



Stations of the Cross for Peace between Israel and Palestine

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa wrote this week of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The pain and dismay at what is happening is great. Once again we find ourselves in the midst of a political and military crisis. We have suddenly been catapulted into a sea of unprecedented violence. The hatred, which we have unfortunately already been experiencing for too long, will increase even more, and the ensuing spiral of violence will create more destruction. Everything seems to speak of death.

Yet, in this time of sorrow and dismay, we do not want to remain helpless. We cannot let death and its sting (1 Cor 15:55) be the only word we hear.

That is why we feel the need to pray, to turn our hearts to God the Father. Only in this way we can draw the strength and serenity needed to endure these hard times, by turning to Him, in prayer and intercession, to implore and cry out to God amidst this anguish.

I – Jesus is condemned to death

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



Defenceless, defeated it seems – Jesus, a prisoner with hands bound, stands before Pontius Pilate, the “evil empire’s” regional commander-in-chief. All the power seems to be in Pilate’s hands – the power to condemn or release. And yet it is Jesus who is at peace, his conscience untroubled, his mission clear. And Pilate? He is caught in compromise, his conscience dulled and dismissed. As Jesus is led away, Pilate washes his hands in guilt. He will never know peace again.

The first victim of war is truth. Violence and brutality construct a convenient story to justify themselves. Propaganda. Lies. But conflict begins in the battles of the individual human heart. What are the lies and deceptions of my own life?

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, grant us a feeling of shock.

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 whatever you wish.

II – Jesus takes up his cross

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

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.



How perverse, how sadistic it is to make the condemned carry the instrument of their own execution. Yet while others recoil from their cross, Jesus embraces the rough, splintering beam – like a soldier being issued with the weapon that can bring his deliverance. As the jagged cross cuts through his skin, Jesus momentarily closes his eyes in prayer before taking the first steps towards Calvary.

At the outbreak of war, people instinctively reach for different things – for loved ones, for food and water, for weapons, for news... In the face of danger would my first thought be for my own self-preservation or of solidarity with the suffering and the weak?

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, grant us a feeling of dislocation.

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 whatever you wish

III – Jesus falls for the first time

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



The Son of God stumbles and crashes to the ground, the weight of the cross crushing him against the stone cobbles. Deprived of sleep, weakened by the beatings and baiting of the soldiers and guards, a cacophony of abuse ringing in his ears, Jesus is overwhelmed by this blitzkrieg of pain. There are many watching the scene who delight in his fall – this man who has been such a threat to their authority now being publically humiliated and shamed. This should be the end of all that.

In war there is a need not just to overcome your enemy but to break their spirit and bring them to their knees. Victory comes from the total annihilation of the other – this is the way of war. Have there been times when I have delighted in the falls and defeats of others? Take from me, Lord, any envy or jealousy towards others. Lord, teach me how to humble my pride.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, grant us a feeling of horror.

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 whatever you wish.

IV – Jesus meets his mother

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



Wives and mothers are often sent away from the battle zone for their own safety, leaving the men in the firing line. But Mary will not, cannot leave her son in his hour of need. Fearlessly and faithfully, she comes forward to offer Jesus, through a tender touch and a gentle gaze, the love and support she has given him since the very first moment of his life in her. Love is more powerful than any threat or force. Love is stronger than death itself. Her heart pierced with grief, Mary unites herself with every mother who has lost a child through tragedy or violence.

War tears families and friendships apart. The deepest human bonds ruptured through separation and exile, loved ones taken away perhaps never to be seen again. Desolation and despair. Let us pray for all families who grieve at this time, for all families who have been separated by war. We entrust them to Mary's motherly care. ***Hail Mary, full of grace...***

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, teach us to be generous.

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 whatever you wish.

V – Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross

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

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.



War is like an earthquake, sending out shock waves far from its epicentre. More and more people are shaken by its impact. And so it was that Simon of Cyrene, an innocent passer-by, was dragged from the crowd and forced to help Jesus carry his cross. The soldiers, seeing their prisoner's frailty, fear he will not make it to the place of execution. Simon is a conscript, forced into service against his will, but these brief moments by Jesus' side will change his life for ever. In the condemned man's determination and dignity, Simon sees that this is a life not taken by force but freely given in love. He is the first to be healed by Jesus' saving blood.

In a time of war there are no bystanders in the heat of the battle. Lord, help us not to be passive observers, passers-by in the struggle between good and evil, between life and death but to walk by your side and, like Simon, help those in need, the weak and the wounded, to carry their cross.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, teach us to be generous.

