

Thank you for being with us today and for taking part in this meditation.
We encourage you to continue the conversation about the devastation caused by clergy sexual abuse; please stay and chat with us.
There are people available today should you wish to speak with someone about additional support or advice.

If you are a victim of clergy sexual abuse, and would like to talk with someone, support is available today or contact:

Rachael Campion - Director of Safeguarding, Nottingham Diocese
tel: 01159539849 email: safeguarding@dioceseofnottingham.uk
Margaret Swift - Buxton Parish Safeguarding Representative
tel: 07513 725529 email: margaret.swiftPSR@dioceseofnottingham.uk
Sue Thornhill - Chapel Parish Safeguarding Representative
tel: 07513 725269 email: susan.thornhillPSR@dioceseofnottingham.uk

OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Safe Spaces: Safe Spaces is a free and independent support service, providing a confidential, personal, and safe space for anyone who has been abused by someone in the Church or as a result of their relationship with the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales or the Church in Wales.

Helpline: 0300 303 1056 (answerphone available outside of opening times)

Email: safespaces@victimsupport.org.uk

Website: <https://safespacesenglandandwales.org.uk/>

The Survivors Trust: provides a range of counselling, therapeutic and support services working with women, men and children who are victims or survivors of rape, sexual violence and sexual abuse.

<https://thesurvivorstrust.org/>

Safeline: a specialist sexual violence and abuse charity: <https://safeline.org.uk/>

Samaritans: for people struggling to cope and needing someone to talk to

Tel: 116 123

Grief to Grace: specialised retreats for anyone who has suffered sexual, physical, emotional or spiritual abuse Tel: 020 7937 4297 www.griegtograceuk.org

Stop it Now: for anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse prevention www.stopitnow.org.uk

Spiritual Abuse: www.spiritualabuse.com

NAPAC: offers support and advice to adult survivors of childhood abuse - 0808 8010331

*This Way of the Cross is based on a meditation written by a special committee in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Regina, Canada, including parish members and victims of clergy sexual abuse within and outside of the church. The words of the victims have not been altered. Reproduced with permission.
All images - from the 'Folly of God - 'The Journey of the Cross, a Path to Light' by Sieger Köder*

The Way of the Cross through the voices of the Victims and Survivors of Abuse



23rd April 2024 ~ St Anne's Church, Buxton

Welcome

This 'Way of the Cross' asks us to listen to the victims of clergy sexual abuse through their voices, so that we might get a glimpse of the darkness they have experienced, and are still experiencing.

The Stations of the Cross are a traditional way of praying which draws us into the pain and suffering of Jesus, precisely in order to reveal the depth of God's love. But for victims of clergy sexual abuse, church can be a very painful place. We invite you to find the courage to listen deeply and compassionately to those who were wounded when they should have found love, and to look for the presence of the wounded Jesus, walking in solidarity with the victims.



Surrender

All:

Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity, I see you suffer, and I remain unmoved. I am so caught in my own concerns; I am so fearful of my own insecurity that I do not wish to enter into your pain or the pain of your victimised people. I have become part of the problem. Standing aside, denying your pain, justifying the injustice, I have become as those who have led you to your death. Lord Jesus, give me the courage to be with you now so that I can bear your truth and embrace your compassion. Help me to walk one more step with you.

We take some time for personal prayer and reflection

Closing Prayer

All:

God of mercy,
it was not your plan that your children should be abused,
that vulnerable people's lives should be destroyed,
nor that people called to goodness
should give way to the temptation to abuse
or to cover up the sinful actions of others.
The scandal of abuse has broken the heart of your Church,
but the work of Christ will be its healing and redemption.
In our sorrow and shame, we turn to you,
our source of hope.
Give us faith to believe that you can bring light from this darkness.
Give us hope that the future can be built
on the foundations of truth and justice.
Give us love so that we can all play our part
however big, however small,
in your great work of healing the broken Body of Christ.
We ask this through Christ Our Lord
Amen.

wellsprings.org.uk

Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, Joseph tried his best to give you dignity in death.
We repent that by our refusal to listen to the victims, we killed their hope.
By our secrecy we killed their trust.
By our lies, we killed their faith.
By our not believing, we have kept them in the darkness of their tomb.



Chrysalis

Station 1: Jesus is condemned to death.

