

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS TODAY

Praying the Stations of the Cross
in Holy Trinity Parish, Braamfontein

With Reflections by the Artist

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&

Meditations by

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Pictures of the Stations of the Cross
in Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Braamfontein
painted by Joseph Capelle

Stations of the Cross were photographed by Leica S2 System
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Introduction

The paintings of the Stations of the Cross do not seek to reproduce the natural world but rather to interpret the events detailed in the scriptures of two thousand years ago and to make them relevant for us today. Although the artist's notes give an explanation of his intentions, the individual viewers are left to discover meaning for themselves through their reflection and prayer on the paintings.

In his technique Capelle has utilised the two-dimensionality of paintings and has made no attempt to show perspective. To create interest he has used other techniques on the surface area: for example, visible brushstrokes, hand painting, hard-edge and smudging.

The paintings are universal in their depiction of humanity, but are influenced by the African context which is subtly suggested in a number of ways, most especially in the patterns on the cloth of the garments. This influence can also be detected in the African type head gear and the suggestions made, for example, in the beaded collar worn by Pilate in the First Station. Veronica, with her beautifully coloured head scarf and beaded bodice, is another example of the African influence. However, the paintings aim at inclusivity –

implicit in Jesus' teachings – and the whole world's face can be detected, including that of the Jewish women of Jesus' own culture. The message of the Stations is not constrained by colour, race or culture.

Some faces are coloured unnaturally as an indication of the mood of the Station. Colour and hands are used to express emotions and feelings in many of the Stations.

The space in the paintings is divided into positive and negative elements and the treatment of both areas is given equal significance. The figures exist in a non-figurative framework often based on the shape of the cross. The artist likes to think of his paintings as being modern equivalents of icons which are in praise of God and are two-dimensional.

The Stations are intended to give a timeless look at the events of the Passion and help us ask ourselves 'How do they relate to me today?' They attempt to bring us face to face with the Passion of Jesus by drawing us into the events they depict and which we experience in our own lives. They are 'springboards' into prayer which evoke feelings in us and draw on our own experience so that, in our own lives, we see how Jesus suffers, dies and rises again.



1 Jesus is Condemned to Death

If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

John 8:31-32

The Artist's Reflections

How often do we condemn or judge because of our own prejudice and fear?

The judgement of Jesus is set against prison walls. There is a complete contrast in the way Pilate and Jesus are shown in this Station. Pilate is flamboyantly and richly dressed, wearing an elaborate headdress and a magnificent collar. He is the epitome of power and confidence. Jesus, in contrast, is in a foetal position symbolising his vulnerability. He is clothed in a garment which represents his imprisonment. His attitude is one of complete submissiveness, but also of acceptance. He has the freedom to choose his own path.

Pilate's face is divided in two with the yellow symbolising life and the blue, death. Judgement has yet to be given and therefore a bird in flight is superimposed on the yellow side of his face. If Pilate had set Jesus free, then he would have made a judgement that is life-giving and Jesus would have been free – but humanity would not have

been redeemed. The dark blue side of Pilate's face is shown incorporating a black cross and, in his headdress, three nails: the instruments that will be used in Jesus' crucifixion if he is to be condemned. Judgement will be given and the blue sky behind the right side of his face is symbolic of our ultimate redemption.

At the bottom left, Pilate washes the guilt from his hands. The two faces imposed on the prison wall at the top right are indicative of humanity's condemnation and judgement; they are blinded by prejudice and fear and they shout condemnation at an innocent man whom they cannot see clearly because they are looking away from him.

Meditation

It is so easy to make harsh judgements about others, sometimes because we have not taken the time to understand their circumstances or because we are blinded by our own fear and prejudice. Like Pilate we often desire power: this can manifest itself in a certain self-righteous confidence. Our yearning for power over others often conceals our deeply seated prejudice and fears.

Jesus, on the other hand, teaches us that we need to be true to ourselves even if this means our vulnerabilities are exposed. Our ability to be faithful, like Jesus, will give us the life-giving freedom

we so often seek. Pilate is really the vulnerable one who lives in fear.

What are my deepest fears? In what ways do I abuse my power as a parent, priest, teacher, community leader or employer? Which of my vulnerabilities might be the very things that lead me to freedom if I dare reveal them to others?

Lord Jesus,

There are many things that I am afraid of, especially those things that make me feel vulnerable.

In my desperate attempts to conceal my fears and vulnerability in order to look self-confident and strong, I can so easily think I am better and stronger than others.

Forgive me for the times I have worn a mask and in so doing been dishonest with you and others.

Forgive me for the judgement and prejudice I carry in my heart.

Help me to be more like you and make choices that are life-giving to me and others. Amen.



2 Jesus Takes up his Cross

There are two extremes to avoid: being completely absorbed in your pain and being distracted by so many things that you stay far away from the wound you want to heal.

Henri J.M. Nouwen in *The Inner Voice of Love*

The Artist's Reflections

What in my life has entangled me and become a barrier between God and me?

Jesus looks up to his Father, offering up the cross in reparation for all our sins. At the base of the painting, gross humanity, snail like, crawls heedless of the drama being played out for our redemption. Entangled in the lines which chain us to the earth we are only aware of what lies immediately before us, our immediate surroundings. Only one figure looks up at Jesus with horror and any understanding.

As Jesus takes up the wood of the cross the shapes and entangling lines are carried up and incorporated into the structure of the cross behind him; the cross will become the symbol of our redemption and thus our freedom.

