

Ecological Way of the Cross

Background: The Way of the Cross can be traced to St. Francis of Assisi, who lived at a time when Christian pilgrims could not travel safely to the Holy Land. Francis brought the experience of the Holy Land home, as we bring the Way of the Cross home to our local place of natural beauty. Reflecting on the sufferings of Jesus at each station, we raise the Cross of Christ to remind us that our sister, Mother Earth—our common home—belongs to God, and we ask for strength and unity to care for God's creation.

This booklet is prepared by the Franciscan Friars Conventual JPIC commission and a combined adaptation from a Catholic Climate Covenant (CCC) parish resource (from the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis's 2022 ACCT) and a Jesuit Refugee Service resource (JRS Renew the Earth—Stations 2022). It offers us a timely way of the cross which invites us to give new meaning and reflection on this traditional experience. Annually we are blessed with the season of Lent where we are encouraged to renew our faith through practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving in preparation for the celebration of Easter.

These past years with the critical traumas of the relentless COVID pandemic, degradation of lands by fire and flooding, displacement of peoples by drought and rising sea water it seems fitting that we reflect on this unique way of the cross with an emphasis on the eco-conversion that is needed for our time.

“One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world...”

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* 99

OPENING PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, today we join you in your Passion, accompanying you through your greatest trial. Grant us the courage to keep our eyes open, our ears listening, and our senses aware of what you experience. May we recognize how your Passion continues in the plight of our sisters and brothers who seek refuge during these unsettling times, fleeing violence, conflict, persecution, and environmental destruction. May we stay by your side, even if we fall with you. Animate our steps with your love and hope, although we may not be certain where the journey will end. Remove all fear and help us to become aware of your presence in all things. Amen

♪ HYMN

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

(repeat)

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

*The hymn is repeated at each Station with a first line variation

1st Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death

The innocent suffer for the sins of others

Meditation: We were present in the Creator's mind and heart, even before these ancient soils and waters were formed. We are part of the Earth itself, yet we disregard these gifts that we think of as common, ordinary, and plentiful. We throw away because there is always "more." We burn, discard and waste until the scarcity is before our eyes. It is only then that we recognize God's resources as gifts and condemn ourselves and others to the strife of shortages, inequity, and fear; we are responsible for exacerbating environmentally driven displacements and climate induced refugees. Despite the desperate situations of our neighbors fleeing in search of safety, countries across the globe continue to restrict asylum and limit refugee admissions. Dare we wash our hands of their plight like Pilate, or shall we immerse ourselves in solidarity – remembering that these injustices can be addressed?

We Pray: Loving God, in your generosity You gave us abundance to meet our needs. You gave us Jesus as first-born Gift of the Earth. May we not wash our hands of our brothers and sisters displaced worldwide, and may you rain down upon them with all of the love and peace you were denied in your condemnation. Forgive us our sins of abuse and neglect. Increase our awareness of the value of your Gifts, lest we destroy all that gives us life. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when they seized the Man of Peace?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

2nd Station: Jesus Takes Up the Cross

We take responsibility for our Earth

Meditation: Just as Jesus embraced his burden, we lift up our burdened world. In 2020, 30.7 million people were displaced globally because of weather-related disasters, including 1.7 million Americans. By 2050, as many as 143 million people could be displaced globally due to climate-related reasons. When consumerism goes too far, short-sighted greed weighs heavily upon land and people. Humans are a part of Nature and a force of nature. Soils can be destroyed by human greed when land is rapaciously altered, mined for minerals, or industrially drained of nutrients. Precious water supplies, valuable plants and wildlife are impacted forever.