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: *I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.*

Narrator: My Jesus, you stand alone, silent and composed before Pilate as the crowd calls for your death. Pilate finds no guilt in you, yet you are still condemned. All have abandoned you. Nobody speaks up for you. Nobody helps defend you.

Victim # 1:

Will I be denied as well? I am abandoned and afraid. I am treated unfairly and blamed unjustly for just being a victim. I see the church represented in Pilate, unable to accept the truth. When I tried to speak out, I was accused instead. They refused to listen so I could not break the sacred code of silence. I am powerless. Not only am I an innocent victim of the perpetrator who inflicted unspeakable acts on me, but also a victim of the church who sees me as someone to be destroyed, “put to death” like Jesus, for it to remain powerful.

Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, you spoke the truth to those with power over you, but they couldn't accept it and refused to listen to you.
We confess that in our pride we were deaf to the words of those we hurt, and we did not defend those who were suffering though they had not done anything wrong.

All: *Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity, I see you suffer, and I remain unmoved. I am so caught in my own concerns; I am so fearful of my own insecurity that I do not wish to enter into your pain or the pain of your victimised people. I have become part of the problem. Standing aside, denying your pain, justifying the injustice, I have become as those who have led you to your death. Lord Jesus, give me the courage to be with you now so that I can bear your truth and embrace your compassion. Help me to walk one more step with you.*

Station 2: Jesus carries his cross

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.

Narrator: My Jesus, the guards dress you up as a king, with a crown made of thorns, and they mock you. They give you a heavy wooden cross to carry. You know that the way will not be easy and that it will lead to your death. Jesus, you are already so weak from the scourging and yet you shoulder your burden and start on your way.

Victim # 2:

I didn't choose to be given this cross. It is so heavy, and I am afraid, as I am too small and ill-equipped to deal with such a heavy cross. Why me? What did I do to deserve this? I didn't choose to be damaged and crushed.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, judged and convicted, your tormentors abused your body and spirit and forced your cross upon your shoulders.

We ask forgiveness for the suffering caused to your children and those vulnerable people who were abused by priests and religious.

All: Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...

Embrace

Station 14: Jesus is placed in the tomb

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.

Narrator: My Jesus, Joseph brings a linen cloth to wrap your body and lays you in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolls a stone against the entrance of the tomb. To accept your death is to allow the grieving to happen... to remain in the tomb... sitting with the pain and grief.

Victim # 1:

All has been taken from me. I lie alone, in the darkness of the tomb. The life of who I could have been is forever gone. My childhood stolen from me forever altered. All hope, trust, and faith are gone. What is there to do but lie and wait, but wait for what? There cannot be new life, no resurrection until the reality of what was done to me is fully acknowledged; until the burden is no longer mine to carry, placed upon those who are responsible for it. My grief will never be gone. The pain is forever. This is my reality, one that was thrust upon me, one that even in death I must carry.

Victim # 2:

Yet I am reminded of the cocoon stage of the butterfly...those days of dark waiting before new life and new transformation emerges. I can't skip this waiting period, as it is an important time of grieving and mourning for what died within me. Can there be death to new life with me? Can my tomb eventually become like a womb that gives birth to new life?

Each time I hear a new voice speak out, each time a bishop listens and acts, each time a parish chooses to face this difficult issue with courage, each time the lies, deception and failures are acknowledged, and the truth is declared... can the stone be rolled away and people rise from their tombs?

