



## Stations of the Cross

The set of stations of the cross being used this year were painted by Helen Meyer, who trained at Camberwell and Edinburgh Colleges of Art.

There were pilgrimages to Jerusalem from the early days but this devotion originated there in the 13<sup>th</sup> century where, as today, worshippers follow the actual route of Jesus to the cross.

By the fourteenth century popular demand resulted in it being used in churches all over Europe. It was much encouraged by the Franciscans, who taught people to pray using their imaginations.

The reflections are by Richard Harries.

### **Service order**

(At each station)

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

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

(A brief meditation will be read followed by a short period of silence for personal reflection)

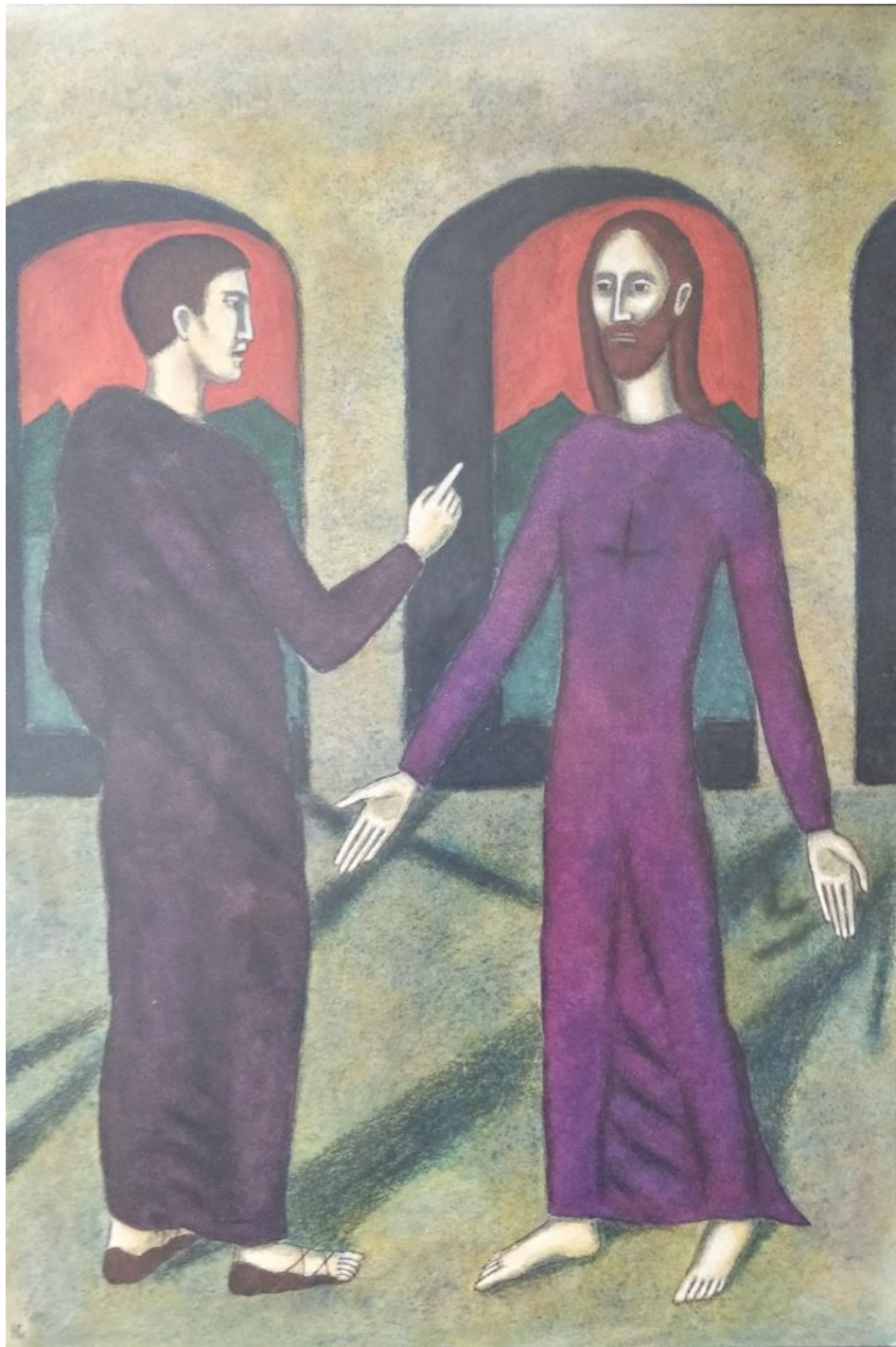
Jesus, Saviour of the world, come to us in your mercy.

**We look to you to save and help us**

By your cross and your life laid down, you set your people free

**We look to you to save and help us**

(Move to next station)



### **First Station**

#### **Pilate condemns Jesus to die**

**Pilate points an accusatory finger. Jesus stands before him, hiding nothing, palms open. Not defending himself but available for whatever lies ahead.**

## First Station

*(Short silence)*

Here is tragic irony indeed. Jesus is judged and condemned to death but by that very act it is humanity itself which is judged. Sometimes when there is a creative breakthrough in the arts a particular work is greeted with derision by most contemporary critics. But in the light of history, when that work's stature is widely recognised, those critics look extremely foolish. Their rejection of the work, their judgement, is itself judged and found to be wanting. They were so trapped in their own prejudices that they turned out to be blind.

