

1 Condemnation

The pain and shock of the statement, to be condemned to death. In the case of Jesus, the question is why? All He had done was to speak the truth and highlight the shortcomings of those who coveted power. All Jesus had done was to point out where true power comes from. In sentencing Jesus, we see discriminate prejudice. The people were united, whipped into a frenzy against Jesus, He had to go, so that order could be resumed. He was a condemned Man.

Father free Him.

Everyone fears hearing the words that might lead to death. "There's nothing we can do." So many throughout the world have been condemned. This time, it is not through discriminate prejudice, but through an indiscriminate attack to the human body. Whatever race or creed, whether rich or poor, a virus condemns. All those who are attacked can do, is hope. All those who are free can do, is hope "It won't get me." People united in anxiety. People who hope.

Remember those who live with feelings of condemnation. Maybe through illness, through poverty, through lack of employment. Those whose have been condemned to endless travel to find a home, those living under persecution. Those who long for the 'fix' to alleviate pains of addiction.

Father free them.

2 Burden

After the condemnation, Jesus is given the wood on which His Life will end. A burden is thrust upon Him. A dead weight. A climb begins. Jeering crowds, heat and dust. Executioners pushing Him on. What do they care? They just need to ensure He gets up that hill. The burden, eating into His Flesh. That is what burdens do, they eat into us, becoming heavier as we take each step of life. Jesus' condemnation was now reality. He felt it, He carried it. In the midst of the crowd, Jesus was isolated.

Father ease His load.

In this time of pandemic, the burden comes from realizing the result of a test, brought about because of a cough or fever. **"Positive."** There is a negativity in this form of "positive" outcome. The burden is laid upon the shoulders. Now the hope is deep. This maybe a burden, but not necessarily the reality of being condemned. Avoid the crowds and in the midst of so many, isolate. Do not allow the burden to eat away.

Remember those carrying burdens each day. Fears for loved ones unwell. Those burdened with anxiety and depression. Those burdened with little or no self-worth.

Father ease their load.

3 Fall

As with any burden in life, for Jesus, it had become too heavy to carry. The fall came, and as well as the pain of the fall, the burden deepened the pain. His face in the dust. Shouts and slaps from the guards. The crowd baying. Total indignity. How had it come to this? Jesus lifted up so many who had fallen in life. The blind, the lame, the leper. Jesus lifted those that others had wanted to crush. Was that why He was laying beneath the burden, carrying condemnation? He was dragged to His feet, to climb.

Father raise Him up.

In the burden of illness, we fall from time to time. We can no longer portray an image of inner strength. The reality slaps us in the face. Inner voices scream, just give in! When this kind of fall comes, we may just want to let the seemingly inevitable happen. We may look at the numbers of people falling under the burden of the virus. We may feel weak against such an attack. We can achieve little like this though. Although the burden of worry may still be present, rise and move on.

Remember the many who fall each day. Fall into despair and hopelessness. Fall into the depths of loneliness. Those who fall because a once promising relationship has collapsed. The support of family has been removed.

Father raise them up.

4 Encounter

Were there any faces in the crowd to inspire Jesus as He climbed? Anyone to offer hope? Then something happened. The Encounter of all encounters. A Son met His Mother. Mother met her Son. What a meeting. Eyes looking into eyes. Pain looking into pain. A time when words were no longer needed, when reality told its story. What could possibly have been said? What shone through though, was the light of sheer love in utter grief. That love, eased the burden. In that love there was no condemnation. That love would raise Him when He fell. That love would abide in the Mother for all time, just as she had conceived that Love.

Father be with Him.

One of the many burdens in this time of pandemic is the loss of the encounter. In the laborious journey, there is for many, only loneliness. Although no one is left alone in their passion even when familial love is physically absent. What grief is this? The presence of ministering angels, comes from those who sweat and toil to offer comfort and ease suffering brings, to bring that physical comfort. There is nothing to match the look of love though. To hold a hand that had been held so many times. Isn't it only natural to want to encounter love at such a time? We remember all of those who are unable to encounter the ones they love in their time of pain.

Father be with them.

5 Support

Not only was there the look of love to hold onto for Jesus. There was also the physical presence of another person to help carry the burden. This was not an offer of friendship. The helper was dragged from the crowd, a by-stander. The persecutors of Jesus wanted Him to make it to the end of the journey so they could fulfill their mission of crucifixion. No doubt, like all of us Jesus would have been uplifted by this support. His weakness was becoming too great, the climb, an endless path.

Father carry His burden.