Station 3: Jesus falls the first time

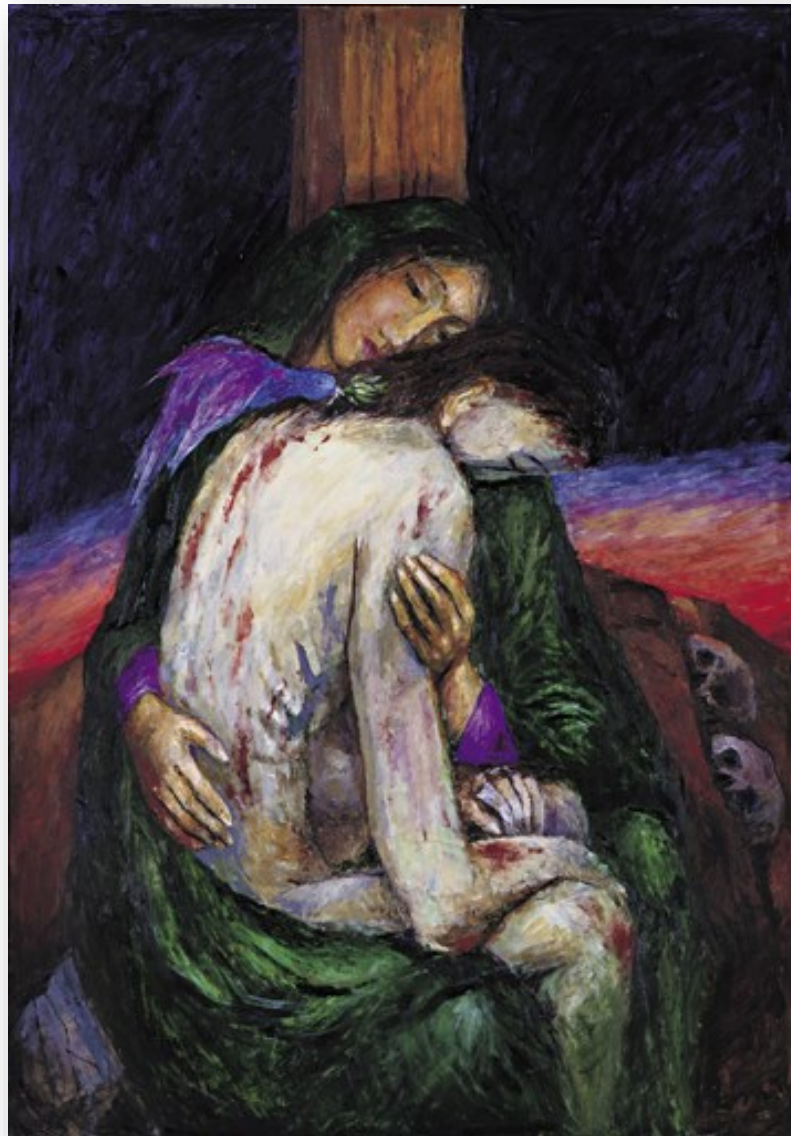
Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: *I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.*

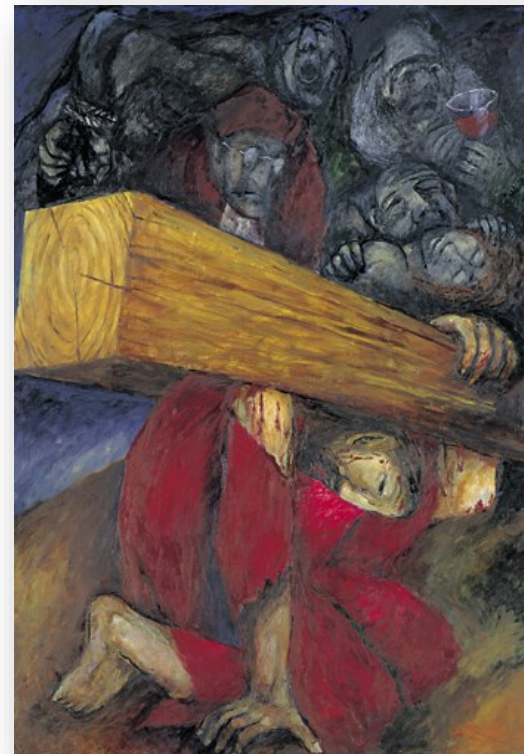
Narrator: My Jesus, burdened by your heavy cross, worn down by fatigue and pain, you are becoming weak, and almost ready to faint, you fall. Nobody seems to want to help you. The soldiers yell at you and try to get you up and moving again. You push yourself up and continue your journey.

Victim # 1:

I have fallen too. I told a priest what happened to me, and I was confronted, and he told me I was mistaken, that this clergy person would never do such a thing. I was not believed. Using the power of the institution, he challenged, demeaned, and victimised me, pushing me down, killing any flicker of light that remained in my soul to continue... my power is stolen.



Maternal womb



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, you fall under the weight of the burden of your cross that you carry alone.

We repent the times we did not listen, did not believe, did not do anything, and left the abused children to carry on and bear the burden of their shame alone.

