

Our journey has brought us to the final day of Christ's earthly life, as we walk with him to his place of execution. Having entered the city riding on a donkey, Jesus, like all condemned prisoners, is forced to walk to his place of execution as an example to others. Nowadays, the tourist is able to visit the Via Dolorosa (the Way of Sorrows); a medieval route which enables pilgrims to follow the route of Jesus from the place of trial to the place of crucifixion. It's a route we will follow today in our imaginations. The Via Dolorosa's historical accuracy is not absolutely certain (a number of the stations are not actually recorded in the Bible though they have been traditionally observed since the church was young) but that will not prevent it from being useful today.

We turn then, and look at the streets. Built by the Romans the roads of Jerusalem are narrower now than they were 2000 years ago. They were busy shopping streets then but nowadays the shops have encroached onto the main streets until only a narrow souk remains. In addition the Roman walls were on different lines to those of today – Calvary was originally outside the city walls.

Along the route we will be travelling are fourteen stations. A station is a standing place and at each one as we walk along the road we will pause and reflect on Christ's path. Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." To follow our Lord on the way of sorrows helps us to understand Jesus better and to love him more as we reflect on what he endured for us.

We stand at the al-Omariya school on the site of the Roman Antonia Fortress. Here, Jesus stood before Pilate. We see Pilate washing his hands, unable to find a way to free Jesus, as he condemns our Lord to death – a death we have caused. Because we, like Pilate, often do things we know to be wrong because we are afraid. And it's sins such as these that condemn Jesus.

As our Lord is led out from the amphitheatre we pass near a pillar and recall how, only a few minutes earlier, Jesus had been tied to it and brutally received the infamous thirty-nine lashes. We walk through the "Ecco Homo" arch, the words of Pilate - "Behold the man!" still ringing in our ears until we come to the foot of the steps from the school and stop in order to receive the cross.

As the sun beats down on us we struggle forward to the third station at the next corner turning onto the Via Dolorosa – the way of sorrows – itself. With our faces to the ground we notice the Roman paving stones beneath our feet. Nowadays some have been raised to the surface and we can literally walk in the footsteps of our Lord. Elsewhere the stones still lie several feet down in the ground. A few yards further we fall to the ground for the first time, the earlier flogging making the weight of the cross difficult to bear as it rubs across our back – a back that has shards of flesh hanging from it as a result of the scourging.

Blood still drips from the thorns in our head and we are weakened by the blows from the soldiers. And then, we see someone we recognize. Jesus meets his mother, and it is that moment that she feels the pain that Simeon predicted all those years ago - "A sword will pierce your own soul too".

Struggling on we come to the fifth station where a foreigner is forced to help us carry the burden. Selected because he is of a different race to the others around him, we reflect that 2000 years later, things are not really much different. We still categorise and discriminate because of race, gender, religion and all other differences that drive us to hate. Nowadays, there is a little chapel of the Little Sisters of Charles de Foucauld on the site of the sixth station, the station of kindness. Here, Veronica wiped the face of Jesus (according to

tradition), giving him some respite from the stinging sweat and blood that poured down him.

The respite is short though as he falls for a second time. On regaining his feet he hears, above the noise of the jeering, spitting crowd the sound of the women wailing – the professional mourners had gathered. Jesus stops, turns, and we can imagine in a voice croaking with exhaustion tells them not to weep for him but for themselves and their children.

There is a Roman pillar at the gateway to the Egyptian Coptic Patriarchate where, tradition tells us, Jesus fell for the third time on the threshold of the Judgement Gate. This was on the city wall, leading out to the place of crucifixion at Calvary. We still hear the mocking and accusations of the soldiers and crowd – remember, when people are persecuted it is because their goodness makes others hate them.

Entering the courtyard we come in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. There is a steep narrow staircase on the right as you enter this building leading up to the place where Jesus was stripped of his clothes. Nearby Jesus is laid on the cross and we hear the sound of metal striking metal as the nails are hammered through his flesh to fasten him to the instrument of destruction.

And there, just behind is the rock of Calvary – a rock where, even today, you can place your hands in the cleft that held the cross on which our Saviour was lifted up.

In your mind's eye look on him now. The sun beats down on him as he hangs there in agony, blood caking dry on his forehead as it continues to ooze from the holes in his hands and feet. The young man hangs there, dying in front of your eyes.

And it's all your fault.

He hangs there, bleeding, beaten and dying because of the sins you have committed. Every one throughout your life has caused him to be in this point of despair, desolation and abandonment.

And now it is time for you to respond, silently, and with love and gratitude. Now is not a time to hold back the tears – it's a time to weep: but not for him, but for your sins that brought him to this moment.

And as he yields up his spirit and is taken down from the cross to be laid in the tomb just a short distance away, we can pray.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, who at the evening hour rested in the sepulchre, and thereby sanctified the grave to be a bed of hope for your people: make us so to abound in sorrow for our sins, which were the cause of your passion, that when our bodies lie in the dust, our souls may live with you; for you are alive and reign, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.