We Pray: Precious Lord, the good Earth is like you, suffering from our sins of thoughtlessness, wastefulness, and taking the easy way out. May we willingly pick up the challenge to examine our lives and find the courage to put down the things that are destroying your creation and your people, give us grace to be good denizens of this beautiful Planet. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when they sent Him to his death?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

3rd Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

The fallen state of the environment causes people to emigrate

Meditation: To the weight of the cross, an even heavier burden is added: the powerful beatings, the lies and betrayals, abandonment by his own disciples, the cruel humiliations. Because Jesus cannot bear the terrible pain, he falls. Climate-related displaced persons “are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering...”(LS 25) there are so many times that migrants fall on their journeys; the way to the *promised land* becomes a journey of the cross as they deal with hatred and many obstacles. Only faith in an active God gives them strength.

We Pray: God of migrants, you were driven through the streets as a criminal, your true identity ignored, help us to see your face in those driven from their homes by environmental forces, and to be their voice in a world that does not recognize their rights or dignity. We pray for the protection of our migrant sisters and brothers on their journeys full of risks and dangers, as they escape devastation in their homelands. Help them to overcome obstacles; do not allow families to be separated or lost. Walk with them and lift them up after they fall. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when He fell the first time?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

4th Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

Sister Mother Earth suffers, too

Meditation: God created the Heavens and the Earth, the cradle for every life form known to us, doing so God made us kin to all life; the biosphere is therefore our sister. As mothers hold their babies, Earth also holds every life. Consider how our choices harm this great Sister Mother Earth of ours (as St. Francis called her). How would you feel to see your sister or mother humiliated and bruised? Consider our contributions to environmental degradation. Are we like the jeering crowds who made Mary's heart feel the pain of her Son? Today's cumulative effects of climate change cause many mothers and fathers to face the stress of providing food for their children when there is so little to find.

We Pray: Loving Jesus, by the sorrow you felt in meeting your Mother, Mary, give me a heart of compassion for our Sister-Mother Earth that holds me, provides my food, water, and air. May I resist choices that devalue the home you've given us. Help me protect Earth as I would my own Sister or Mother. Help us to act in love to ease the pain of the millions of parents who watch their children needlessly suffer. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when His Mother saw His face?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

5th Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

In support of marginalized people

Meditation: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Mt 25:40). The Bible tells us that we are our sister's and brothers' keeper, and guardians of Creation entrusted to us. Our responsibility extends to the threatened commons—vegetation, animals, and natural elements. We are called "to listen to the cry of the earth and of people who are poor, examining their behavior and pledging meaningful sacrifices for the sake of the earth which God has given us." [09/01/21 Joint Message for the Protection of Creation]

We Pray: God of compassion, help us to recognize that we are our brother's and sister's keepers. Simon of Cyrene's day, plans, and life were disrupted when he was called upon to help you, like Simon, may we also work to alleviate the suffering of those crushed by the heavy cross of injustice and violence committed against them and their fellow creatures. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when Simon shared his Cross?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

6th Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

We recognize the stains of abuse on people and the land

Meditation: For those who live in wealthy countries, access to amenities and abundant resources can put a temporary band-aid on the inconveniences caused by climate change. But such comfort can come at a high cost for our sisters and brothers around the globe. Today there is a great need to slow down our hectic pace in the global north. Contact with nature, its beauty and peace, helps restore our pace to creation's. While we take in our Sister-Mother's wonderment, it is also necessary to look into ourselves, into the depths of our hearts, face to face with our conscience.

We Pray: O God, we see the face of your Son reflected in all people, and in the whole cosmos created through Christ and for Christ. May our works of charity and justice serve to wipe the bloody face of Christ in our world today so that others may see a glimpse of your glory. With your grace, may we commit ourselves to the practice of empathy, to be present to others vulnerable to problems they did not create, but who reap these tragic consequences anyway. Give us the courage to reconnect and to heal. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when she wiped the face of Christ?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

7th Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time

We stumble through frustration and anger

Meditation: Most wealthy and powerful people are tempted to exploit resources under the impulse of unlimited profit. Strong secular powers damage the balance of ecosystems, the health of their inhabitants and future generations, they frustrate the designs of our Creator with their industrialized economics and geopolitics. Are we aware of our daily actions that result in a demand for excess, waste, and destruction? While the results may seem small within our own vicinity, they join the billions of actions around the world that daily contribute to a culture of degradation.