All: *Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...*

Cornerstone

Station 4: Jesus meets his mother.

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.

Narrator: My Jesus, alone, amidst the confusion and pain, your eyes meet the eyes of someone who cares; your eyes meet those of your mother Mary. She nurtured you as a baby, witnessed your first steps and words, now she meets you on your final journey. What pain she must have felt, unable to help or comfort you in your suffering. Yet she remains present and steadfast.

Victim # 2:

Who can I turn to? I am so overwhelmed and alone. The church should be like a mother, nurturing and loving, but so often it is not. Who are those life bearers in my life? To whom can I trust to hear my pain? When I encounter another victim, although we have different experiences, it is then I see I am not alone. I reached out to someone and told my story and they listened to me.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, you could not conceal your wounds from your mother as she came to you and gazed on you with all her love and compassion.

We confess the times that we denied comfort and compassion when victims wanted someone to reach out to them to listen, to care, to believe.

All: Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...

No words

Station 13: Jesus is taken down from the cross

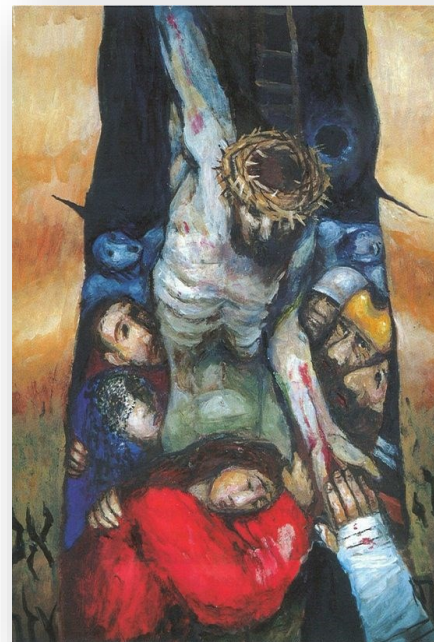
Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.

Narrator: My Jesus, how brutally you were put to death. How gently you are taken from your cross. Your suffering and pain are ended, and you are tenderly placed in the lap of your mother. We see her embrace your lifeless body. The dirt and blood are wiped away. You are treated with so much love.

Victim # 2:

So, it is for all victims nailed to their cross, by abuse. I too, want to be taken down from the cross of my pain. I do not want to be kept fastened to the cross as the church continues its lies, deceit, and cover-up. I want to be free from the clutches of despair and the torment to stop. How can I be freed from this cross? I can't do it alone. I need support. I need a church that cares, risks being honest with itself and is accountable. Although my trust has been shattered and all hope lost, I want to be able to grieve for the parts of me that died the day the abuse started. I also grieve for those victims who remain nailed to their cross.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, your pain and torment ended, we see you treated with such gentleness and love.

We ask forgiveness for not helping to free the victims from their cross of pain, for shattering their trust, and for not supporting them with the same tenderness and love that you were shown by those who stood by you in your suffering.

All: Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...

Taken down from the cross

Station 12: Jesus dies on the cross

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.

Narrator: My Jesus, you were thirsty, so the soldiers soaked a sponge in vinegar and lifted it to your lips. When you had received the drink, you said, 'It is finished.' With that, you bowed your head and gave up your spirit... and you died...

Victim # 1:

Something died in me the day my innocence was taken from me. I am empty like an abandoned shell. A double murder...of the body and of the soul. Sometimes I wish that death would take away my emptiness. Plunged in the darkness, despair consumes me, and I can't imagine that I will ever see the light again.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, you trusted your father until your final breath.

We ask forgiveness for betraying the trust that your children and your people placed in us.

We grieve for those who died prematurely as a result of the spiritual, psychological, and emotional damage they suffered through abuse.

All: Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...

(A longer period of silence to acknowledge the death...)

Holocaust

Station 5: Simon helps Jesus carry the cross.

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.

Narrator: My Jesus, the soldiers are becoming impatient. They are afraid you won't make it to the hill where you will be crucified. So, they grab a man out of the crowd and make him help carry your cross. He does not know you but lends his strength to carrying the heavy weight of the wood.

