

The Stations of the Cross, with reflective Sonnets by Malcolm Guite

Around the walls of the nave in St James', as in so many churches, there hangs a set of the Stations of the Cross. They are present throughout the year as a visible reminder of the events of Good Friday: Jesus' judgment before Pilate, his carrying the cross through the streets of Jerusalem and incidents encountered upon the way, his being nailed to the cross, his death and burial. They mirror for us the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows, in the Old City of Jerusalem, which pilgrims still today follow in Jesus' footsteps to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the traditional site of the Crucifixion, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus.

In medieval times it was the aspiration of every Christian to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land once in a lifetime. Of course, this was never possible for everyone, and it became increasingly more difficult politically over time. The Franciscans were largely responsible for bringing representations of the Holy Places into churches throughout Europe to aid devotion, in 21st Century-speak, to enable a virtual visit. So we have the crèche at Christmas, the Stations of the Cross, and particular places of pilgrimage too: Walsingham, England's Nazareth; the Holy House of Loreto; the Santa Scala in Rome.

It became traditional in Lent and especially on Good Friday to walk around the Stations, the Way of the Cross, in church, individually or as a group, reflecting on the Passion of Christ and offering prayers. This opportunity is usually offered at St James' every Friday in Lent. In this time of physical distancing, you are invited to make your own 'virtual' Way of the Cross using for reflection an evocative set of Sonnets written by Malcolm Guite, a priest-poet who lives in Cambridge, England (the preacher on St James' Day in 2019).

Malcolm Guite's Stations are available on his blog: malcomguite.wordpress.com (enter "Stations of the Cross" in the Search box) and are published in his collection *Sounding the Seasons*, Canterbury Press 2012.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

**Praise to the Holiest in the height,
and in the depth be praise:
in all his words most wonderful,
most sure in all his ways.**

**O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
a second Adam to the fight
and to the rescue came.**

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

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

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

The very air that Pilate breathes, the voice
With which he speaks in judgment, all his powers
Of perception and discrimination, choice,
Decision, all his years, his days and hours,
His consciousness of self, his every sense,
Are given by this prisoner, freely given.
The man who stands there making no defence,
Is God. His hands are tied, His heart is open.
And he bears Pilate's heart in his and feels
That crushing weight of wasted life. He lifts
It up in silent love. He lifts and heals.
He gives himself again with all his gifts
Into our hands. As Pilate turns away
A door swings open. This is judgment day.

Silence

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.

There is room in my heart for thee.

**O wisest love! that flesh and blood,
which did in Adam fail,
should strive afresh against the foe,
should strive and should prevail;**

**The Second Station:
Jesus is given his cross**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
**Because by your holy cross you have redeemed
the world.**

He gives himself again with all his gifts
And now we give him something in return.
He gave the earth that bears, the air that lifts,
Water to cleanse and cool, fire to burn,
And from these elements he forged the iron,
From strands of life he wove the growing wood,
He made the stones that pave the roads of Zion
He saw it all and saw that it is good.
We took his iron to edge an axe's blade,
We took the axe and laid it to the tree,
We made a cross of all that he has made,
And laid it on the one who made us free.
Now he receives again and lifts on high
The gifts he gave and we have turned awry.

Silence

Jesu, my Lord, I thee adore.
O make me love thee more and more.

**And that a higher gift than grace
should flesh and blood refine,
God's presence and his very self,
and essence all-divine.**

**O generous love! that he, who smote
in Man for man the foe,
the double agony in Man
for man should undergo;**

**The Third Station:
Jesus falls the first time**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
**Because by your holy cross you have redeemed
the world.**

He made the stones that pave the roads of Zion
And well he knows the path we make him tread
He met the devil as a roaring lion
And still refused to turn these stones to bread,
Choosing instead, as Love will always choose,
This darker path into the heart of pain.
And now he falls upon the stones that bruise
The flesh, that break and scrape the tender skin.
He and the earth he made were never closer,
Divinity and dust come face to face.
We flinch back from his *via dolorosa*,
He sets his face like flint and takes our place,
Staggers beneath the black weight of us all
And falls with us that he might break our fall.

Silence

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
grant us your peace.**

**And in the garden secretly,
and on the cross on high,
should teach his brethren, and inspire
to suffer and to die.**

**The Fourth Station:
Jesus meets His Mother**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

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

This darker path into the heart of pain
Was also hers whose love enfolded him
In flesh and wove him in her womb. Again
The sword is piercing. She, who cradled him
And gentled and protected her young son
Must stand and watch the cruelty that mars
Her maiden making. Waves of pain that stun
And sicken pass across his face and hers
As their eyes meet. Now she enfolds the world
He loves in prayer; the mothers of the disappeared
Who know her pain, all bodies bowed and curled
In desperation on this road of tears,
All the grief-stricken in their last despair,
Are folded in the mantle of her prayer.