In this Station the bird above the head of Jesus symbolises all the souls that will be redeemed by his sacrifice. The striped area on the right repre-

sents a barrier between heaven and earth that is lifted as he willingly lifts his cross.

Meditation

At times we feel crushed and entangled by the unavoidable burdens of life. We crawl, snail like, when our spirits feel heavy and oppressed by the burdens we carry. When things that afflict us overwhelm us we are tempted to think that we are cut off from God; that God has abandoned us. At times we cannot see the bigger picture, our burdens blind us from seeing any further than ourselves. At times we feel entangled and chained beneath the weight of human life.

Jesus takes on the burden of our humanity; he feels the unavoidable burdens of life and is tempted to believe that God has abandoned him. By embracing his cross, by not giving up when he is crushed under the weight of the cross, Jesus reminds us that we can overcome the heaviness in our own lives. Jesus dares to look up and glimpses the dove of freedom that flies above his head; he sees the bigger picture and knows that despite his sufferings God is at work and will raise him up and offer him the freedom from his burden that he so desires. Jesus wants us to look further than the burdens we carry. He urges us to look up and see how God is at work even when we feel abandoned.

What burdens do you feel on your shoulders today? Are you tempted, in your chains and entanglement, to think God has abandoned you? Where do you glimpse the dove of freedom in your life?

Lord Jesus,

The burdens of life make me feel overwhelmed and defeated.

Sometimes their weight is so great that I feel lonely and isolated.

My burdens can dispirit me, chain me and crush me.

Give me the courage and strength I need, not to run from the burdens of my life but to embrace them knowing that in those moments I walk your path.

Help me to trust that God never abandons me but is gently working to set me free. Amen.



3 Jesus Falls the First Time

In the space between yes and no there is a lifetime. It's the difference between the path you walk and the one you leave behind; it's the gap between who you thought you could be and who you really are...

Jodi Picoult in *Change of Heart*

The Artist's Reflections

Jesus gives us strength and hope to fulfil our vocations. Do we feel ready to give up at times? Do we despise others as they fall under the weight of their crosses?

As Jesus falls for the first time under the weight of the cross, he looks up and is confronted by evil. The evil spirit hovers at the top of the painting looking down at Jesus, tempting him, in vain, to give up his journey to Calvary and therefore be unfaithful to his mission. The shapes above his head symbolise the cross crashing down upon him as he falls. His hand desperately tries to hold on as he slips and falls.

Meditation

When things do not go as we would like them to we are tempted to 'throw in the towel' – to give up. At times we may hear a voice that tells us we cannot do it, a voice that tells us to give up. When relationships become fraught or the workload that confronts us seems insurmountable we may hear that discouraging voice saying 'give up'. There are times when we feel like we are desperately trying to hold on when life defeats us and things seem to come crashing down on our heads.

Others also struggle under the weight of their own cross. Sometimes we watch our loved ones, friends and acquaintances stumble and fall as they face their own struggles. It is easy to judge them or even despise them because of what they have done or failed to do. Sometimes we lay extra burdens on those who are already strained because of the unfair expectations we place on them.

It is Jesus himself who helps us when we might be tempted to give up. It is Jesus who reaches out, through us, to those around us who might be stumbling or falling as they walk the road of life. It is simply because Jesus faced the dark inner voice that said 'give it up!' and chose to be faithful that we can be faithful and overcome the burdens life places on our shoulders.

Are you tempted to be unfaithful, to simply give up? Have you made a harsh judgement on someone who has fallen or failed under the weight of his or her personal cross? In what areas of my life do I need courage and strength so that I can confront the struggles I face and despite them be faithful to who I really am?

Lord Jesus,

Give me the strength I need to overcome the crosses in my own life: those things that seem to defeat me.

Help me to be faithful especially when I am tempted to be unfaithful and even take the 'shortcut' that promises freedom.

Inspire me with words of encouragement, instead of condemnation, for my brothers and sisters who are weighed down by their own crosses.

May your courage be my inspiration and your faithfulness be my strength in times of discouragement. Amen.



4 Jesus Meets his Mother

God's purpose for us is that we acquire a seeing eye and an understanding heart.

Rumi

The Artist's Reflections

Are we present to those going through difficulties or mourning a loved one?

Jesus, despite his suffering, reaches out tenderly to his grieving mother. He is totally concerned with her suffering as she watches him walk to his death. They are united momentarily in the journey to Calvary by the blood stained shapes swirling around them. Jesus' hand reaches out, despite his own pain, to comfort his mother and gently reassure her.

The triptych at the top depicts: the annunciation, the nativity and the family life of Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus. These memories make the encounter much more personal and painful for Mary and any grieving mother.

Meditation

Family can be the source of much joy but also of our deepest hurts. Stormy family relationships, broken trust, abuse (alcohol, physical and sexual)

and the death of loved ones often haunt us for many years. We hurt and get hurt in our families. The place of greatest consolation can also be the place of our greatest desolation and deepest disappointments. We can shut family members and other loved ones out when we have been hurt by them. We can also be the source of deep hurt. Hurt is an inevitable part of our human story. The important thing for us is that we do not let the pain we have suffered (or caused) immobilise us. Mary remembers the happier moments she lived through with Jesus, her pain is reinforced when she remembers how things were before this terrible moment she now witnesses. The past puts the present into perspective for her.

Like Jesus, we are invited to stretch out our hands in comfort and reassurance to those who are hurting. If we find ourselves struggling with the pain caused by a loved one to us we, like Mary, are invited to accept the comfort and reassurance that we are offered. Notice how Jesus, even in this painful journey to Calvary, is concerned about others. Despite his suffering he reaches out to his mother and, in an intimate moment, tries to console her and reassure her that he is being faithful to God his Father. When we reach out to others and try to console them, despite our own struggles, things in the present are put into perspective for us.