Victim # 1:

No one wanted to help me at first as I lay with grave wounds in my soul. I had lost my innocence, and my spirit was broken. I had been sexually abused. I had been physically, emotionally, and spiritually raped, beaten down by the church. I could not find solid footing and didn't think I could continue. At times, I too have had a Simon compelled to assist me and help me carry my cross. Others have lifted the burden by reaching out, another speaking their truth, and another...



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, beaten and weakened, you no longer had to carry your cross alone.

We ask forgiveness for turning our backs on the victims of abuse when we should have been holding out our hands to help and support them in their journey of suffering.

All: Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...

Unison

Station 6: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.

Narrator: My Jesus, moved by your pain, Veronica steps out of the crowd. Her love overcomes her fear, and she courageously comes forward to wipe your face. She cannot change your fate, but recognising your dignity, she faithfully performs her small act of compassion. You can see how she cares for you as she takes a cloth and begins to wipe the blood and sweat from your face. As the guards force you onward, the image of your face is left on her cloth.

Victim # 2:

There is no one who can take away this pain or heal the wounds that run so deep, nor the scars that will never form. But sometimes there is a chance meeting with someone who sits for a moment, looks at me and changes things for an instant. Sometimes there is a Veronica who comes out of the crowd and makes a difference in my life.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, moved by your pain, Veronica's love and tender compassion overcomes her fear, and she courageously steps forward.

Forgive us for our cowardice in not coming forward when we could, to make a difference in the lives of the victims.

All: Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...

True icon

Station 11: Jesus is nailed to the cross

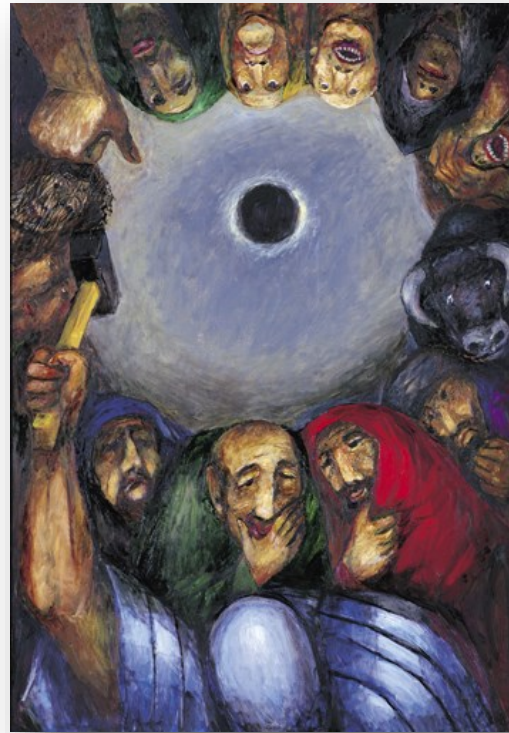
Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.

Narrator: My Jesus, having done nothing but good, the soldiers hammer nails into your hands and feet and you cry out in pain.

Victim # 1:

Every time I am not believed or have been challenged to get on with my life, more nails are hammered into me, and the pounding continues. Some say they believe me yet do nothing to help me. I have been thrown into darkness but that is not enough. I am tortured, hung out with no peace in the darkness. Words are like nails that thrust more wounds into my body. Actions, inactions and denial cause deep pain and keep me nailed to the cross.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, The soldiers hammer the nails into your hands and feet, yet even in this moment you show your compassion, praying for those who crucify you.

We confess the times we caused pain, over and over again, by our actions, our inactions, and our denials of the truth.

All: Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...

Face to face

Station 10: Jesus is stripped of his clothes

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: *I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.*

Narrator: My Jesus, beaten and broken. You have lost everything, but you still have your dignity. But the soldiers see that you still have something of value. So, they strip you and now even your dignity is gone. They throw dice for your clothes. Your wounds are torn open once again.

Victim # 2:

The church does everything it can to expose me as a fraud, lies are told about me and everyone turns against me. The light that was once my guide has been extinguished. The abuser is once again protected and moved to a different parish, opening the door to more abuse and victimisation.

I too was stripped, exposed, made vulnerable. And each time I share my story, or relive it in nightmares, I am stripped again. The doors of the church are locked to me but unlocked for everyone else. They have insulted me, threatened my family, and made it clear I am not worthy. Jesus, exposed and mocked in such a way, over and above the lashes, the crown of thorns and the carrying of the cross, you help me to know that you understand my pain.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, you suffered the indignity of the cross, a sign of sin and shame and then being stripped of your clothes.