The one condemning Jesus is not dressed like a Roman governor. With plain robes and impassive face he is Mr Everyman. It is the world, unable to face its own horrible tangle, that points the accusatory finger at the one whose sheer presence questions us.

St John's Gospel records

'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not perish but have eternal life. It was not to judge the world that God sent his Son into the world, but that through him the world might be saved. No one who puts his faith in him comes under judgement; but the unbeliever has already been judged because he has not put his faith in God's only Son. This is the judgement: the light has come into the world, but people preferred darkness to light because their deeds were evil.' (John 3,16-19)

That light stands before us arms open, palms open, available for us, on our side.

In the light of your resurrection O Christ, we wake up to the horror of what we humans have done, condemned you our Saviour, you who came to draw us out of ourselves into the beauty of your light.

At the same time, we rejoice that you have so lifted us into that light that our misjudgement is lifted from us.

We rejoice that we walk now in the light of your presence.



### **Second station**

#### **Jesus accepts the cross**

**The gentle hands of Jesus hold the cross whilst he looks down at it reflectively. But the jagged mountain range and orange sky indicate menace.**

### **Second station**

*(Short silence)*

The sight of crucified criminals hanging on a cross, often for days, could sometimes be seen by the roadside of Roman Palestine. They acted as a terrifying warning to rebels and wrongdoers. When Jesus was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying that the cup of suffering would be taken from him, perhaps that image was in his mind. Now the reality had come to pass. He had prayed that his father's will be done, and this painful road was it. The sharp, jagged mountains against a blood red sky were there in the first station, now the agony they foretell presses closer.

We distinguish between what God directly wills and what he allows for deeper, wider reasons. He wills health and happiness. But he allows the limitations and constraints of life to bear upon us, as we certainly discover as we get older. We can rail against them, accept them stoically, or seek to discover the Divine will somewhere within them. Jesus seeks that deeper will within the harsh circumstances in which he finds himself, he accepts the cross that he foresees lies before him. He recognises that this is what he has to go through. 'Father, take this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.'

The one who gives him the cross is not dressed as a Roman soldier. Again, he is Mr Everyman. The world in its weariness presses the cross on Jesus. The world is faint and ready to say farewell to it all, and Jesus carries it, carries us.

Later they remembered his saying "No one who does not carry his cross...can be a follower of mine" (Luke 14,27). That cross comes in the form of the limitations and constraints of the circumstances of our lives. Even more it comes in the struggle to leave self behind and focus on Christ and his presence in those around us. But to hear his call, to carry that cross, is to enter into his joy, for it is to be taken into his unbroken relationship with the father.





### **Third station**

#### **Jesus falls for the first time**

**It is the weight of the cross that pushes him down, but he bends and bows his head as though in prayer. The sharp peaks and sky are even more menacing as they highlight the vulnerable white of the upturned feet.**

### **Third station**

*(Short silence)*

After the last supper he had gone out to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. He had been arrested and gone through all the nervous tension and trauma of two trials, one before the religious authorities, the other before Pilate. He had been whipped and humiliated and exposed to the hostility of the crowds. He will have been weak and exhausted even before taking the cross. It is not surprising that he stumbled and fell with the heavy weight.

In his ministry Jesus had said “Come to me all who are burdened and heavy laden and I will give rest to your souls. My yoke is easy, my burden is light”. Here he himself is burdened-but burdened for the sake of humanity. He is the living God who bears our burdens -the load on all those who are stressed and strained, at the end of their tether, tempted to give up, falling into despair. He enters into all who are heavy laden in order to lift them into his presence, into his unbreakable union with the father.

As Jesus bends over there is an extraordinary repose in his face and body. His hands are not full of tension but hold the cross gently. Beneath the pain and turbulent emotions his being is one with the Father. In his poise and repose he is upheld, and in him we are upheld too. ‘Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrow’ as Isaiah foresaw many years before. ‘Come to me all who are burdened and heavy laden and I will give rest to your souls.’ ‘May we who are fatigued by the changes and chances of this fleeting world repose on thy changelessness.’



### **Fourth station**

**Jesus meets his mother, Mary**

**Jesus looks down on his mother, pity in his face, and holds her hand. She reaches out to touch him but looks away unable to bear what is happening to her son.**



## **Fourth Station**

*(Short silence)*

Forty days after the birth of Jesus, in accordance with Jewish custom, he was taken by his parents to the temple in Jerusalem. There they met the devout old man, Simeon, who had been waiting, as the scripture says, for the consolation of Israel. Simeon told Mary that her son was destined to be a sign that would be rejected - "and you too will be pierced to the heart". Or as the old translation put it. 'A sword will go through your own heart.' Now, as she saw her son staggering along, crushed by the weight of the cross, with a terrible end in view, her heart was indeed cut right through. This was the baby she had pulled to her breast with warm, passionate love, the growing child she had anxiously watched over, the young man whose company she had enjoyed at home, the mysterious teacher who had amazed and puzzled her. All those years of love poured out into him, and now he was being torn from her in a suffering she could not bear to think about.

Jesus looked and saw her face, saw the agony she felt on his behalf and her own, knew that he was powerless to help her. This too was part of the cost of his vocation, the suffering it brought to his mother. He looks down in sorrow and pity. They are joined in a wordless embrace. No words need to be said. They know. A circle of love made by the nearness of the heads, the curve of the bodies, the holding of a hand and the touch on an arm joins them.