Have loved ones hurt me? Have I hurt someone? Can I reach out to others in need despite my own suffering? Who has or is reaching out to me in comfort and reassurance that I may not have recognised?

Lord Jesus,

Family life can be my greatest comfort and support; it can also be my source of the deepest pain.

Grant me the love I need to forgive those closest to me that have caused me deep hurt.

Help me to recognise you in the hands of those who offer me comfort and reassurance.

Give me the strength I need to reach out to those around me who suffer, despite my own sufferings.

When pain causes me to lose my perspective, help me to see things as you see them.

Mary, Mother of Jesus, support me as you did your Son. Amen.



5 Simon Helps Jesus Carry his Cross

'Which one of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?'

He replied, 'The one who showed pity towards him'.

Jesus said to him, 'Go, and do the same yourself.'

Luke 10:36-37

The Artist's Reflections

Do we give our help to all who need it, or are we reluctant in our support?

Jesus is portrayed as both the sacrifice and the priest. Endurance and dignity are written large upon his sad face. The red cross passing through him and the two black crosses on his vestment foreshadow the great sacrifice of Calvary: Jesus is in the middle and the thieves are on either side.

In contrast to the figure of our Lord, Simon of Cyrene, as he receives the cross, is bent double under the weight of the wood. He is reluctant and uncomprehending yet generously accepts the circumstances he is dragged into.

The human shapes at the top right hand corner symbolise our journey through life. For Jesus this journey will end at the place of the skull.

Meditation

In a world of so much need it is overwhelmingly tempting to close our eyes to the sufferings of others. We fear becoming involved in the sufferings of others and so have become a society that is insensitive to the pain of others. It is so much easier for us to put our monetary 'concern' into an envelope or bank account and allow those who suffer to remain faceless and 'somewhere out there'.

Simon, despite his reluctance, fear and lack of understanding, is willing to help Jesus in his moment of need. Simon does not turn a blind eye or seek the easy way out. He recognises that Jesus is his brother and he assumes the responsibility that all God's children have for each other. The journey through life brings us, and others, to our own 'place of the skull'. Simon helps Jesus and we recognise in him our responsibility for each other, especially those who are the most weak and vulnerable in our world.

Am I insensitive to the pain of others and reluctant to get involved? Do I find ways of keeping the weak and most vulnerable faceless – maybe through monetary contributions? Do I recognise that I am responsible for others and am I ready to assume that responsibility?

Lord Jesus,

*Make me sensitive to the pain of others,
especially those who are the most weak and
vulnerable.*

*Give me the courage I need to reach out, like
Simon of Cyrene, to those who are in need of my
help.*

*When I am confronted by those in need help me
to overcome the fear of becoming involved.*

*Teach me how I can better assume my
responsibility for all my brothers and sisters.*

Amen.



6 Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

I implore you, I beg you, in God's name I order you: Stop the repression!

Archbishop Oscar Romero, Sunday 23 March 1980, in the San Salvador Cathedral the day before he was shot and killed while celebrating Mass.

The Artist's Reflections

When we find people imprisoned in a life of misery, do we add to their burdens or do we reach out in a way that helps to relieve their suffering?

A brave and courageous act! Veronica reaches out to wipe the face of Jesus the prisoner, despite great danger to herself, epitomised by the angry reaction of a bystander shouting abuse. It is an act of love and bravery in an adverse, volatile situation.

The triptych above shows humanity imprisoned: a victim in a torture chamber, spikes piercing his face; a hooded prisoner, tied up in a cell; a battered wife, her face half hidden to hide her shame and a single star in an empty sky symbolising her isolation.

Amidst the fear and terror, someone has the courage to touch those who suffer: South Africa in

the years of Apartheid, the Rwandan genocide, San Salvador, the Zimbabwean atrocities, Iraq, Afghanistan and so many places in our world.

Meditation

We admire those who, at risk to themselves, are willing to reach out to those imprisoned in a life of misery – whatever that misery may be. Our society overflows with organisations that offer help and support to abused women and children, refugees, victims of war, victims of torture and victims of drug and alcohol abuse; the list goes on. In the face of adversity and great danger to themselves, men and women like Archbishop Oscar Romero act bravely and courageously. Archbishop Romero lost his life because he, like Veronica, had the guts to wipe the faces of the victims of government atrocities in San Salvador.

Veronica's bravery reminds us that living a Christian life demands a faith that does justice. It is in our action on behalf of the many victims of our world that our faith is put into practice. In conscience no Christian can but speak out against the injustice that has subtly become part of our social structures: injustice against refugees, women and children. Injustice, which maintains the status quo so that the poor remain poor, and the rich get richer. Our places of work and families can be part of the unjust structures that perpetuate mis-

ery for others. Veronica asks us to recommit ourselves to rejecting all forms of injustice and oppression even when it may cost us dearly.

In what ways have I contributed to injustice? Where might I need the courage and strength to speak out against injustice? What am I afraid of? Adversity? 'Loss of face' with the powerful? Isolation?

Lord Jesus,

Give me the courage of my convictions so that I can imitate Veronica.

Allow me to act with justice and integrity even in the face of adversity, isolation and danger.

Help me to recognise the subtle ways that injustice is at work in my attitudes and lifestyle.

Forgive me for the ways I have contributed to the imprisonment and sufferings of others through my thoughts, words and actions. Amen.