We repent the mockery of victims and the loss of their dignity by not believing what they said, by making them think it was all their fault, by blaming and shaming them. We failed to protect them, and we were complicit in the silence, the secrecy, the cover up.

All: *Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...*

Whose?

Station 7: Jesus falls the second time

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: *I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.*

Narrator: My Jesus, under the weight of the cross, once again you are brought to your knees. As the cross grows heavier, it becomes more difficult for you to get up. But you continue to struggle until you are standing again and can start walking again. You don't give up.

Victim # 1:

I tried a second time to tell my story. This time I told someone working within the institutional church and I was ignored. What power I had regained was once again stolen. I too have been pushed to the ground. I lay broken with a heavy cross upon me. I found myself struggling, but I didn't stay down. I got up again, the weight still crushing me.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, in your suffering, you stumble and fall again under the heavy burden of your cross, but you persevere and rise again.

Forgive us that we were weak and did not share in the pain, fear, and confusion of your abused children when they tried to tell us what was happening to them, not once, not twice, but again and again.

All: *Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...*

With us

Station 8: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

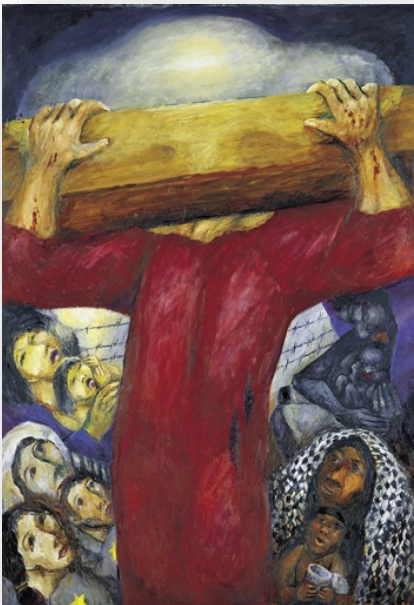
Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: *I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.*

Narrator: My Jesus, as you draw closer to the place of execution, you meet the women of Jerusalem weeping for you. You see their grief. You recognise their difficulties and stop to speak to them. You tell them not to weep for you, but for themselves and their children. Although you have been abandoned by your friends and are in pain, you recognise hearts that ache like yours.

Victim # 2:

The doubt that others have cast upon me has caused me to even doubt my own abuse...maybe I am crazy? Then in my search for something I see that I am not alone, there are countless people who are victims of clergy sexual abuse, that I am not the first, nor will I be the last. Each one of us feels so alone and not aware that others exist...this is a painful realisation of how well the church has done in keeping this secret quiet and sweeping it under the carpet. But others have broken their silence and have tried to share their stories. It is together, caring for one another, that we can face this brokenness.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, you came face to face with the sorrow and tears of the women.

We confess the times when we were indifferent in the face of suffering, when the church covered up the crimes of abuse and kept quiet, when the reputation of the church was put before the safety of your children.

All: *Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...*

Nuturing

Station 9: Jesus falls the third time.

Narrator: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

All: *I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, I find no rest.*

Narrator: My Jesus, you fall again for a third and final time. You are completely drained, yet you find the strength to rise, and although weak and tormented, you continue your path to Calvary.

Victim # 1:

Every time I hear about another abuse case, I am defeated and fall to the ground. Each time I hear about church leaders who have protected the perpetrators, I relive the nightmares and have flashbacks. The anger smothers me, and I can't breathe.

Even after confronting the church, equipped with the knowledge that I am not the only victim, my efforts are met with anger and again I am pushed to the ground. Many do not want me to rise up and tell my truth. I am pushed down in such a way that I am riddled with pain, tormented, and thrown into a deep darkness where I am expected to stay.



Confessional prayer of the Bishops and Priests:

Lord Jesus, your energy is spent. You are exhausted but you rise again, and your journey of suffering continues.

For prolonging the suffering by denying the victims and their families when we were faced with the truth, we ask forgiveness. For the deaf ear, the blind eye, the hard heart, we ask forgiveness.

All: *Jesus, innocent victim of the violence of humanity...*

Amen!