So, he looks with pity on all those mothers whose sons have been torn from them by war, gangs or knife crime, all those who grieve.

Earlier had he said, "Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother and sister and mother"? He has taken us into a new family, a family united with new, everlasting bonds, a family which unites both the living and the departed in love and prayer. So, now, risen with Christ, living in the Spirit, we rejoice in that everlasting communion of the faithful, where all familial relationships are brought to fulfilment.



### **Fifth station**

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

**Jesus looks at Simon, with a gaze he will never forget. Jesus touches his arm with a touch that will be with him forever.**

## Fifth Station

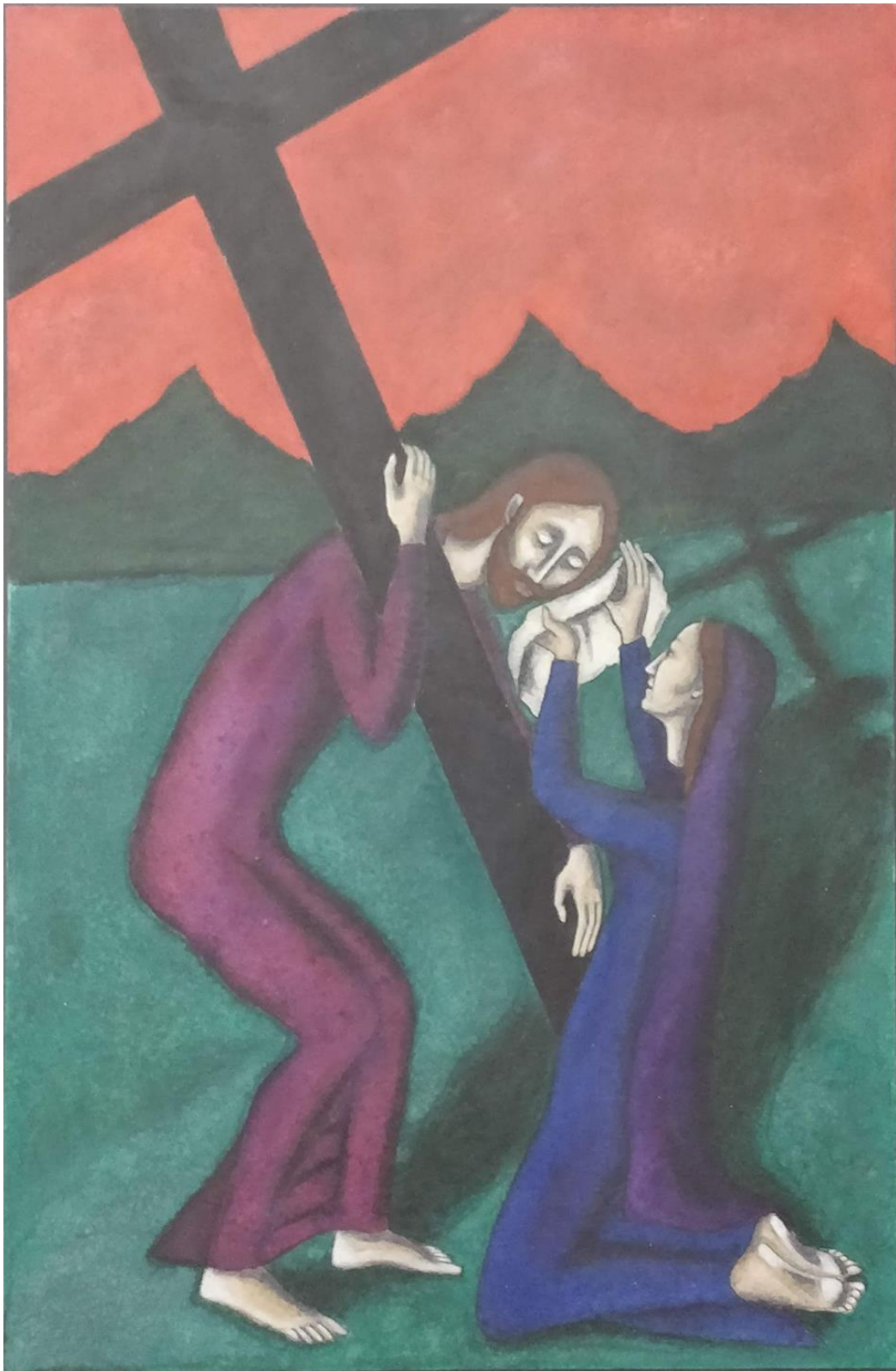
*(Short silence)*

Cyrene was a Roman province in present day Libya which contained a high percentage of Jews. Simon could have been a Jew from there on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In any case, the Roman authorities who had the power to press people into service, forced him to carry the cross.

Mark, the earliest record, tells us Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. The only point of adding such a tiny detail of course is that they would have been known to the readers of his Gospel. When they were young their father had come home one day and told them what he had been forced to do. Perhaps he recounted how Jesus had looked at him, how he had put his hand on his arm in a reassuring way. How he was helping Jesus carry the cross but the look and the gesture had somehow said that he himself was being helped. Perhaps that started a train of thought which eventually led to Alexander and Rufus becoming Christians, followers of Jesus.

Luke, in his account, adds a tiny detail, which makes a telling point. He says that Simon carrying the cross walked *behind* Jesus. It would have brought to mind the words of Jesus. "If anyone would be a follower of mine, he must daily take up his cross and follow me".

