

A PRAYER AND A MESSAGE OF GRATITUDE  
FROM ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK  
TO ALL IN THE HEALTH SERVICE  
WHO CARE FOR US IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES

In many churches and chapels you will see on the walls "Stations of the Cross". We use these images especially during Lent and Passiontide to meditate on the journey Jesus makes carrying his cross to Calvary. These devotions are especially significant at this time as you care for so many of our brothers and sisters in carrying the cross of sickness, and even death, during this COVID 19 pandemic.

Three significant people who accompanied Jesus on that painful journey. They speak to us on the journey we are forced to make today. The first was Mary his mother, and our mother too. "At The Cross Her Station Keeping" as the ancient hymn "Stabat Mater" puts it. Mary is the model for all who stand, and watch, and care for those who are in any need whatsoever.

The second is Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry his cross. He probably did not know the significance of what he was doing. Yet his example comes down through the ages as a model and support as you reach out and help those who need to be carried through this burden of sickness.

Veronica wiped the bloodied face of Jesus and, by tradition, that image was printed on the towel she used. Her tenderness in the face of terrible suffering remains an inspiration to all who relieve the pain and suffering of those who rely on staff "binding up their wounds".

There is no doubt that each one of you, through your professionalism, compassion and courage, extend the healing hands of Jesus to the sick for whom you care. Often this is done at risk to your own health. I write to say you are not forgotten and for your healing hands we are all truly grateful. Even though at times exhausted and even fearful, you are supported by the prayers, love and admiration of so many people in our homes, churches and beyond. Please care for yourselves and your families in the same professional way you care for your patients.

Mary, Simon and Veronica did extraordinary works of mercy at a time of great confusion and pain to themselves. Com-*passion* is a powerful word which is as meaningful today as it was on the road to Calvary two thousand years ago. We thank you for travelling with us on this painful journey.

On Thursday last Pope Francis blessed the peoples of the world from St. Peter's Square.

Speaking of you he said:

“It is the life of the Spirit that can redeem, value and demonstrate how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people who do not appear in newspapers and magazine headlines nor on the grand catwalks of the latest show, but who without any doubt are in these very days writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, cleaners, caregivers and so very many others who have understood that no one reaches salvation by themselves. The Lord needs these companions on his way of the cross. You who are on the front lines of this pandemic are involved in these decisive times before us”.

Urbi et Orbi