Silence

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
**Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.**

**Praise to the Holiest in the height,
and in the depth be praise:
in all his words most wonderful,
most sure in all his ways.**

**The Fifth Station:
Simon of Cyrene carries the cross**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
**Because by your holy cross you have redeemed
the world.**

In desperation on this road of tears
Bystanders and bypassers turn away
In other's pain we face our own worst fears
And turn our backs to keep those fears at bay
Unless we are compelled as this man was
By force of arms or force of circumstance
To face and feel and carry someone's cross
In Love's full glare and not his backward glance.
So Simon, no disciple, still fulfilled
The calling: 'take the cross and follow me'.
By accident his life was stalled and stilled
Becoming all he was compelled to be.
Make me, like him, your pressed man and your priest,
Your *alter Christus*, burdened and released.

Silence

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

**We sing the praise of him who died,
of him who died upon the cross;
the sinner's hope let all deride,
for this we count the world but loss.**

**The Sixth Station:
Veronica wipes the face of Jesus**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

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

Bystanders and bypassers turn away
And wipe his image from their memory
She keeps her station. She is here to stay
And stem the flow. She is the reliquary
Of his last look on her. The bloody sweat
And salt tears of his love are soaking through
The folds of her devotion and the wet
folds of her handkerchief, like the dew
Of morning, like a softening rain of grace.
Because she wiped the grime from off his skin,
And glimpsed the godhead in his human face
Whose hidden image we all bear within,
Through all our veils and shrouds of daily pain
The face of god is shining once again.

Silence

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.

There is room in my heart for thee.

**Inscribed upon the cross we see
in shining letters, 'God is love';
he bears our sins upon the tree;
he brings us mercy from above.**

**The cross! It takes our guilt away:
it holds the fainting spirit up;
it cheers with hope the gloomy day,
and sweetens every bitter cup.**

**The Seventh Station:
Jesus falls the second time**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

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

Through all our veils and shrouds of daily pain,
Through our bruised bruises and re-opened scars,
He falls and stumbles with us, hurt again
When we are hurt again. With us he bears
The cruel repetitions of our cruelty;
The beatings of already beaten men,
The second rounds of torture, the futility
Of all unheeded pleading, every scream in vain.
And by this fall he finds the fallen souls
Who passed a first, but failed a second trial,
The souls who thought their faith would hold them whole
And found it only held them for a while.
Be with us when the road is twice as long
As we can bear. By weakness make us strong.

Silence

Jesu, my Lord, I thee adore.

O make me love thee more and more.

**It makes the coward spirit brave,
and nerves the feeble arm for fight;
it takes its terror from the grave,
and gilds the bed of death with light:**

**The Eighth Station:
Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
**Because by your holy cross you have redeemed
the world.**

He falls and stumbles with us, hurt again
But still he holds the road and looks in love
On all of us who look on him. Our pain
As close to him as his. These women move
Compassion in him as he does in them.
He asks us both to weep and not to weep.
Women of Gaza and Jerusalem,
Women of every nation where the deep
Wounds of memory divide the land
And lives of all your children, where the mines
Of all our wars are sown: Afghanistan ,
Iraq, the Cote d'Ivoire... he reads the signs
And weeps with you and with you he will stay
Until the day he wipes your tears away.

Silence

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
grant us your peace.**

**The balm of life, the cure of woe,
the measure and the pledge of love,
the sinner's refuge here below,
the angels' theme in heaven above.**

**The Ninth Station:
Jesus falls the third time**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

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

He weeps with you and with you he will stay
When all your staying power has run out
You can't go on, you go on anyway.
He stumbles just beside you when the doubt
That always haunts you, cuts you down at last
And takes away the hope that drove you on.
This is the third fall and it hurts the worst
This long descent through darkness to depression
From which there seems no rising and no will
To rise, or breathe or bear your own heart beat.
Twice you survived; this third will surely kill,
And you could almost wish for that defeat
Except that in the cold hell where you freeze
You find your God beside you on his knees.

Silence

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

**My song is love unknown,
my Saviour's love to me;
love to the loveless shown,
that they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake,
my Lord should take frail flesh and die?**

**The Tenth Station:
Jesus is stripped of His garments**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
**Because by your holy cross you have redeemed
the world.**

You can't go on, you go on anyway
He goes with you, his cradle to your grave.
Now is the time to loosen, cast away
The useless weight of everything but love
For he began his letting go before,
Before the worlds for which he dies were made,
Emptied himself, became one of the poor,
To make you rich in him and unafraid.
See as they strip the robe from off his back
They strip away your own defences too
Now you could lose it all and never lack
Now you can see what naked Love can do
Let go these bonds beneath whose weight you bow
His stripping strips you both for action now

Silence

Jesu, my Lord, I thee adore.
O make me love thee more and more.