We Pray: Lord, you fall to the ground as do many today crushed by the forces of technocratic greed, consumerism, and politics without soul. Help us to recognize you in those who carry the heavy load of unjust public policies and practices. We pray for the wisdom to unlearn harmful habits and deconstruct the systematic structures that oppress people, especially displaced persons. May we not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for a just and sustainable future. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when He fell the second time?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

8th Station: Jesus Consoles the Women of Jerusalem

We weep over deaths of the innocent

Meditation: Our country faces a time of trial—the conflict between a culture that affirms, cherishes and celebrates the gift of life, and one that declares entire groups of beings to be outside the boundaries of protection. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate shocks; significantly affecting their ability to care for themselves and even putting them in intensified risks of gender-based violence. To choose life involves rejecting every form of violence—poverty, hunger, interreligious intolerance, armed conflict, sexism, racism...and thoughtless damage to our common home.

We Pray: Creator God, may we resist the throwaway culture of death. Like the women of Jerusalem, may we weep for the children of Sister Mother Earth, who will bear the brunt of global environmental change. Help us to emulate your kindness and prevent the tragic violence that affects so many innocent lives. May our compassion purify our vision and empower us to choose life, for children in our communities and afar, from this generation to the next, and for all God's creatures. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when the women wept for Him?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

9th Station: Jesus Falls a Third Time

We need courage to resist despair

Meditation: Under the weight of the cross, as the crowds pressed in and the sun glared down, Jesus falls again. “We fail to see the deepest roots of our present failures, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth” (LS 109). As we carry our cross of stewardship for the Earth, we feel anguish as exploitation seems so vast, complex, and daunting. The harshest anguish of all is to hear people speak of their sisters and brothers with derogatory slurs, for the Earth is everyone's common home.

We Pray: Lord, we seek your guidance to enlighten our decisions and ask for courage to boldly acknowledge your more-than-human creation. As a people, help us to embrace the kinship of creation. As Jesus found the strength to rise and fulfill Your will, open our eyes to “see the deepest roots of our present failures,” give us the resolve to care for Your creation, even when the challenges are daunting, to pick ourselves up and carry on despite our weakness.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when He fell the third time?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

10th Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

Nature is stripped of its dignity and beauty

Meditation: As Jesus is prepared to be crucified, he was stripped of his clothing, and mocked as an assault to his dignity. Today the Earth is stripped of rich soils and carved into for mineral wealth and fossil fuels. Wildlife habitat is lost, watersheds are reshaped in our image, and potable water is endangered, all in the name of capital. Communities in rural and low-income parts of our Church suffer the visual, ecological, and physical health effects of Earth's exploitation. “Crises are driven by fragility and conflict, amplified by climate change and the impact of COVID-19; extreme poverty or destitution has risen for the first time in 22 years. Global humanitarian needs are at an all-time high and continues to grow.” [OCHA 2021]

We Pray: God of those stripped of dignity, the current situation is stripping away what little belongs to those experiencing poverty, just as you were finally stripped of your bloodied garments. Stir us with empathy and help us to seek sustainable lifestyles that restrain our own impulses of consumer frivolity, so that your creation will not be stripped of beauty and life-giving resources. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when they stripped away his clothes?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

11th Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

We are responsible for Christ's pain and Earth's exploitation

Meditation: Just as Jesus suffered the anguish of nails piercing his hands and feet as his mother and beloved disciple absorbed the scene of injustice and mockery, many people throughout the world have been pierced by the effects of climate change, violence, and war. As we carry our cross of guardianship, we make a commitment to be anchored to the beams of justice, not of convenience, to suffer in solidarity with innocent victims. Our hands must prudently use precious resources and our feet must work tirelessly for ecological conservation.

