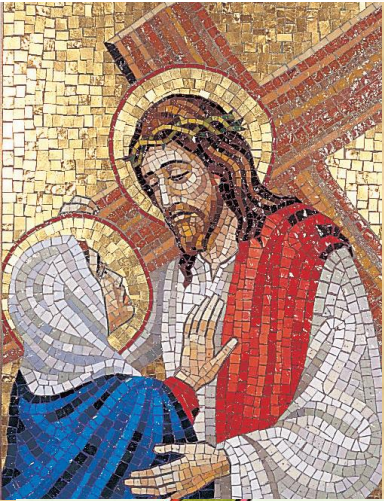


Stations of the Cross

“The Way of the Cross winds through hospitals, refugee camps, places of conflict and anywhere where there is suffering, pain and acts of humanity. It is there that we should stop and reflect as we recall the journey of Jesus to Easter that couldn’t bypass Calvary.”





Pilate says...



“I am frightened. Never have I felt like this before. The shouting of the crowd is deafening, and I can hardly hear myself think. He is standing before me, bloody, battered and ridiculous in that mocking crown, hardly human at all. He has no power; he is so weak he can hardly stand; his friends have all vanished. He is all alone. He is my prisoner, entirely at my mercy: so why does it feel when I look into his eyes that he is the judge and I am the accused? I am in control, his life is in my hands, my soldiers wait for my command: so why is it that he is so calm, so self-assured and I am in turmoil? I would give anything to let him go. I am the Governor here, a courageous Roman should be able to tough it out to tell them who is boss, to say he must be released and we'll have none of their foolish squabbles. A courageous Roman should; a courageous Roman would. My rich clothes and rich living have always made me feel so powerful before, but now I feel naked, weak and frightened. A brave man would protect him from this crowd, only a coward would hand him over.”



Barabbas says...



“A life for a life; his life for mine. If this strange and unsettling man had not walked into Jerusalem a few days ago, it would be me feeling the weight of that beam now, my back being gouged with rough splinters. Yet now, I am free. I'm still not sure that I can believe it. A voice inside me cries 'Run, run before they change their mind', but I cannot. This man's life is tied to mine somehow, and I must see where the story will end. Every day I live now, I live because of him. I did not think that my life mattered all that much, I did not think it was worth much at all, but now the world looks different. It feels as if somehow he has drawn all the hatred, all the anger, all the fear out of them, and there is none left for me, so I can walk away. For the first time that I can ever remember, it feels as if I matter, as if my life is worth something.”

A Bystander in the crowd says...



“You do not need to know my name, I am too ashamed to tell it. He has just staggered past, jostled and jeered at by the crowd. I hardly know who he is, I hardly know what is going on here at all. I heard the noise and came to see what was happening, and found myself caught up in chaos. They all seem so angry. Just as he drew level with me he tripped, and gasped and fell and the cheering and the jeering grew louder. I don't know what came over me, but I felt so full of anger, as if he must pay for every failure, every hurt, every rejection, and I screamed and I spat and I kicked. I never knew I had so much anger in me, so much fear, so much hate, and I poured it all onto him while he just lay there. Now I feel empty, tired and frightened, a stranger to myself. What have I become?”

Jesus' mother Mary says...



“I remember the old man, all those years ago. 'He is destined to be a sign that is opposed, and a sword will pierce you soul'. How sharp that sword feels. How can they hate my son, who I love so much? It is every parent's destiny that they, the first teachers of their children, will one day find they have become the learner, their child the teacher. But this lesson is too hard. My love for him is so great, but it breaks my heart that it is not enough to cancel out all this hate.”

Simon of Cyrene says...



“This was no part of my plan, this carrying a cross. An African in Jerusalem, the last thing I wanted was to stand out from the crowd. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, coming in through the gate as he was coming out, and before I knew what was happening I was his reluctant helper. He was tired, and I could see that he could not manage on his own. He could hardly breathe, and he said not a word to me. I felt so conspicuous, so full of resentment, so sorry for myself. But as we walked, I found that every time I took a little more of the weight of the cross, he was able to stand a little taller. There was nothing I could do to save him from what was coming, but I found that each struggle of mine to take the weight made his burden less, and made him less bowed, less degraded, less inhuman. This began to fascinate me because never before had I realised that simple acts and gestures could restore a man's dignity. I felt like a child again, full of wonder and excitement as I began to discover something new. In the end, I was sorry to let the cross go, because this tool of torture had opened my eyes, had opened my heart.”