7 Jesus Falls the Second Time

*Be bold, be adventurous, don't get into a rut,
don't be afraid of making mistakes.*

Pedro Arrupe SJ, former Superior General
of the Society of Jesus

The Artist's Reflections

*Jesus gets up and continues his journey.
Do we lose hope and slip down the ladder when
we have failed or do we get up and continue on
our journey?*

The second fall of Jesus is depicted metaphorically: the blue background broken up with white lines graphically represents a sheet of glass suddenly and violently breaking. Jesus falls violently backwards, crying out in shock and pain, surrounded by red shapes representing the cross crashing down on him. His tortured face looks ready to give up.

The ladder at the right of the painting connects earth with heaven. Discordant souls, representing humanity, attempt to climb up to heaven but many are slipping and falling back. With the fall of Jesus humanity is sliding downwards. The painting has a sense of the downward movement of all things in this second fall of Jesus.

Meditation

Once we have recognised that we have failed we can feel very downcast. We do our best to live good, holy lives but at times we slip up and find ourselves doing and saying things that betray who we really are, things that betray our core identity: children of God. Our human limitations seem to pull us down and can discourage us from believing that we can be and do better. That all too familiar voice that speaks in our heads can say ‘ah you see, you are no good...’ and we are tempted to lie with our faces in the dust when we recognise our failures.

It takes great courage to face our own failures, our own sinfulness. Recognising our sin should not leave us lying on the ground feeling desolate and empty. Our willingness to own our sin and take responsibility for what we have done and said is the first step in getting up when we recognise that we have fallen.

Recognising sin is a moment of grace if we see that this is an opportunity to rely more on the Lord himself. In the Easter Exultet the Christian Church cries out ‘O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!’ Our failures can become moments of conversion and opportunities for more reliance on the Lord.

Jesus falls under the weight of the cross, our sin, but he does not stay down although he is exhausted. He gets up and continues to walk to Calvary. Jesus teaches us not to be downcast or feel desolate when we have failed. He invites us to seek closer union with him and in so doing allow him to be our strength.

Can you name your own failures, your sinfulness? Does your sin discourage you? In what ways could you come to a deeper reliance on Jesus when faced with your own human weakness?

Lord Jesus,

I struggle with failures in my life and feel ashamed and guilty when I recognise my sinfulness.

At times I am discouraged by my failure to live as you would like me to, and I am tempted to give up striving to live a good and holy life.

Give me the strength I need to face my human weaknesses; help me to stand up ever more ready to take another step on the path to holiness especially when I see my sin. Amen.



8 Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

The Dalai Lama

The Artist's Reflections

Despite his own suffering Jesus is concerned about these suffering women. Are we so wrapped up in the affairs of our own lives that we show no concern for others?

‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children. For look, the days are surely coming when people will say, Blessed are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne children, the breasts that have never suckled!’ (Luke 23:28)

Stop! Jesus raises his hand in admonishment to the women. ‘Do not cry for me but for yourselves and your children.’

This Station represents war, a world torn apart! The grief, pain and horror are etched in the colours on Jesus’ face. The green colour of his face portrays grief; the colour is disconcerting and shows how disconcerting so many things are in our world. His

red eyes looking into the future, he sees endless wars and tragedies. In the background a tower explodes, recalling the 9/11 tragedy and also the many other tragedies that affect us. Burning houses are silhouetted on the horizon; they remind us of atrocities and people's inhumanity to others. Yet even in the midst of his own suffering, Jesus is still concerned with the suffering of all humanity; he gently raises his hand and looks with compassion on the women.

Meditation

Violence and the destruction of human life as well as the suffering these cause have become so much a part of our lives. Every day we hear stories of people's inhumanity to each other. Life has become cheap. Our world is plagued by tragedy and misery. Perhaps even more disconcerting is how insensitive we have become to violence and suffering – our newspapers and television screens become more and more explicit to try and evoke a response in us!

Often, when there is some disaster like the Rwandan genocide, Asian Tsunami or the Haiti earthquake, many people of goodwill respond generously to those caught up in the tragedies. Yet it is sad that it takes such tragedy to elicit a response. Sometimes we are so worried about our

own affairs that we fail to see the afflictions of others. In many ways we have locked ourselves up in the prison of self-pity and self-concern. There are many people who face dehumanising situations every day – the poor, the handicapped, those living with HIV/AIDS, women and children who are harassed and badly treated, gays and lesbians, victims of racism, xenophobia and human trafficking. The list is endless!

Jesus shows great sensitivity to those who are victims of dehumanising situations. Despite his own painful journey he is concerned about others.

Do I live in the prison of self-pity and self-centredness? In what ways can I stand up for others who are being dehumanised in my community or at my place of work? How can I learn to be more sensitive to others in need?

Lord Jesus,

Open my eyes so that I can see the vulnerable and those who have been dehumanised around me.

Don't allow me to be imprisoned in my own self-centredness and self-pity.

If I have ever shredded the dignity of another person please forgive me. Amen.



9 Jesus Falls a Third Time

... *Understanding our wounds is not enough. Finally we must find the freedom to step over our wounds and the courage to forgive those who have wounded us. The real danger is to get stuck in anger and resentment.*

Henri J.M. Nouwen in *Here and Now*

The Artist's Reflections

Jesus continues in spite of the obstacles. Do we give encouragement to those who fail often, or do we add to their struggle?