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 whatever you wish.

VI – Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

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



Brutality cannot be stopped by yet more atrocity but it can be exposed and shamed by tenderness and compassion. Such was the effect of Veronica's daring to step out of the crowd to offer Jesus the soothing balm of her dampened cloth on his bloodied and beaten face. An exquisite sensation of relief, of human care shielding him from the shrapnel and shards of others' rejection. He has inspired in Veronica this heroic act of service through his own example of selfless care for so many. She stands there on behalf of all whom Jesus has touched and transformed through his own healing mercy.

Survivors of conflict often tell stories of those who, in the midst of humanity's most barbaric actions, perform acts of heroic courage and self-sacrifice. Lord, help us to live in the spirit of Veronica, not afraid to stand out from the crowd and reach out to those in need whatever others may say. May we too respond to carnage with compassion.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, teach us to be generous.

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 am may love you always and then do with me whatever you wish.

VII – Jesus falls for the second time

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



Once again Jesus collapses under the burden of it all, this relentless bombardment of human hate. His bloodied body stains the ground, his open wounds and lacerated skin turning crimson. How fragile, how soft and fleshy our bodies are when our defences and securities are taken away from us. We are so easily cut apart. Who could imagine there was so much blood in one human body?

The walls and floors of military and civilian hospitals in war zones are smeared with blood. So many who die in war die from bleeding. Shrapnel cutting through veins and arteries. Civilians are the softest target – bombed in their homes and schools, caught by snipers while risking a search in the open street for food or water. Soldiers too – their helmets and jackets no match for bullets and bombs. Let us pray for all medical and emergency teams who try to patch up and save the fallen, bleeding casualties of war. Heal us, Lord, of our human hatred through your saving blood.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, teach us to be generous.

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 whatever you wish.

VIII – Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

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



The spectacle of condemned criminals carrying their cross to their place of execution outside the city walls has become almost a routine, even a daily occurrence at festival times. It is a constant reminder to the Jewish people of the consequences of rebellion and resistance against their Roman oppressors. But people still find ways to show their opposition, such as this band of women, mostly mothers, who have their established station on the execution route where they mourn and lament the prisoners as they pass by. It is their own act of defiance against this institutionalised slaughter.

We might expect Jesus to thank the women for their resistance to power, and solidarity with the condemned, but instead he warns them that the time will come when they and their children will also become victims of this violence. Evil, like a virus, seeks to multiply and spread – it is voracious and all-consuming. War is a cancer which, once started, we struggle to contain. Lord, help us to realise that there are no winners only losers in war – it is a tragedy for us all. We are all invaded. We are all infected.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, give us the faithfulness to not look away.

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 whatever you wish.

IX – Jesus falls for the third time

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



Calvary is in sight, not far to go now. But Jesus is surrounded, under siege from all sides. The human spirit can cope with so much, but when the attacks become relentless and our life-lines are cut, we become overwhelmed and everything falls apart under the sheer pressure of it all. Jesus too is on the brink of breakdown – trembling, barely able to take another step. And yet from within he hears his Father's voice and picks himself up for one last push.

So many people are on the edge of collapse, fighting for survival in our world today. Victims of war, hunger, crime... The climate around them changing beyond their control. Refugees forced from their communities and homes by crippling poverty, the threat of starvation or the atrocities of persecution and conflict. Torn away from their roots, they seek sanctuary in unknown lands at the mercy of human traffickers and gangs. Lord, guide all refugees, guide all those living on the edge to find the hope and help they so desperately need. May they also hear the Father's voice and know his loving hand in theirs.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, give us the faithfulness to not look away.

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 am may love you always and then do with me whatever you wish.

X – Jesus is stripped of his garments

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

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.



Exhausted, his head throbbing with the incessant noise and dehydration, Jesus finally reaches the hill of Calvary. Now the soldiers begin their sacrificial rite. First his body is stripped naked – nothing left to hide behind or give any sense of human dignity. Total exposure, the removal not only of his blood soaked garments, but also of any human rights.

The victims of war likewise lose all they have – their home, possessions, food, water, health care, family... Stripped of all, they become totally defenceless. This is not just individuals but also whole peoples – the majority of humanity dispossessed and vulnerable while the powerful few look on and cast lots for their clothing.