Physical support is what we seek when unwell. On hearing the words of illness pronounced, who would want to be alone? On climbing the seemingly endless path of treatment we crave someone to help carry the burden, to lift us when we fall. In this pandemic the support of so many care workers is admired and appreciated. They, like an army fighting on the front line bear the brunt of this attack on life. In their periods of tiredness they still assist, not by force, but willingly. In the place of intense pressure they bring human kindness.

We remember care workers, whatever kind, and in whatever place. We remember, not only now, but at all times.

Father, carry their burden.

6 Tenderness

As Jesus climbed, the encounter and support must have been a sign of goodness in the presence of the evil that was inflicted upon Him. Now another sign of that goodness as the woman comes from the crowd. In an act of tenderness she wipes His Face. Cleansed from the blood, sweat and dust that covered the Face that once looked upon crowds and individuals who came to Him for cleansing. The imprint remained. We can only hope Jesus felt that tenderness while He faced brutality. *Father show Him Your tender, loving care.*

As illness takes hold of those we love, and they are taken into the care of professionals, we hope, above all else, that they feel loved and receive tenderness, even when painful treatment must be undertaken. We place our loved ones in their care. We can only hope that an imprint of our tenderness towards them has made an indelible imprint on their heart, so they realise our presence, even in our absence. Even when unconsciousness takes hold, even when machines keep them alive.

We remember those who endure painful treatment in the hope of healing. Those who seek tenderness and the warmth of physical signs of love.

Father show them Your tender, loving care.

7 Deeper

Even after the moving encounter, the physical support and an act of tenderness, Jesus can climb no more. He falls deeper under the condemnation and burden. Once again, the Face, so recently cleansed, lies deep in the dust. Once more shouts and beatings occur, to force Him to carry on the climb. Maybe those who had shown tender care prayed for it to end now, so He would no longer have to endure the pain.

Would it be for the best, a kinder death than the one to come?

Father, enter into the depths with Him.

This can be a question many people have to ask themselves as they witness the pain and indignity of illness take hold of the person they have so much love for. All they see are tubes and machines, 'keeping them alive'. The person seems to have been removed from their sight. Should it all end now, away from machines and noise? In this pandemic we have witnessed the level of care needed and given in order that life may continue. Witnessed the care given so that loved ones may be lifted up, back into life. Witnessed that for many, even when the care is given, some fall, deeper. We remember those who fall into the depths of despair through mental illness, through loss, through fear of what may be.

Father, enter into the depths with them.

8 Encouragement

Jesus would certainly have needed words of encouragement as He climbed onward. How though could anyone encourage someone who is on the way to their execution? This though was not Jesus receiving the encouragement, He was the One to give it, even in these circumstances. The women of Jerusalem were distraught. He witnessed that distress. God knows our need for encouragement and gives it. "Do not weep for Me. Rather, weep for yourselves".

Father strengthen Him.

We also need encouragement when all seems lost. We may weep for the many people of the world who suffer. As Jesus said though, should humanity not weep for itself, as it can be humanity that causes the pain of others. Who knows the cause of the virus that afflicts the world? Now we do weep. For loss of life, for those who show such care, for loss of community and for those alone. We weep, that our life is not the same as it was. A clap and a cheer may bring short term encouragement. A long term change of attitude could encourage so many more.

Father strengthen us.

9 Crushed

Surely, enough is enough. All energy had gone from Jesus as, once again He fell, crushed under the condemnation and burden. Not another step could He take. Only the force of the soldiers got Him on His feet again. They say that the heavy burden Jesus bore, was not only the weight of the Cross but of our sin. In human form though, Jesus was carrying a truly heavy load. Through the load, we have been restored to right relationship with the Father. The wood of the Cross, crushed the One sent to save us it would have appeared.

Father save Him.

There are many ways in which humanity is crushed in life. Carrying the weight of physical illness is but one way. Another is that of mental illness, an invisible load. So many people bear this burden every day. They feel they can no longer take another step in life, because each step is filled with pitfalls. All seems lost. With mental illness, a darkness takes hold of the person. The way forward cannot be seen. Nobody understands apart from the one living through this burden. To those outside all seems normal. To the one inside, life feels as if it is not worth living. Maybe it is just too hard for those free from the load to understand, so it is hidden from view. To the one climbing the hill, it is all to present.

Father save them.