The church has sometimes been called the extension of the incarnation. The work of God in Christ goes on in and through us, as we take up the cross and follow. Perhaps we have particular crosses to bear, as the saying goes. But at the heart of this is leaving self behind by keeping close to Christ and serving him in and through others. In the duties and delights of everyday hearing the call of Christ himself. From one point of view it is a daily struggle to leave self behind and keep close to Christ but it is also our true happiness, for it is to enter into the life and joy of God



### **Sixth station**

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

**Carefully, lovingly, Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.  
He bends his head to allow himself to be ministered to.**



## Sixth Station

*(Short silence)*

The crowd lining the streets of Jerusalem as Jesus went by would have contained the usual mixture of people. Many just curious, a few, very few we hope, would have taken sadistic pleasure in another's suffering. Many more, we hope would have felt a sense of horror and pity but also a sense of helplessness. Nothing could be done to stop what was happening, the juggernaut of Roman power, nothing could be done to alleviate the pain. But one woman decided there was something that could be done. Not only was Jesus burdened by the weight of the cross, sweat was running down his face, the salty liquid blinding and smarting his eyes. On the impulse she rushed into the street, took out her handkerchief, and wiped his face. According to the story her name was Veronica, from the Latin, Vera icon, true icon, for again according to the story, a likeness of the face of Jesus appeared on the cloth, forming what was later called the Sudarium, the basis for many subsequent images.

The focus in the station is on the space between the face of Christ and the face of Veronica. Her face looks up. Her hands are held up and open, holding the cloth. His face bends low to be ministered to. There is a wordless flow of compassion between them.

Jesus himself is the Vera Icon, the true likeness, the human image of the Eternal Son of God, but we are called to grow into that likeness. We also are called to be icons, showing forth the face of divine grace. Veronica showed that even when everything seemed hopeless, there can be a gesture of loving kindness. Through those gesturers of loving kindness, we reflect that true icon. For the true Icon is risen and ascended lives on in us.



### **Seventh station**

#### **Jesus falls for the second time**

**Jesus, further weakened, bends lower than at his first fall.**

**He clings to the cross acting as a prop to hold him up.**

**That cross dominates the sky.**

## **Seventh station**

(Short silence)

Jesus, physically weak and exhausted falls for the second time. But weighing him down too is the world's woe, the burden of ignorance, weakness and deliberate wrong-doing that has brought him to this point. There is his own deep disappointment. Called by his father to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom and invite people to live in it, at first he was heard gladly, but then with suspicion. He had built up a small group of intimate followers to share his mission. But now one of them had betrayed him, one denied him, and all the rest had fled. The religious leaders seeing him as a threat had turned on him, the political power had taken the course of least resistance, the mob had turned nasty. All this in one way or another was a turning away from God. All this weighed on him.

In the light of history what also weighs heavy is the failure of his followers, his church, the crimes carried out in his name. All this bends his back, but which he carries. Yet in the light of the resurrection, this burden is lifted into the light of his unbreakable union with his Father. As the Prayer of Consecration in the Book of Common Prayer puts it, he died 'For the sins of the whole world.' All human weakness and sin is carried and lifted into the presence of God for healing and redemption. As Julian of Norwich wrote 'I understood that the Lord looks on his servant with pity and not with blame.'



### **Eighth Station**

**Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem.**

**Some of the women who line the streets look at him, one bows her head sadly. Another kneels to hold on to him. He looks down in pity and prayer. “Do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and your children” (Luke 23, 28)**



## **Eighth Station**

*(Short silence)*

Luke has a particular interest in women, especially the small group of women who travelled with him and supported him. Here they are joined by a larger group of women who have already started the death wail which belonged to ritual mourning. Again, the cross overshadows everything, with its shadow on the wall. Again, the ominous red sky highlighting the hill of Golgotha adds to the sense of menace. The difference here is the white, perhaps a sudden shaft of sunlight or a flash of lightning before a gathering storm. It lights up the wall and the faces and the hands.

‘Do not weep for me’, he says. But he had wept. He wept when his friend Lazarus died. He had wept over Jerusalem. But now he focusses on the women and what is in store for them. He knew that the policies of the country were leading to disaster, as indeed did happen when the Jews revolted in 66 and the temple was destroyed and again in 136 when Jerusalem was razed to the ground. If things were bad now, with him being condemned to death, they would be much worse then. It would be better then to be childless, so bad would things be. Inwardly he weeps for them and the new generation. And he weeps now over the world so cruel and alienated from its true self.

Is it nothing to you who pass by?

Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow

For these things I weep

My eyes flow with tears



### **Ninth station**

**Jesus falls for the third time**

**Jesus has fallen right to the ground. But the position of his body is almost one of repose, of letting go in trust.**

## **Ninth station**

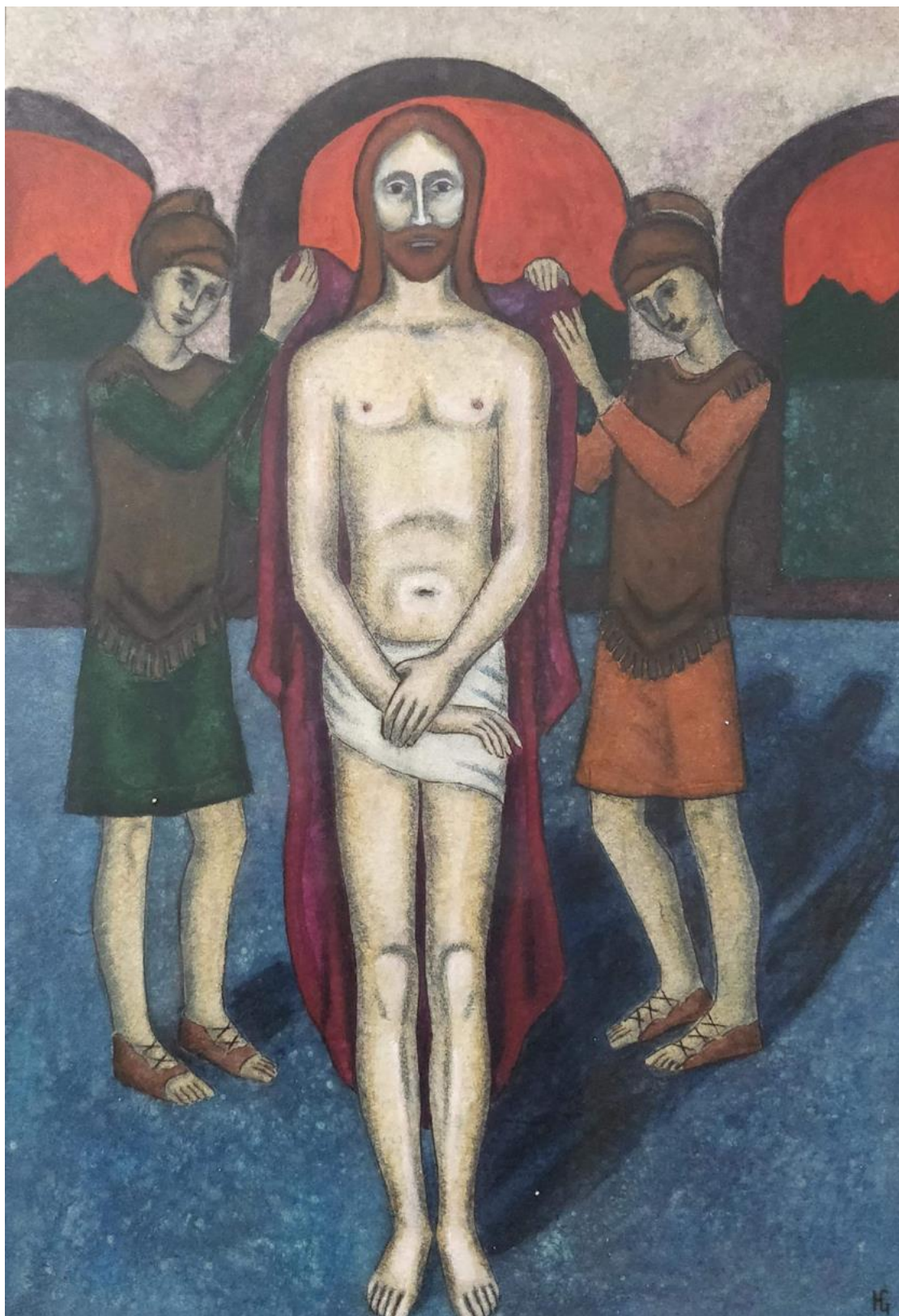
*(Short silence)*

Totally exhausted Jesus collapses for the third time. He loses control of his legs. As we grow up we begin to take control of our lives. We begin to do what we want; not always what others tell us to do. As we get older this desire to be in control of our lives can become dominant. Sometime the anxiety of losing control leads us to try to manage everything, and sometimes, everybody. Yet, whether we like it or not, in old age we do gradually lose control. Sometimes we have to let go. But so did God. In creating us God let go and gave us a life of our own, and then in the person of his Son he let go further and put himself in our hands at the mercy of events.

St Paul wrote:

Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Jesus loses physical control of his body. But inwardly he had long surrendered control of his body, his whole life and work, to the good guidance of his Father and the Father's spirit within him. He knew within himself that upholding presence and power. He knew that to fall out of time and space was to fall into the hands of the living God; that to fall through the world of electrons and atoms is to fall into the everlasting arms. So here he is curled into a cocoon of quiet repose, safe in an all-embracing sphere of support.