We Pray: God of sacred space and nature, our obliviousness to the wonder and universal destiny of your creation, and our misguided models of progress are like nails with which we crucify you today. Help us to recognize the wounds of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. May our realizations and reawakening's in the Spirit bring us to repentance and to your abiding presence in which everything lives, moves, and has its being. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

12th Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

We are often indifferent to those who die

Meditation: Jesus dies after an earthly life that began as a refugee. Today, over 80 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide. Armed conflicts, and religious, political, and socio-ecological persecution continue to displace people from their homes. Refugees are dying daily from climate induced floods, famines, and wars. Many are tortured, killed, or internally displaced within their own countries. We too must take responsibility for our contributions to the death and destruction of our common home. How will we respond to others who lack the basic necessities of life?

We Pray: Jesus, you died on the cross, surrendering your will to the Creator's so that we may have life in abundance. Forgive us for what we have done to contribute to the web of today's problems. May we surrender our moral, economic, and social decisions to God's divine providence. For only in faith can we move beyond self-interest to see the interdependence of all God's creation is other-centered. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when He died for love of us?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

13th Station: The Body of Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

We feel discouraged, disillusioned, hopeless

Meditation: Christ is taken from the cross and darkness settles upon the world, for the Son of God has been slain. Today this darkness lives on as feedback cycles of violence, oppression, and disasters perpetuate. As Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus stepped up to care for the lifeless body of Jesus, we must step up to care for the unjustly crucified creation. May we be inspired by the resiliency of refugees to rise above their circumstances, however distressing they may be. We must acknowledge our responsibility to be co-creators with God in the goodness of creation. We can provide the spark of faith or the seed of hope to blossom for the next generation.

We Pray: O Maker of all things new, help us to hold on to our faith, hope and love when we feel overwhelmed and discouraged by the challenges of our socio-ecological crises. As a community of mutual support, deepen our courage and use us as instruments of the peace you desire for all creation. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when they took Him off the tree?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

14th Station: Jesus' Body is entombed

We wait with eager longing for the glory of God

Meditation: The hope and light of the world has been laid to rest in a tomb, but it was only an interlude to the resurrection. The women of Galilee and faithful followers take the first lonely steps without Jesus by their side. Each year, millions of our brothers and sisters take their own lonely steps into new lands that are not always friendly to their arrival. Wherever this suffering is present in the world, there, the cross of Christ is mysteriously present. It is by this cross that light pierces through the darkness as those suffering wait in hope for the joyful coming of the Lord. In moments of darkness and suffering like these, we must learn to trust in God's providence and not obsess over our own *desires*.

We Pray: O gracious God, for whom nothing is impossible, help your Church to be faithful to you in the midst of adversity. May your love, through our solidarity, be a balm for those who weep and provide them with the peace of knowing that they are not alone. Empower us to bear your dream of justice, peace, and integrity for all your creation. Amen.

♪ HYMN

Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

15th Station: Jesus Christ is Risen

Our faith gives us hope for new sources of life

Meditation: Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. And the One who was seated on the throne said 'See, I am making all things new' (Rev 21: 1-5); Christ brings all together in the fullness of time. Creation will be transfigured after its collective pilgrimage unto its end, the resurrection is a promise that all will be made into a new creation in the great beyond. May this easter hope stir us to cultivate and cherish the kinship of creation.

We Pray: God of love, thank you for leading us from the darkness into the light. May we fan into flame the gifts we have received, mindful that you gave us no cowardly spirit, but one of power, love, and temperance. Give us wisdom and strength to be witnesses to the world as we take up the mission of healing and sanctifying the world so that "God may be all in all." (1 Cor 15:28) Amen.

♪ HYMN

Taize Chant:

Jesus, remember me, when You come into Your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me, when You come into Your kingdom. (Repeat X2).

CLOSING PRAYER:

Christ Jesus, from the darkness of the tombs we experience today may you transform our world and help us towards the emergence of Resurrection. Imbue us with the Spirit of your Life, that we too may be resurrected in You, that the face of your creation may be renewed. Help us to always see you in the most vulnerable and marginalized among us, especially migrants and refugees. Protect them on their journeys just as you have protected us on ours. Teach us to stand together as One People under you, Our One Lord and migrant God. Amen