid.

Meditation

A soldier mourns for his friends

I had lost three good mates. We were a little team together and the last three who were the ammunition carriers were blown to pieces. My reaction was terrible, it was like losing a part of my life. I'd taken an absolute liking to the men in the team, you could say almost love. You could talk to them about anything and everything. We each knew where the others came from and what their lives had been, where they were educated. You were one of them, we belonged to each other if you understand. It's a difficult thing to describe, the friendship between us. I never met any of their people, any of their parents but I knew all about them and they knew all about me. There was nothing that cropped up, doesn't matter what it was, that you couldn't discuss with them in one way or another. You could confide everything to them. They would understand.

Let us pray

Lord, at the end You were in the hands of Your friends, Joseph who cared for Your body and gave You his own tomb, and the women who stayed with You. Thank You for friendship, for the people who have stood by us, cared about us, been faithful to us through many years. Help us to be good friends to them and give us warm and generous hearts towards everyone we meet.

Lord, in Your mercy

Hear our prayer

The fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb

The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

Meditation

A young British officer tells of his reaction to the end of the war

On the day of the Armistice, I had a vision, and I was standing in a trench. I could not put my head up because I was under fire, but above me, at eye level, walking past, were hundreds and hundreds of boots and puttees. I thought of all those I had known; it was like a panorama of passing people, people from the cadet battalion, through the various training courses and out in France. They went on and on for hours, and I realised it was the dead all walking away and leaving me behind. I felt worried and frightened that they were leaving me by myself, that I had been left behind. They were marching away into the distance, where I would never follow. All the people I knew had gone except me. That was a vivid dream and I dreamt it on many occasions, although I never told anyone until I was a very old man, because I felt it was a private matter between my old comrades and myself.
Let us pray

It is finished. And we know that there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, there is no longer friend or foe, for all of us are one in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Lord, have mercy

Christ, have mercy

Lord, have mercy

Amen

[All Great War quotations are from books by Richard van Emden; written as an act of remembrance by Joan van Emden]

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