### **Tenth station**

**Jesus is stripped of his garments**

**The soldiers lift the robe back and Jesus is left naked except for a loincloth, exposed, vulnerable.**



## **Tenth station**

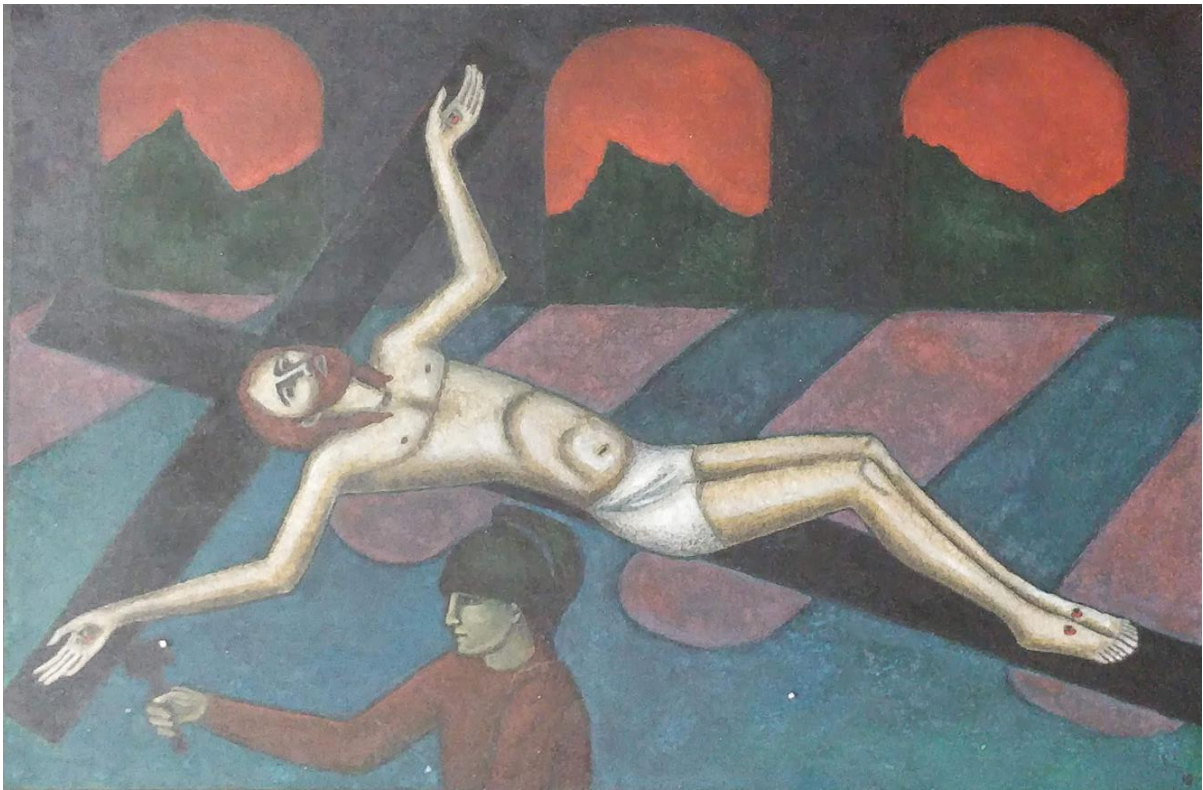
*(Short silence)*

Earlier Matthew's Gospel records:

The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into his residence, the Praetorium, where they collected the whole company round him. They stripped him and dressed him in a scarlet cloak; and plaiting a crown of thorns they placed it on his head, and a stick in his right hand. Falling on their knees before him they jeered at him: "Hail, king of the Jews!" They spat on him and used the stick to beat him about the head. When they had finished mocking him, they stripped him of the cloak and dressed him in his own clothes (Matthew 27, 31).

Stripped of our clothes we feel vulnerable. Our clothes are part of us, expressions of our person, at once revealing and covering. Without them we feel exposed, exposed physically to the elements, exposed psychologically to the eyes of those around us. The whole company, scripture says, was collected round him, with their curious or hostile eyes. In becoming incarnate the Divine Word put himself before our eyes, powerless and utterly at our mercy. But there he stands, still and straight before us, looking us in the eyes, with nothing to hide, in the true full dignity of his person, transparent to the divine life within and behind him.

Then there is the irony in the account. The soldiers dress him as though he was royal. They spit and jeer and mock him as though he were a king. Ah, the irony, the divine irony, for he is a king, their king, the king of the universe. And into that kingship he raises all the innocent, the mocked, all the unjustly imprisoned, those who are jeered at for the truth's sake. He raises them into his eternal, inviolable kingship, into their true dignity, into transparency to the Divine within them and us.