Lord, help us to respond with compassion not indifference to those stripped bare in our world today. To clothe the naked, feed the hungry and welcome the stranger... To restore dignity to the broken and bleeding. This is the mission we are called to by Jesus.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, give us the faithfulness to not look away.

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 whatever you wish.

XI – Jesus is nailed to the cross

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



The Creator of the universe is pinned to the cross, his hands and feet immobile, impotent. The soldiers with well-trained efficiency hammer the iron nails through flesh and bone, inflicting pain beyond pain on the condemned. And then the raising of the cross into the ground with a shuddering jolt which tears at the prisoners' wounds. Now the real torture begins – the slow asphyxiation as the prisoners struggle to pull themselves up to breathe. Every gasp for air costs them so much.

As war becomes more desperate, more extreme tactics are used, such as the deployment of chemical weapons, often on civilians – toxic weapons which burn the lungs and skin of their victims. These weapons are designed to cause the most horrific pain and suffering to break the spirit of those they are used against. Lord, take from our human hearts this terrible desire to make others suffer. Cleanse us of cruelty and inhumanity. Restore in us your image and likeness.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, give us the faithfulness to not look away.

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 whatever you wish.

XII – Jesus dies on the cross

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



For three hours Jesus hangs on the cross, conserving every bit of energy so as to have the strength to speak his final words and, in his dying, give the most powerful lesson of his life. To love to his final breath, to continue to minister to both friend and foe, to care for those closest to him. And above all to live his loyalty and love for the Father to the very end.

In war there are clearly defined sides – opposing armies with different uniforms, weapons, languages and military objectives. But on the cross, as throughout all his life, Jesus does not divide people into sides. He prays for all – the righteous and the unjust, the oppressors and the oppressed, Gentile and Jew. Beneath the different armour and uniforms we are simply men and women, flesh and blood, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters – Jesus offers his life for us all. Lord, help us, faced with so many divisions in our world today, to remember our common humanity, our shared dignity as children of the one God as we pray together ***Our Father...***

Silent reflection

Prayer

Lord, give us the faithfulness to not look away.

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 am may love you always and then do with me whatever you wish.

XIII – Jesus is taken down from the cross

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



The finality of death. A body which even a short time before had breathed and pulsed with life now stiffens and shrinks. A mere shell it seems, left behind as the soul journeys on... And yet the respect and reverence we naturally show to a corpse speaks of its continued sacredness. This has been a work of God's hands, a temple of the Holy Spirit. With what sadness but defiant care Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take charge of Jesus' body, a public declaration of their faith in him. They gently lower him down from the cross and, for a short time, place his body, already cool to the touch, in his mother's arms. Jesus ends his life as he began it – in Mary's tender care.

In war some of the fallen are honoured with a dignified funeral, even a hero's farewell. But for so many there is no such ceremony as they are entombed in rubble and ruins, or hastily hidden in unmarked graves by alien hands. How many loved ones wait in vain for them ever to be found or identified. There should be dignity in death as in life. Lord, help us to show reverence to every human life, at every stage and state of life.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

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 whatever you wish.

XIV – Jesus is laid in the tomb

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



The crowds have all gone home – rushing to prepare for the Passover feast before the sun sets. There is a sudden silence and stillness where before there was so much rage and raw emotion. Jesus' body is brought to a garden and laid in the earth, like a seed which will bear fruit in due time.

Lord, at this time when the skies over Ukraine thunder and roar with missiles and bombs, when families and communities are torn apart by the carnage of war, we pray for peace to return to Ukraine and to all countries and peoples plagued by war in the world today. Silence once more the weapons of war. Change the hearts of those who choose war. Comfort and console all who suffer, on all sides. May birdsong replace the din of bombardment, bullets and bombs; may freedom and hope be restored and renewed on Ukrainian soil. And may we, as a human family, reject division and empire, greed and domination. May we walk once again the path of peace. Lead all those involved in this terrible war on the road to reconciliation. Just as out of the tomb you rose to new life, so too, we pray, that out of this darkness, Lord, you may bring light. For this we pray.

Silent reflection

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

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 am may love you always and then do with me whatever you wish.

***We unite our prayers with those of all the Church, as we pray for the Holy Father's intentions:
Our Father... Hail Mary.... Glory be to the Father...***

Closing Prayer

Loving God, in the Stations of the Cross you show your faithfulness to us, faithfulness even to your death on the cross. Be faithful now to all living in Israel and Palestine. Grant them Peace and the salvation you revealed at Easter. Bring us all closer to your kingdom