Jesus falls for the third time and so this painting pictures a feeling of overall collapse. Jesus crashes down onto the hard stone pavement; his face is distorted with pain and the sheer violence of his fall. The red surrounding his face signifies the blood shed for us.

His cross is presented in a non-figurative way on the top right of the painting. Two bystanders in yellow are helpless as they observe the scene. They cannot understand the lengths and depths to which this love goes; they are helpless in their own blindness to the love that leads Jesus to his crucifixion. Despite the harshness of the situation and his own agony, the expression on Jesus' face still reveals his acceptance of the situation he finds himself in: he is the Lamb of God.

Meditation

The wounds that life inflicts on us can weaken us and cause us to come crashing down as we walk our own journey of life. We struggle with our own failures but also the failures of others which can, and have, caused us great pain. The many painful falls we experience – moments of misunderstanding, betrayal and conflict – weaken us and eventually we may find it hard to get up and walk yet again. Burdened by hurts we, like the bystanders, may feel helpless as we face the raw wounds of our 'life-landscape'. Some old wounds can, on the cold wintry days of emotional turmoil, come back to haunt us and their pain reminds us of the past events we have lived through. Sometimes our old scars are torn open and become raw again and, blinded by their pain, we are tempted to give up.

Jesus, after his third fall, gives us courage to face our human situation. He, despite the pain of his wounds, rises from his fall to continue the journey to Calvary. Calvary is the very place where, in agony, he will show us that it is possible to get up and take the next step and have the courage to offer forgiveness to others. Jesus does not escape feeling the pain of our human situation but, in the midst of his pain, teaches us to be people of hope. The hope that Jesus teaches us is a hope that enables us, despite our wounds, to

overcome the shackles of past hurts and the anger and resentment that may result. Our ability to hope, despite our wounds, empowers us to get up and walk again, step by step, and in so doing grow in acceptance of the many and various pains we have experienced. Acceptance brings hope and hope gives us the freedom to move forward despite the past.

What wounds regularly weaken me and cause me to crash down onto the hard pavement of defeat? How can I, despite my wounds, get up and walk again and in so doing become a visible sign of hope to others?

Lord Jesus,

Old wounds can cause me to fall again and again.

Sometimes I wonder if I will ever be able to let go of the pains that shackle me.

I do not and cannot deny the hurts that I have endured yet I desire freedom from their power to overwhelm me.

Grant me the gift of hope so that I can accept my wounds and in so doing be set free to get up and walk when I fall. Amen.



10 Jesus is Stripped of his Garments

The only kind of dignity which is genuine is that which is not diminished by the indifference of others.

Dag Hammarskjöld

The Artist's Reflections

Do we expose and strip away other peoples' façades and judge them, without any understanding of them?

There is a terrible indignity and violence to the sense of self in being stripped naked in public: wounds are laid bare as the physical stripping re-opens Jesus' wounds from the scourging. There is a sense of the painting itself being torn apart in empathy with Jesus' pain in the violent shapes at the left and bottom of the work.

Behind Jesus is the cross on which he is to die. Human faces, on either side of the cross, are partly veiled. These depictions remind us that we are able to hide behind our façades but Jesus does not have this luxury, nor does he need it.

Meditation

Like the faces on either side of the cross, we are tempted to veil our eyes from seeing the many ways in which our communities and society strip people of their inherent dignity. Every human being deserves to be treated with respect, no matter who they are or where they come from. It is so easy to judge others based on our own standards and perceptions. There are times, perhaps, when we 'bully' others into submission to control them or gain our own ends. Fearful and insecure people normally hide behind façades and use tactics which strip others of their dignity.

When we treat others any less than we would like to be treated ourselves we strip them of their dignity because we do not relate to them as equals. Some people are physically stripped, others are stripped by being publicly humiliated and others still by the circumstances we force them to live in. Whenever we do not do all that we can to give others access to education or health care we strip them of their dignity.

Jesus, before his crucifixion, is physically stripped. He has already been publicly humiliated by the civil authorities and is forced to carry a cross – the most powerful sign of humiliation. Now, in the last moments of his life he is physically stripped and laid bare publicly. Jesus is as

humiliated and vulnerable as the most humiliated and vulnerable people in our own times.

Have I, because of my own fear or insecurity, through my words or actions stripped another person of their dignity? What can I do to restore dignity to someone who has been humiliated?

Lord Jesus,

We live in a fearful world where, more than anything, our own insecurities are exposed.

When I feel vulnerable I might be tempted to strip another person of their dignity through word or deed.

Remove the fear that may drive me to humiliate others and in so doing make me feel good about myself.

If I have caused the stripping of another, in anyway, I beg your mercy and forgiveness. Amen.



11 Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Religion, prayer and love of God do not change reality, they give it new meaning.

Walter Ciszek SJ in *With God in Russia*

The Artist's Reflections

Do we keep Jesus nailed to the wall of the church, so that he will not intrude in our daily lives?

The outline of a church encloses the image of Jesus and the crucifix. Jesus cries out in pain as he is nailed to the cross. Within the church community people experience Jesus but they too may also be hurt. Outside the church, preoccupied, thoughtless, self-centred humanity is represented.

In descending order these are the people who reject God:

- A person whose face is turned away from the church, one whose head is steeped in the tall reservoir of knowledge. This person is just too clever and well educated to believe in God.
- The self-centred person is shown here with a large spoon almost entirely obscuring his face. This person is blinded and gagged by his own greed and self-indulgence to the exclusion of all else. He is only aware of his own desires. Despite the fact that a spoon is a means of feeding oneself,

a spoon this size blinds one to everything else around. It is secured to the face with barbed wire – impossible to remove and God, who is the One able to help, is excluded and rejected.