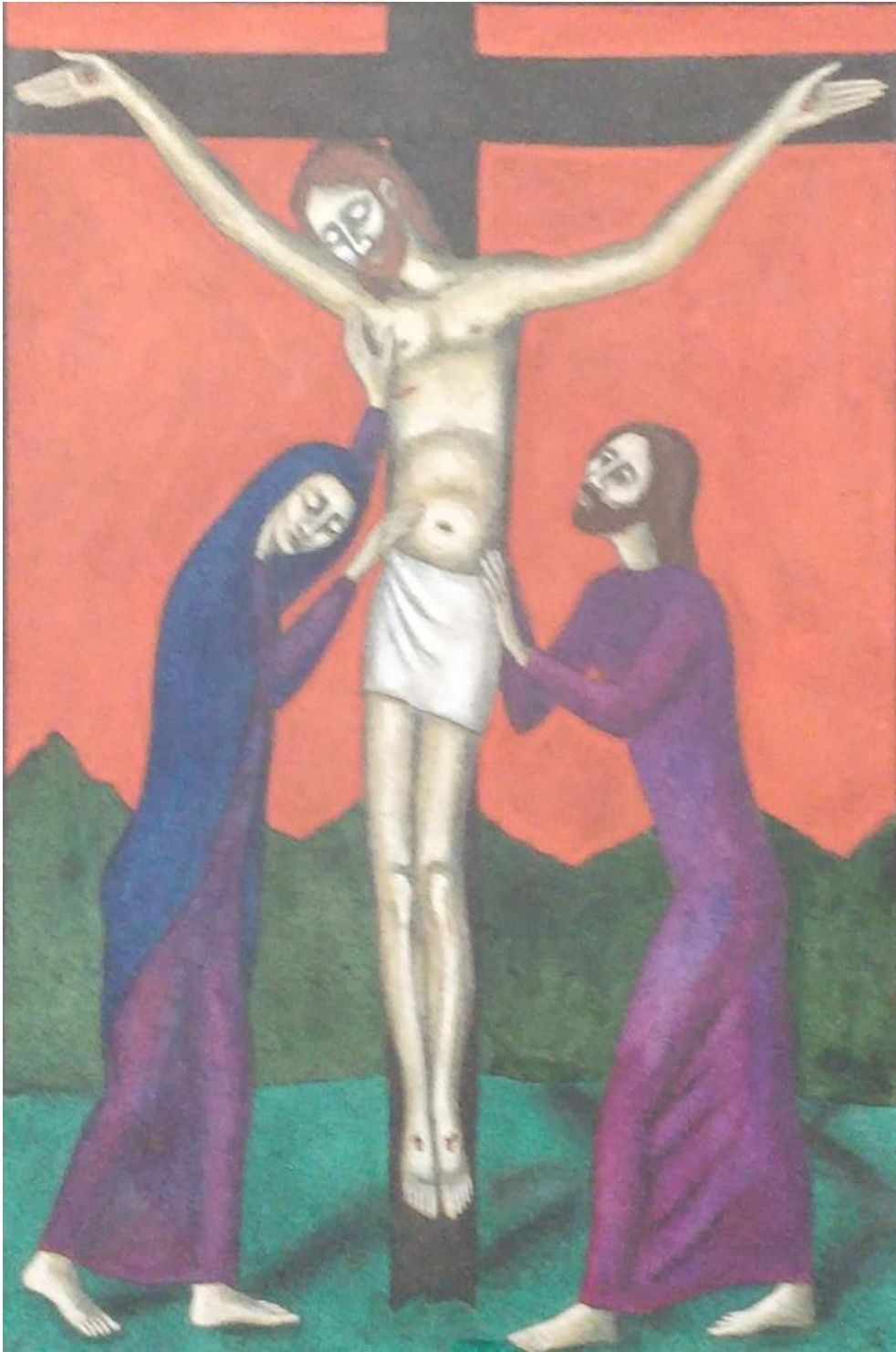
### **Eleventh station**

#### **Jesus is nailed to the cross**

**Jesus lies spread-eagled on the cross. The eyes of the soldier are concentrated on banging in the nails. The eyes of Jesus gaze up at the onlookers.**

*(Short silence)*

Traditional pictures of Jesus depict him as fastened to the cross by nails through his hands and feet, a torture before which we rightly shudder in horror. He was now totally helpless, not even able to wriggle, hardly able to breathe, fastened down. The pillars of the wall cast their blue/grey shadows across the scene. The Sun of the world is sinking, the end is near. The emptying of the divine into a human life involved limitation, accepting all the constraints of finite existence, and now here was the final limit-pinned down like a butterfly on the board of a lepidopterist. But he was fastened down, that we might be unfastened from all that holds us down. He was pinned down that we may be unpinned from all that makes us less free. He was made helpless that we might be given freedom; the glorious liberty of the children of God.



### **Twelfth station**

#### **Jesus dies on the cross**

**The head of Jesus falls to one side as Jesus lets go into death with the trust in which he had lived. His mother and John the beloved disciple touch his body with infinite tenderness.**

