

# One Step Forward

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By the time March runs its course this year, we will have celebrated St Patrick's Day, acknowledged the wonderful man that is St Joseph, carried palms on Palm Sunday, and prepared to remember the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, to venerate the cross on Good Friday, to light candles at the Easter Vigil. In any diary that is a mammoth journey. As in all journeys, we begin it with one step forward.

What a difference that one step can make! A step towards another in friendship or healing, a step towards celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, towards sobriety or maybe a step towards the Church that has not been part of our lives for a while, indeed maybe for a long time. One step paves the way for a journey to be made and a destination reached.

That first step though can be difficult to take and especially if it is a step we have been putting off, trying to avoid or one that we genuinely fear.

Is there a road map we can follow for this journey of the first step? I

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am inclined to think there is, and we may well find it in the Stations of the Cross that feature too this month. Leaving aside condemnation, the weight of the cross and the injustice of it all, somewhere Jesus found the strength to take that first step towards Calvary and the rolled back stone of Easter. The steps, of course, led to stumbles and falls – three that are recounted, but the journey was seen through. The 'how' of that truth I think is found in two of the Stations that we might give a bit of thought to on this day in March.

Simon's help, though forced by the army and un-offered by Simon himself, gave courage to Jesus. He was not alone. The shared weight reminded him, reassured him, that the road he was on was the road to salvation. There are Simons out there – people who will share the load with us and for us as we battle with the decision to face the road that needs to be faced. You know who they are – quite likely placed amongst your family and friends. Have confidence that you will not walk alone and that the burden or the uncertainty you carry will be lifted with you, if not from you, by so many people who care.

Veronica, now she is one to be noticed though she did not seek notice. Her act of kindness was rooted in her own generosity of spirit. Somewhere along the way, she witnessed or received kindness and a lesson for life



**Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus by F. Houz from the Church of Notre Dame du Finstere, Brussels**

was learned. She saw in the moment a man who needed reassurance and gentleness, who was struggling to stay upright, blinded by cruelty and hurt by misunderstanding. Into all that she stepped not with medicine or qualification but with a towel that brought some trace of comfort and dignity to the moment. In that touch, in the wiping of his sweat and blood, she let him know she was grateful he had taken the first step for her and for us all. She reminded him that it was a step worth taking and an essential step and that it had not gone unnoticed.

As you look towards that first step, take it with confidence. Once the journey begins, you will not walk it alone. You may well have to drag Simon from the crowd, or hopefully

he will see for himself that it is the right thing to do. You will find Veronica along the way, and her touch and reassuring act of kindness will remind you that the road being travelled though, not necessarily an easy one, is a necessary one for you and your peace of mind. You may even stumble and fall, but you will find your feet again. You will, as he did, encounter Mary's watchful and loving presence – you will find the strength because you will know you are on the right road.

March will run its course – from first to thirty-first – and will bring us through wonderful moments of faith and grace. The month cannot start without its first day. We cannot journey without the first step. Safe journey!