· The third figure represents the super-rich. She is expensively dressed with a silly little fashion-conscious hat. As she turns away she looks over her shoulder at the church, wary of involvement with anything as unpleasant as a crucifixion and death.

These three figures are depicted in an absurd way – to live a life away from God is absurd. The colourful, swirling spheres above represent all the distractions that keep us away from God.

Meditation

Going to church can be so easy; living our faith is difficult! Our faith in Jesus is something that we are invited to live in our daily lives, not only ‘at church’. There can be a stark contrast between our professed belief and the actual way we live. Perhaps the hardest thing for us is to put our faith into action. It is so easy to keep our social lives, professional lives, political lives, family life and faith lives in different boxes, thinking that each has its own place – never to be ‘mixed’! Our faith in Christ should form and inform every part of our lives; there should be no exception! If we think we

‘know it all’ or are relying on our own power and wealth and have become preoccupied with getting more, a dichotomy has developed between faith and life, a dangerous dichotomy.

When we fail to live our faith we also betray the church, the Body of Christ. The church should be a community of love; at times it has become a place where people experience great pain. The current revelations of child abuse are an example of how people can be hurt by the church when our faith is simply a veneer and not being lived. When our church communities are not open and welcoming we betray our very identity. When people are rejected, hurt or abused by the church we betray everything the cross stands for. Simply, we have failed to live the faith we profess.

Do I live my faith in the very way I conduct my daily life? Has my pride, self-centredness or greed betrayed the faith I claim to profess? Have I, in word or deed, rejected or hurt someone in the church community?

Lord Jesus,

Help me to live the faith that I profess. May all my words and actions reveal my faith in you.

Make me an instrument in building a church community of support and love. Amen.



12 Jesus Dies on the Cross

In him who rose from the dead, our hope of resurrection dawned. The sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality. Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting place in heaven.

Preface of Christian Death I

The Artist's Reflections

Do we discriminate against our neighbours or deny them their human rights just because they are different from us?

Jesus dies on the cross, dying in love for all those who are persecuted or victimised in any way. Jesus dies for all; nobody is excluded.

He hangs from the cross looking down on a family escaping from a burning shack, a violent scene that is so common in South Africa (because of the lack of electricity and the dangers that some people live with daily, or because of a xenophobic attack). The father leads his family out of the danger. The mother's hair falls into a cloak enfolding the child in her protection and love. It is the child who cries out in fear, and whose prayer takes the form of a leaping flame flying up towards the dying Jesus. Jesus willingly looks towards the pain



and destruction; the family looks away. So often we find it hard to accept the violence and destruction for which we are responsible.

Meditation

Death knocks us off balance. We, like ships on the ocean, discover that none of our navigation instruments are functioning and we run into a sudden storm in the night. We are tossed about in darkness as waves of grief roll over us. We feel directionless, our inner compass fails us, we feel empty and our hearts bleed in silence. Death seems so final and we are not encouraged to speak about death; in fact we do our best to avoid any talk about death! It's not a fashionable subject; it's not a welcome topic. Most of our lives are spent trying to avoid the unavoidable. Our society preaches a gospel of immortality and so often we are desperate to believe this gospel but the death of a loved one announces a sober truth: death is our constant companion on the journey of life; Mark Twain assures us that death and taxes are a certainty for everyone!

Life is messy and fragile and the death of someone we love reminds us of this fact. The pain of death brought about by violence or suicide can be even more acute for those who stay behind. The gruesome death of Jesus overcomes the power of

death and shows us that there is no place that God has not been. God, in Jesus, shares in the most painful of our human experiences.

Do I avoid reflecting and thinking about death? Am I fearful of death? Does the death of Jesus console me and assure me that nothing is out of God's grasp, not even death itself?

Lord Jesus,

Give me the wisdom and insight to reflect on death in the light of your own death.

Your death on the cross shows us that death has been defeated forever and that we have nothing to fear.

You teach us that the pains of dying are labour pains; through them we leave the womb of this world and are born to the fullness of life in God's presence.

Give me the freedom to let go of my fear and the freedom to let go of my loved ones who have died. Amen.





13 Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

*When I die and you wish to visit me,
Do not come to my grave without a drum,
For at God's banquet mourners have no place.*

Rumi

The Artist's Reflections

*Can we not see Jesus in all who die violent
deaths and why do we not reach out to them,
before the event?*

Jesus' body is placed in the arms of his mother. We see the awful spent grief of the mother holding the battered dead body of her son. Mary has used a cloth to wipe away some of the blood and sweat. Now his work is complete, and she embraces him in a primeval act of protection, his body, collapsed in the final exhaustion of death, in her arms. Mary's grief reflects that of all parents who have lost a child to violence. The empty cross hangs redundant behind them.

In the top right hand corner is a dramatised rendition of the eclipse of the sun: from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour (Matt 27:45). A red flash cuts vertically through the painting emphasising the violence of

his death and echoing the veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom (Mt 27: 51).

Meditation

Mary, in this scene, knows the grief of all who mourn the death of loved ones. Her disconcerting face captures the pain of her heart and our pains too. The death of a loved one changes our lives forever. Words cannot capture or express the heartache that so often accompanies death. To begin with we may find it hard to accept and believe that a loved one has left us. In the days and weeks after their death we discover, little by little, what their departure means – the little customs and rituals that were so much part of their (and our) lives which now become memories. In this way our loved ones seem to keep dying every day and every week.

