

### EASTER POEM

Behold the man,  
Who in frailty walks,  
Towards his cross shaped throne.  
Arms outstretched,  
Love enfleshed,  
To welcome sinners home.

Behold the man,  
Whose beaten body,  
Was laid in garden grave,  
Death defeated  
Hell retreating,  
Humanity to save.

Behold the man,  
Whose healing hands,  
Were once nailed to cursed tree,  
Hope restoring,  
Grace declaring,  
To set the shackled free.

Behold the man,  
Whose silent corpse,  
Was raised to reign as King.  
Love embracing,  
Joy empowering,  
For him the saints will sing.

**Jon Swales**

### Contributors:

*Sarah Clarkson* is a theologian, author and broadcaster living in Oxford

*Jan Richardson* is an artist, writer and retreat leader based in Florida

*Rebecca Ruiz* is an Ignatian spiritual director and writer from Virginia

*Peter Storey* is a retired bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa where he was active in the anti-apartheid movement

*Rev Jon Swales* is the Lighthouse Mission Priest in Leeds ministering to marginalised and vulnerable adults

*Pope Francis*

*Henri Nouwen* was a Dutch Catholic priest, writer and theologian

*Annie O'Connor* was a street evangelist and lead training tutor for Church Army in Sheffield

*John O'Donohue* was an Irish poet, author, priest and philosopher

## STATIONS OF THE CROSS



(After each station)

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

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

### 1. Jesus is condemned

*At festival time Pilate used to release a prisoner for the people, anyone they asked for. Now a man called Barrabas was in prison for murder at that time. The chief priests had incited the crowd to demand that Pilate release him in place of Jesus. Pilate, anxious to placate the crowd, released Barrabas and, having ordered Jesus to be scourged, handed him over to be crucified.*

Jesus' total obedience to his Father led him to the cross. To return to God means to return to him with all that I am and all that I have. I cannot return to God with just half of my being. Every time I pray, I feel the struggle. It is the struggle of letting God be the God of my whole being. It is the struggle to trust that true freedom lies hidden in total surrender to God's love.

Henri Nouwen

### 2. Jesus carries the cross

*Peter said to him, 'Even if all desert you, I will never desert you.' Jesus answered, 'In truth, I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will have disowned me three times.'*

In deep shadow, amidst plain-chanted hymns to end the day, I looked to the altar where candles burned round a simple cross. Behind the altar loomed a larger than life picture of a sorrowing Christ, cross on his shoulder, down on one knee as he bore the weight of the world's sin and grief. Kneeling there in the candlelit darkness, with the hymns almost whispered in a tender, gentle awe, I was aware of Christ's givenness. Of the love poured without stint or measure. Of the grace that is with me now, regardless of what I offer.

Sarah Clarkson

### 3. Jesus falls for the first time

*Carrying his own cross he went out of the city to the place of the skull or, as it was called in Hebrew, Golgotha.*

The cross is the measure of Christ's love for us. This love has the power to heal and save. The cross is an act of love, both on the part of the Father who sent his only son to save us, and on Jesus' part, who lays down his life in love.

Annie O'Connor

We don't realise all the good we can do. A kind, encouraging word or helping hand can bring many a person through dark valleys in their lives. We weren't put here to make money or to acquire status or reputation. We were sent here to search for the light of Easter in our hearts, and when we find it we are meant to give it away generously.

May the spirit and light of Easter bless us all, watch over us and protect us on our journey, open us from the darkness into the light of peace and hope and transfiguration. The dawn that is rising on Easter morning is a gift to our hearts and we are meant to celebrate it and to carry away from this holy, ancient place the gifts of healing and light and the courage of a new beginning.

John O'Donohue



### **13. Jesus is taken down from the cross**

*The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he had died, and he said, 'In truth this man was the Son of God.'*

We call the crucifixion of Jesus the passion, and so it is, for us as well as for him. Each time we stretch out our arms in love to one another, every time we open our hearts, we find the shadow of the cross, but also a glimpse of the open tomb. Jesus' final words from the cross, 'Into your hands I commend my spirit,' remind us that every relationship will, at some point, contain a good-bye.

Yet we who know the rest of the story, we who have glimpsed the other side of Good Friday, know that Jesus' last words from the cross are not the final words. There are more words to come, crucial words that Christ will yet add to our vocabulary, our story, our community.

For now, we wait. Together.

**Jan Richardson**

### **14. Jesus is placed in the tomb**

*When it was evening, there came a rich man of Arimathea, called Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered that it be handed over.*

Years earlier, when an angel appeared in a sheep pasture proclaiming good news of great joy, the angel told the shepherds of a Saviour, a Messiah, a Lord whom they would find as a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. Now, on this day, the Saviour is wrapped in a spiced shroud of linen cloths, a scented winding sheet to hold him as he lies in the tomb. As at the beginning, so at the end: those who love Christ enfold him, tend him, bless him.