Veronica says...



“It hangs now on the wall, this piece of cloth that has become my most treasured possession. I have never thought of myself as particularly kind, particularly compassionate. I am just an ordinary sort of woman, with an ordinary sort of life. I can't say what it was that moved me so much that day - something about his face, I suppose, that looked as if it concealed all the sorrows of the world. Never before have I made a dramatic gesture, never before have I thrown caution to the winds. I nearly didn't do it, I nearly didn't have the courage, but something in that face spoke to my heart. It was like something I have never seen before that moved me to the very depths; but I have seen it since. I have seen that face in every lonely, sad despairing person I have met since - goodness knows there are enough of them if you know where to look. The memory of the look of gratitude that came over that blessed face as I wiped it clean, the message I can see on the cloth today, is what drives me on, drives me to seek them out, those other suffering Christs, and to repeat time after time little acts of compassion. I have found my heart”



Mary Magdalene says...



“This is intolerable, this memory of such pain and such powerlessness. I was dead, dead in sadness, and in sin, and in pointlessness, and this man brought me back to life. Never before have I known a man so alive - must I watch that life now be extinguished? He lifted me up from the dust, gave me back my dignity, made me see that I am loveable after all, allowed me to stand tall. Must I now see him sprawled exhausted on the ground? They are all so angry, so angry with him, it seems, am I the only one who feels anger at a world that stands by and watches as this man - any man - is treated as if he were not human, as if he were a beast, or less than a beast?”

A Woman from Jerusalem says...



“My cheeks felt as if they were on fire with my tears. It was all so sad, so horrifying, so utterly pointless. the stupidity of men arguing over power and position. I wept and wept and wept for him, but when he spoke I realised that the tears were as much for myself as for him. I was weeping for a world that was more cruel than I wished it, weeping for the world in which my children would grow up, weeping for humanity that could be so inhuman. How have we let this happen? How have we let them get away with this? For the first time I saw that this world I feel so scared of is my world, too. All the attitudes and prejudices that make it like this have wormed their way into my heart too. Looking on at this intolerable procession, am I a victim or am I a perpetrator, too?”



Jesus' friend John says...



“Can this be the same man who I ate with just a few hours ago? The man I saw transfigured on the mountain, the man who let me come so close to his heart. He looks so different, I hardly remember how he used to look. The time we spent together now seems so short, the words he spoke so few: can I remember them all? I feel repelled by this savagery, but drawn to the man who lies exhausted on the ground. I see the throb of the vein in his neck, and remember the beat of his heart as we embraced at that extraordinary meal. If only I had listened more, if only I had paid more attention. There are so many questions I want answered, if only I had asked them. I get the feeling that it is not quite over yet, that he may still have more to teach me, and so I am watching his lips, waiting, hanging on any and every word.”



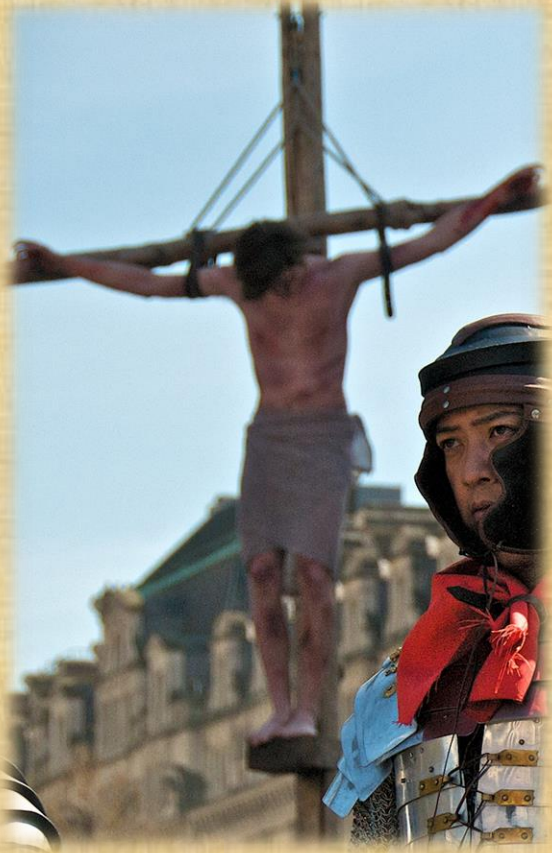
A Roman Guard says...