Henri Nouwen says that life is a short opportunity to say ‘yes’ to God’s love; death is a full coming home to that love. He tells us that the pain of death is like labour pains; through death our loved ones leave the womb of this world and are born into the fullness of God’s presence.

We find it difficult, when death visits us and claims the ones we love, to say goodbye and let go of them. The painful separation that death brings cannot be denied, but we must also remember that

our loved ones who have died are in the loving embrace of God – just as Jesus is pictured in the loving embrace of his mother, Mary.

Are there loved ones of yours who have died, whom you still find difficult to let go? Call them to memory now and imagine them in the embrace of God. Ask God to give you the strength to let go of them so that they can rest completely in his embrace.

Lord Jesus,

The death of a loved one affects us more than any other experience. It is so hard to let go.

Give me the confidence and assurance that all my loved ones who have died are now in your embrace.

Help me to see their death as birth into new life with you.

Give me the strength and courage to live my life in all its fullness despite the pain of loss. Amen.



14 Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

Weep like the waterwheel, that green herbs may spring up from the courtyard of your soul.

Rumi

The Artist's Reflections

The broken bloody corpse of Jesus is laid in the tomb. It is covered by a shroud which the artist has etched in with fine white lines and pierced with red spikes penetrating into his body, again, as nails pierced the prisoner in the Sixth Station, symbolising the violence of torture and crucifixion. But the world no longer has any power over him.

The tomb is stark in its two dimensionality. Unseeing humanity, depicted in the toy-like guards on each side of the tomb, is unable to stop the events about to happen. The shafts of light from the guards' eyes miss Jesus completely and emphasise their uncomprehending temporality and blindness to the drama unfolding before them.

The focal point in the painting, the yellow of the sun within the white entrance to the tomb and the two part circles to the right of this, represent Christ's death and his resurrection on the third day.

Meditation

Jesus is laid in the darkened tomb. His ordeal is now over. His body bears the marks of the terrible events that have taken place and everything seems to have ended in defeat. Those who executed Jesus now believe that they have won and have gained the power and control they desired.

There are times in our own lives when we enter the tomb of darkness and are tempted to believe that we have been defeated – defeated by betrayal, cruelty, circumstances, relationships, illness or depression. There are times when things seem temporarily incomprehensible and we are blinded by defeat from seeing further than the drama which unfolds in our own lives.

Jesus has entered the tomb of darkness and it is because of this that even that which seems dark and feels like defeat to us will not have the last say. In the darkest moments of our lives there is always a shaft of light – even when we like the guards cannot see it! That shaft of light, our hope, is Jesus himself who conquers all defeat by his willingness to die on the Cross, be buried in darkness and rise again on the third day.

What are some of the darkest moments in my life? When have I felt defeated? Can I see a shaft of light, a dawning victory over what seems like defeat?

Lord Jesus,

You entered into what seemed like the dark tomb of defeat.

Sometimes I cannot see anything more than darkness; my eyes are closed to the rays of hope that surround me.

Help me never to lose hope, even when things seem hopeless, because you have conquered all that can defeat us. Amen.



No, we come through all these things triumphantly victorious, by the power of him who loved us ...nothing will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:37-39

15 Jesus Rises from the Dead

The Artist's Reflections

The risen Christ is the central and dominant figure of this painting. He is resplendent in the white garments of Easter which symbolise rebirth (a symbol we still use in baptism) and the majestic robes of the King which are portrayed by the ornate collar. The red banner falling away from his right shoulder symbolises his liberation from earthly suffering and pain. The white banner around his head and right shoulder enfolds him in a new life of light and glory. The suggestion of the crown of thorns on the white banner is now just a distant reminder of the crucifixion.

Christ's resurrection has conquered all. Death is depicted as distorted and subjugated, and descends on the bottom right cringing at the realisation that it has been conquered. Although conquered, death remains paradoxically ever present but powerless.

Despite the glory within the resurrection – God's gift to his creatures – humanity is still chained to the tomb: the figure hangs suspended by the cords in the painting at the right attaching him to the walls of the tomb. The figure representative of all humanity who will be saved by

Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, is bowed down by all the earthly cares, disease, trauma, a transparent veil unsuccessfully hiding the torment within. The artist has depicted the breaking open of the tomb in the shapes above Christ's head and on the right.

Although humanity is still bowed down with its cares and toils the risen Christ stands fully robed in the light of the resurrection. The white lines cutting the painting from top to bottom represent shafts of light reflecting the glory of this moment, those at the left a reminder of the cross and the crucifixion. His raised hand shows one of the now glorious wounds of his passion. He is Christ triumphant.

Meditation

The risen Jesus breaks free from all bondage. His wounds do not disappear; they are a reminder of what has happened and what he has overcome. His suffering does not bring all suffering to an end but helps us understand that we can overcome suffering in all forms.

Recently I met a sixteen year old girl in hospital who was badly injured in a bomb blast. She almost lost one of her legs and the other was also seriously damaged. Many of her companions lost their lives

in the blast. Her life changed in a split second because of an act of terror, the inhumanity of one group towards another. It was precisely because she was trying to do good, and was in the wrong place at that time, that she became a victim. I was astonished at the way she confronted this life-changing trauma. She expressed her sadness that some people felt so desperate that they chose to do this. She spoke words of forgiveness and impressed me with the wonderful hope she expressed. This, I thought to myself, is a moment of resurrection and new life. It is incredible, and perhaps even beyond comprehension, how someone suffering in this way can experience such consolation and be a sign of hope to others. This is a moment of resurrection. Despite her wounds this young lady, like Jesus, is triumphant over the forces of darkness. She teaches us what saying 'Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again, Alleluia!' really means!