**He came from His blest throne
salvation to bestow;
but man made strange, and none
the longed-for Christ would know.
But oh, my Friend, my Friend indeed,
who at my need His life did spend!**

**Sometimes they strew His way
and His sweet praises sing;
resounding all the way
hosannas to their King.
Then "Crucify!" is all their breath,
and for His death they thirst and cry.**

The Eleventh Station:
Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

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

See, as they strip the robe from off his back
And spread his arms and nail them to the cross,
The dark nails pierce him and the sky turns black,
And love is firmly fastened onto loss.
But here a pure change happens. On this tree
Loss becomes gain, death opens into birth.
Here wounding heals and fastening makes free
Earth breathes in heaven, heaven roots in earth.
And here we see the length, the breadth, the height
Where love and hatred meet and love stays true
Where sin meets grace and darkness turns to light
We see what love can bear and be and do,
And here our saviour calls us to his side
His love is free, his arms are open wide.

Silence

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus.

There is room in my heart for thee.

**Why, what hath my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
He gave the blind their sight.
Sweet injuries! Yet they at these
themselves displease,
and 'gainst Him rise.**

**The Twelfth Station:
Jesus dies on the cross**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

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

The dark nails pierce him and the sky turns black
We watch him as he labours to draw breath
He takes our breath away to give it back,
Return it to it's birth through his slow death.
We hear him struggle breathing through the pain
Who once breathed out his spirit on the deep,
Who formed us when he mixed the dust with rain
And drew us into consciousness from sleep.
His spirit and his life he breathes in all
Mantles his world in his one atmosphere
And now he comes to breathe beneath the pall
Of our pollutions, draw our injured air
To cleanse it and renew. His final breath
Breathes us, and bears us through the gates of death.

Silence

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**They rise, and needs will have
my dear Lord made away;
a murderer they save,
the Prince of Life they slay.
Yet cheerful He to suffering goes,
that He His foes from thence might free.**

**The Thirteenth Station:
Jesus' body is taken down from the cross**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
**Because by your holy cross you have redeemed
the world.**

His spirit and his life he breathes in all
Now on this cross his body breathes no more
Here at the centre everything is still
Spent, and emptied, opened to the core.
A quiet taking down, a prising loose
A cross-beam lowered like a weighing scale
Unmaking of each thing that had its use
A long withdrawing of each bloodied nail,
This is ground zero, emptiness and space
With nothing left to say or think or do
But look unflinching on the sacred face
That cannot move or change or look at you.
Yet in that prising loose and letting be
He has unfastened you and set you free.

Silence

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
**Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.**

**In life, no house, no home
my Lord on earth might have;
in death, no friendly tomb
but what a stranger gave.
What may I say? Heav'n was His home,
but mine the tomb wherein He lay.**

**The Fourteenth Station:
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.**

Here at the centre everything is still
Before the stir and movement of our grief
Which bears its pain with rhythm, ritual,
Beautiful useless gestures of relief.
So they anoint the skin that cannot feel
Soothing his ruined flesh with tender care,
Kissing the wounds they know they cannot heal,
With incense scenting only empty air.
He blesses every love that weeps and grieves
And makes our grief the pangs of a new birth.
The love that's poured in silence at old graves
Renewing flowers, tending the bare earth,
Is never lost. In him all love is found
And sown with him, a seed in the rich ground.

Silence

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
grant us your peace.**

**Here might I stay and sing,
no story so divine;
never was love, dear King,
never was grief like Thine.
This is my Friend, in whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend.**

**The Fifteenth Station:
Easter Dawn**

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.**

He blesses every love which weeps and grieves
And now he blesses hers who stood and wept
And would not be consoled, or leave her love's
Last touching place, but watched as low light crept
Up from the east. A sound behind her stirs
A scatter of bright birdsong through the air.
She turns, but cannot focus through her tears,
Or recognise the Gardener standing there.
She hardly hears his gentle question 'Why,
Why are you weeping?', or sees the play of light
That brightens as she chokes out her reply
'They took my love away, my day is night'
And then she hears her name, she hears Love say
The Word that turns her night, and ours, to Day.

Silence

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

**As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

Christ crucified draw us to himself,
to find him a sure ground for faith,
a firm support for hope,
and the assurance of sins forgiven;

and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
+ the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.

Amen.

**All for Jesus! all for Jesus!
This our song shall ever be;
For we have no hope nor Saviour
If we have not hope in thee.**

**All for Jesus! thou wilt give us
Strength to serve thee hour by hour:
None can move us from thy presence
While we trust thy love and power.**

**All for Jesus! at thine altar
Thou dost give us sweet content;
There, dear Saviour, we receive thee
In thy holy sacrament.**

**All for Jesus! thou hast loved us,
All for Jesus! thou hast died,
All for Jesus! thou art with us,
All for Jesus, glorified!**

**All for Jesus! All for Jesus!
This the Church's song shall be,
Till at last the flock is gathered
One in love, and one in thee.**