“Sometimes they struggle and fight with us; sometimes they beg; sometimes they cry. He just stood there as we stripped him, and I was grateful that he looked away. We took away the very last things that he had, until only life remained, and even that was fragile and almost gone, but he just stood there. I didn't feel sorry for him, I didn't feel pity. I'm not paid to feel. I've done this many times before, but there was something different here. He didn't cling to the clothes that we took, he just let them go; it was as if he didn't need them, and was almost pleased to see them gone. I'll never forget this killing. It had become just a job, just something you do, but this one unsettled me, and I don't have the taste to do another. Every other prisoner has seemed as if he were already almost dead; this one seemed more alive than any man I have ever known”



The Good Thief says...



“This cannot last much longer. My death must come soon. An hour ago I was full of anger, resentment and fear. How dare they do this to me, why must I be punished when so many others are so much worse. What wicked twist of fate had brought me to this point. But this man, nailed beside me is so different. I cannot see why they are killing him, and as I look at him I see how different he is from me. No-one deserves to die like this, but while I am here for theft, he is here for healing; while I am here for taking, he is here for giving. And he has promised me paradise; it sounds so absurd, but something about him makes me think that it is true. Only minutes ago I was angry, Oh so angry that they were going to do this to me. Now I am angrier still, but it is all anger that they dare do this to him.”



A Roman Centurion says...



“Orders are orders, and I do as I am told. If he must die, then I will see that he does. I can see them now, a whole succession of scoundrels and wasters, of no-hopers and crooks, who I have led out to the cross and despatched without a second thought. This time was different, and we may have got this wrong. The things he said while he was on the cross were quite extraordinary. He didn't die like a criminal at all, and my conscience is uneasy. What did he mean, "Father forgive them"? Before today I have never had a second thought, but as I walk away I feel glad of that forgiveness. It is not a word that I have heard often - in fact I am not sure that I have ever been forgiven before. It is a strange feeling, and it makes me anxious to get away from here, anxious to take off this armour and this crested helmet. Those two words are ones that I will never forget: forgive them”.



Joseph of Arimathea says...



“This savagery was never my wish, never my intention. Those were lonely days when I followed him and listened to him preach. I went in disguise, exchanged my beautiful clothes for a servant's cloak, and I hid in doorways with my face covered. He fascinated me in a way that no other preacher ever did and I could not keep away, but nor could I dare to let anyone see me there. I was scared of what people would say, scared of what people might do. I saw them scream and spit at him, and I could not bear what they might do to me. It was the sight of his journey to the cross that changed all that: every insult was so bravely born, every ounce of hatred calmly accepted. 'I'm not a brave man', I thought, 'I could never do anything like that'. But then I thought 'he is a man, he can feel pain, he can suffer, he can be frightened, but he still carried on - why should I be less than him'. All my fear melted away, so I went to Pilate: 'It is me, Joseph' I said, standing tall in front of him. 'Let me bury my friend'. Now they all know where my sympathies lie, but I'm not frightened now. Courage was his parting gift to me”



Nicodemus says...



“That first meeting with him was quite extraordinary. I think he sensed my unease as I came to him in the safety of the darkness. I went there with such foolish confidence: 'we know that you are a teacher who has come from God' I said. How naive I was to think that I had grasped it all. I was so full of myself, so full of what I knew. But within minutes he was saying to me 'Are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?' I went to him full of confidence, full of what I knew; and he made me realise that, as to all the things that really mattered, I knew nothing. So as this night falls, I am here once more, humbler and, I hope, wiser, to place him in his tomb. I do not know what will happen next, but I cannot be despondent. I am no longer so sure of my own wisdom, so sure of what I know; my ignorance, my lack of understanding, seems to be the most fertile ground for God's extraordinary intervention.”