What are the signs of the resurrection in my own life? Can I see how I have been transformed despite the sufferings I have endured?

Lord Jesus,

You rose from the dead, breaking the chains of suffering and death.

My wounds will be with me forever but, with your help, I can overcome their power.

I want your resurrection to give me a new way of seeing my own suffering and that of others.

Open my eyes to the new life resurrection brings so that I can be triumphant with you. Amen.



A Biography of the Artist

Joseph Capelle, a South African artist, painted the Stations of the Cross at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. Capelle is retired but retains his passion for painting of religious subjects. In his painting he tries to reach out to others and by using his own symbolism he tries to enable others to have a religious experience.

Capelle studied art at the Johannesburg Technical College where he was awarded a silver medal for excellence. Thereafter he worked for advertising agencies for a number of years before going into display art as part of the creative team which won several gold, silver and bronze medals awarded by an international display magazine.

Capelle moved between advertising and display art. He also ventured into photography, both commercially and artistically. He has exhibited at a number of galleries.

In September 1997 Capelle participated in a group exhibition at the Visual Arts Gallery where his work was kept. He sold a number of paintings, through this gallery, to public undertakings and private collectors.

In 2000 he had a one-man exhibition at the Karen McKerron Fine Art Gallery. The Financial Mail amongst others gave him very good reviews, and many of his paintings were sold.

The Maryvale Catholic Church holds a set of his multimedia Stations of the Cross. The Resurrection and the Stations of the Cross at Rivonia Catholic Church are amongst his works. He also painted the Stations of the Cross for the recently constructed Chapel at St. David's Marist College in Inanda.

HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH

Braamfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa

Holy Trinity Catholic Church is situated west of the city centre of Johannesburg in Braamfontein, and on the south eastern corner of the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand.

In 1897 the Trappist Monks from Mariannhill set up a mission to serve migrant mine workers in Stiemens Street, and they built and opened the first church in 1899. Then the Anglo-Boer War broke out soon after this, the Trappists returned to Natal, and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate served the new parish. The current church was completed in 1938. In 1966 the Paulist Fathers looked after the parish and university chaplaincy until the parish was handed over to the diocese for a short period from 1969. In 1973 the Society of Jesus were given responsibility for the parish and have served the community ever since.

The present parish population is made up of approximately 450 families, drawn from all over Johannesburg as well as the universities. The parish is responsible for and runs the chaplaincies to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of Johannesburg (UJ). It also serves two schools and two hospitals in the vicinity.

Holy Trinity Parish is well known to many locals because of its extensive outreach to people living on the streets in the area. This is also characteristic of a Jesuit parish, looking after the poorest of the poor and promoting a faith that does justice. The church yard is often swarming with the most unusual mix of people who share their experience of being homeless. Most are men but there are a few women and children. Some are disabled and cannot work and others simply cannot find a



job. Many of them are migrants from other African countries who came to the City of Gold looking for a bright future for themselves and their loved ones. Sadly many of them discover the opposite and some become victims to despair, hopelessness and attacks by the police and other locals. One thing they all seem to have in common is that society has, for the most part, given up on them or labelled them as 'pests'. However, through volunteers and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, Holy Trinity tries to let these people know that God has not given up on them and nor have we. Food is available Monday to Friday, and we also provide clothes, blankets, soap, candles and medical help. In partnership with medical students from WITS University



we also run a clinic for the homeless on Monday nights. Those who, for one reason or another, cannot use public health facilities, are thus able to get help from us, including free HIV/AIDS testing and counselling.

The parish continues to grow as it started. It is a 'migrant parish'. The kaleidoscope of people from all walks of life and all economic strata make it a culturally rich parish. The varied activities and programmes and the presence of the Jesuit Institute South Africa next door to the church mean that there is always something happening at Holy Trinity – theology lectures, Alpha, young adult bible study and formation, catechesis, stu-



dent activities and daily liturgies. In the tradition of Jesuit parishes there are priests available after the weekday mass every day for confessions. This allows people who are visitors to the city or who work in the city to attend mass and also participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In 2008 the parish staff and finance committee decided that the Church was in need of maintenance. They embarked upon an extensive maintenance plan for the Church. During this time the old Stations of the Cross (which had to be restored previously, when the plaster started to crumble) had to be removed, and some crumbled when they were moved. The cost of restoring the old ones,

which had served the parish well for many years, was astronomical. After much discussion it was decided that a new set of Stations would be commissioned. It was also thought that the Stations need to depict something of the African context of Holy Trinity. The old ones were very Euro-centric. The parish approached local artist Joseph Cappelle, who had painted Stations of the Cross for other parishes in Johannesburg, and commissioned a new set of Stations.

The new Stations were installed once the Church was renovated. They not only reflect the context of Holy Trinity but also capture something of the complexities of the modern world. Each



Station does not simply portray a moment in Jesus' life but speaks to us of how Jesus' life, death and resurrection are being lived by people today. The Stations are 'iconic' in the sense that they tell a story – my story, your story, our story. We must not look at them only as pictures; we must look for their deeper meaning and how they speak to us where we find ourselves. They will be timeless in their ability to capture the very seasons of the human heart, the human experience and the world. This book is designed to try and help you enter more deeply, from wherever you are, into the mystery of the saving life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Don't be afraid to let them speak to you, make you feel uncomfortable and draw you deeper into the very mystery of God through Jesus.

Russell Pollitt SJ