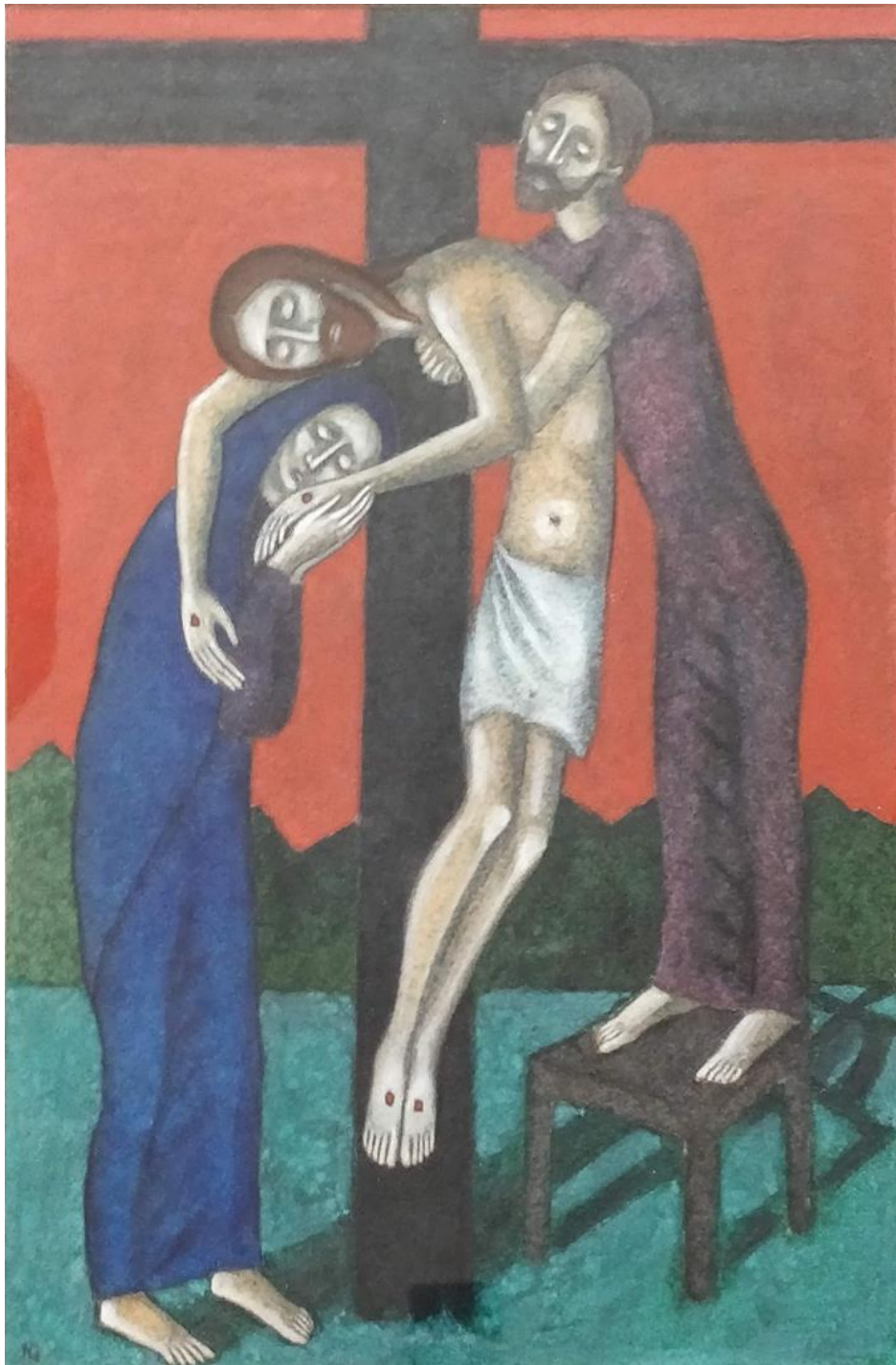
*(Short silence)*

St Mark, the earliest of the Gospels, tells us that Jesus called out ‘My God, my God why have you forsaken me?’ the opening words of Psalm 22, which he may have been reciting in full. Then Mark records that gave a great cry and died. St John lets us know the content of that cry. “Tetelestai”, in Greek, “It is finished” or “It is accomplished”. Jesus knew that his purpose was to do the will of his heavenly father. In the Garden of Gethsemane his natural will to live had battled against the knowledge that this meant he had to go on to almost inevitable death. “Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done”, he had prayed. Now that will had been done, the Father’s good purpose had been accomplished.

St Luke gives us some different words, but ones whose essential meaning was the same. He records Jesus saying “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” just before he died. He had trusted God in life and now he trusted him in and through death. These words from Psalm 31 were the words Jewish children were taught to say going to sleep, words no doubt Mary had taught to the young Jesus. Now he says them for last time as he goes into the darkness of death.

‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit’.





### **Thirteenth station**

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

**The body of Jesus falls to one side and is gently supported by John. The head and arm of Jesus flops down on the other side over the shoulders of Mary who holds his hand. The deadweight of his lifeless body is gently upheld in a circle of love.**

*(Short silence)*

From the time of his arrest Jesus was handed over to his enemies, the soldiers, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, those who mocked him, those who nailed him to the cross and those who tormented him there. He was handed over and put in their power. But now, dead, his body was in the hands of those who loved him, those who had listened to him, trusted him, followed him. It was they who now handled his body with tender care as they took it down from the cross.

Already of course he had given something of himself to his friends. He had chosen twelve specially to share in his ministry, three in particular, Peter, James and John, who had seen him transfigured and been with him in Gethsemane. He had been close to the women who ministered to him. Then, on his last night with them he broke bread and shared his very self, to be broken on the cross. Later, he was to give his self to them in a new way. He was to breathe on them and give them his spirit, that they might be formed into a new community. But now, through the tears of their grief, his loved physical body was all they could see. Now was the time of loss, of lamentation. But he is still given to them in a circle of love. The rounded shoulders and arm of Jesus circle round Mary into his other arm and the embrace of the loving disciple. The body of Jesus is swaying into his for support.

There is a circle of love, the living Jesus himself, who is put in our hands and hearts to be carried by us.



### **Fourteenth station**

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

**From inside the rock we see the body of Jesus being gently lowered into its resting place. One Mary cradles his head, Joseph of Arimathea cradles his body, the other Mary holds his hand.**

*(Short silence)*

There is a finality about burial, or in the case of many today, cremation. A final letting go, a heart-rending sundering. The women who had accompanied Jesus on his mission, who had looked after him, provided for him, who had been light and joy to them, now taken from them, dead and buried. The end of all dreams and hopes, gone, gone. Now could only be a time of waiting, waiting for they knew not what. Life is full of waiting, from waiting for the kettle to boil, to waiting for an operation. Indeed, life itself sometimes feels like a confused kind of waiting for we know not what, as Beckett captured so brilliantly in *Waiting for Godot*. Above all the period between Good Friday and Easter morning is a time for waiting. A time of

waiting which gives meaning to all waiting. But any attempt to imagine what might come next would be misconceived. As the poet said

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing;  
wait without love  
For love would be love of the wrong thing;  
there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all  
in the waiting.

On you alone, O Christ, my soul in stillness waits.  
In you alone, O Christ, my soul in stillness rests.  
To you alone, O Christ my soul in stillness looks.



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