10 Stripped

At least the grueling climb is done. Will there be some form of respite for Jesus before the inevitable? Time to catch, what will be the last few breaths before the wood must bear Him. No. Now comes the indignity of stripping. As if execution was not enough, humiliation must also be endured. The physical pain of this must also have been un-bearable. The pain of those standing by, the helplessness felt, must also have been torture. As evil was inflicted upon the Goodness of God, everyone suffered, especially the Manifestation of that goodness.

Father clothe Him in Your love.

In the course of hospitalization, indignity must also be endured. The clothes once worn must be stripped from the person and consigned to a plastic bag. Stripped of all belongings. A flimsy gown draped over the person, leaving little to the imagination. We wear our clothes for warmth and to uphold dignity, to hide our body from intrusive eyes. Now those eyes must scrutinise our body to bring about the healing required. They may well have seen it all before. That doesn't mean the individual has flaunted it all before. In illness, there must be a handing over of one's self. Those who love can only look on, helpless, knowing.

Father clothe them in Your love.

11 Abandoned

The pain Jesus experienced must have been intense. After everything that had happened, to be hung by nails was sheer agony and a manifestation of evil. This form of execution was a tortuous one as breathing became more difficult. Jesus Himself felt abandoned by the Father. Abandoned by those who followed Him. Apart from a Mother and some other women, and a young disciple, Jesus was alone. Each breath a struggle. The Mother holding her breath must have longed to hold her Son. The scene was quite simply, horrific.

Father breath You Spirit of life into Him.

So is the scene witnessed by front line medical staff today. Television cameras intrude, giving graphic portrayals of all that is happening. In no way can they portray the intensity of the experience. Those affected by this viral attack, plugged into ventilators to oxygenate. Perhaps it is better not to witness everything in graphic detail. Loved ones may feel a sense of abandonment, longing to be there, to hold and love, but the expertise shown by so many is all that can be given. The scene is so tragic.

Father breath Your Spirit of life into them.

12 Accomplished

"It is accomplished." Jesus took His last breath. What would those who stood by have thought? Was there a sense of relief? Finally the One they loved was at peace. The tortuous journey was complete. As far as they knew, it was the end of the story. There was only the ritual of burial to carry out. Then, they would have to experience the suffering of loss. They had placed such hope in Him. Now life seemed hopeless. What to do now?

Father give Him Your peace.

Many people who keep vigil at a bedside of a dying person experience the same as those who stayed with Jesus. Listening for each breath to come. Even breathing along with the person. All the time, wondering. Is this it? When the time finally comes, the confusion of being relieved or mourning. Peace for the one who had died. Inner turmoil for the ones who watched. During this pandemic, some say death has become a statistic. More numbers to add to the list. For families though, death is the birth of loss. For the medical teams, it must be another weight to the burden. Everything they could do was done. Still, another one whom they were caring for has died.

Father give them Your peace.

13 Release

After the death of Jesus, the painful task of releasing Him from the wood. This can't have been an easy task. They would have wanted to show such reverence to the Body. Not because He was Son of God, but because they loved Him. They surely wanted His dignity restored. We hear that as Jesus was released, they lay Him in His Mother's arms. Another tragic scene. No doubt all she would have wanted was to join her Son in death. Put an end to such grief. Be released from the pain of loss.

Father, give Him freedom.

For many whose loved ones have died in this pandemic, they are denied the ritual of death. They cannot be present to hold hands. They cannot restore dignity after the removal of the necessary medical paraphernalia. A final brush of the hair. A farewell kiss. A quiet prayer or chat. Once again, this is left to those who care. But families long to carry out the ritual. To have it taken away exacerbates their loss. This virus leaves its effect, far beyond the hospital bed. Each family will long for release.

Father give them freedom.

14 Entombed

The final act of this day of days. Now, the Body of a Son, of a teacher and friend, of the Lord, is placed in the darkness and security of a tomb. The stone rolled into the tomb. Closed as if closing the cover of a book on completion. How did that party of people feel as they walked away? Did they endeavour to console one another, or was there a pall of silence hanging over them, trying to comprehend, what next? Tomorrow, they would go and perform the final Rites and that would be it. Nothing left but memories of what was, and thoughts of what could have been.

Father in their darkness grant them life.

The final act of remembrance is a vital one to carry out and one of the painful acts of life. Once again, in this pandemic, yet another passage of life taken away from those who mourn. The Rite itself pared down to a minimum, to keep the gathering short. No reception where loved ones and friends would share memories, laughing and crying together. No pictures to help reflect on past days. The cruelty of a virus that tries to win, right to the end. How then do these mourners close the book? Will there be another day when they can roll the stone and close the tomb?

Father in their darkness grant them life.