**Jan Richardson**

### **15. The Resurrection**

*I have risen and am with you still, alleluia! The Lord is truly risen, alleluia!  
To him be glory and power for all the ages of eternity, alleluia, alleluia!*

On Easter morning, let us look again at the lives we have been so generously given and let fall away the useless baggage that we carry – old pains, old habits, old ways of seeing and feeling – and let us have the courage to begin again.

### **4. Jesus comes face to face with his mother**

*Simeon said to Mary his mother, 'Look, he is destined for the fall and the rise of many in Israel, destined to be the sign that is opposed – and a sword will pierce your soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'*

By giving his mother and his beloved friend John to one another with the words, 'Woman, here is your son.... Here is your mother,' Jesus created a community that was to become family to the widow, the orphan, the outcast, and the stranger.

Our call to such a community is a sacred trust. If we accept, can anybody suffer hunger, homelessness, or need? Would there be any lonely old people? Could there be a single unwanted child? If Jesus has made everyone kin to me, would that not make every war in history a civil war and every casualty a death in my family?

**Peter Storey**

### **5. Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross**

*On their way out, they came across a man from Cyrene called Simon, and enlisted him to carry his Cross.*

In life's journey, as in every journey, what really matters is not to lose sight of the goal. We should ask ourselves: on the journey of life, do I seek the way forward? Return to me, says the Lord. To me. The Lord is the goal of our journey in this world. The direction must lead to him.

**Pope Francis**

### **6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus**

*Come back to me with all your heart ... turn to the Lord your God again, for he is all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, and ready to relent.*

Lent is, I think, the answer of the human soul to the challenge and invitation of God's love. Lent is the call to turn my face from the clamour of a thousand distractions, to the Beauty in which I have my being. Lent is a return, to the heart of all that matters most, the single Matter of Christ apart from whom nothing matters at all.

**Sarah Clarkson**

## 7. Jesus falls for the second time

*Will no one hear my prayer, will not God himself grant my hope? May it please God to crush me, to give his hand free play and to do away with sin. This insight, at least, would give me comfort – a thrill of joy in unrelenting pain, that I never rebelled against the Holy One's decrees.*

Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem. He disregards the shame of the cross and steadfastly goes through suffering, not around it. Likewise, God seems to send us on the path towards our own wholeness not by eliminating the obstacles, but by making use of them. Going somewhere good means having to go through and with the bad. The best way out is if we have first gone in – into great suffering and great love.

Annie O'Connor

## 8. The women of Jerusalem weep for Jesus

*Large numbers of people followed him, and women too, who mourned and lamented for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children.'*

Jesus foresaw and even predicted his own suffering and death. He accepted it with his eyes open, not denying to himself or to others what the future held. The Suffering Servant heals. Healing is a consequence of his suffering.

Annie O'Connor

## 9. Jesus falls for the third time

*He had no form or charm to attract us, no beauty to win our hearts; he was despised, the lowest of men, a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering.*

Following Jesus is the way to enter into the struggle of surrendering to God's love to find true freedom. The way is the way of the cross, and true freedom is the freedom found in the victory over death. Jesus' total obedience to his Father led him to the cross, and through the cross to a life no longer subject to the competitive games of this world. Jesus held on to nothing; there was nothing was left for him to cling to.

Only when I surrender myself completely to God's love can I expect to be free from endless distractions, ready to hear the voice of love, and able to recognize my own unique call.

Henri Nouwen

## 10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes

*When the soldiers had finished crucifying him they took his clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamless, woven in one piece from the back to the hem, so instead of tearing it, they threw dice for it.*

Lord, come beside me, let me feel your presence, hear your voice. Open the eyes of my heart, illuminate within it places of eternal Lent where I have not permitted your Love entry. Come into those Golgothas, those broken places in me, in relationships with others, in the world around us in need of reconciliation. Open the eyes of my heart to see you in those with whom I live and work and walk, in those whose walk through Gethsemane is long. Allow me to accompany you in them.

Rebecca Ruiz

## 11. Jesus is nailed to the cross

*And yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried. But we, we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God, and brought low. Yet he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins. On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed.*

All too quickly the breaking of the bread becomes the breaking of the flesh. All too soon the cup offered at the table becomes the life poured out at the cross. After the rending, after the emptying: an impossible stillness, an aching silence, an incomprehensible hollow for which no word will ever be adequate.

Jan Richardson

## 12. Jesus dies

*The soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with him and then the other. When they came to Jesus, they saw he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water.*

God's power is made perfect in the weakness of Jesus crucified. It is through the power of the cross that the Father has chosen to reconcile all things to himself in Christ. And so Paul proclaims the cross (and not just the resurrection) as the power of God. The cross has the power to save – and so 'it is finished.'

Annie O'Connor