

# **GOOD FRIDAY WAY OF THE CROSS**

**Led by His Holiness Pope Francis**

Forty days have now passed since we began our Lenten journey with the imposition of ashes. Today we relived the final hours of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus, to the moment when, from the cross, he cried out “Consummatum est”, “it is finished”. We have gathered in this place where thousands of people once suffered martyrdom for their fidelity to Christ. We want to walk this via dolorosa in union with the poor, the outcast of our societies and all those who even now are enduring crucifixion as victims of our narrowmindedness, our institutions and our laws, our blindness and selfishness, but especially our indifference and hardness of heart. We Christians too suffer from that disease. May the Cross of Christ, a means of death but also of new life, embracing heaven and earth, north and south, east and west, enlighten the consciences of citizens, of the Church, of lawmakers and of all those who call themselves followers of Christ, so that the Good News of our redemption may be made known to all.

## **FIRST STATION: JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH**

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 7:21)

### **Meditation:**

Lord, who could be a better disciple of yours than Mary your Mother? She accepted the Father’s will even at the darkest moment in her life, and she stood by you, heartbroken. She conceived you and bore you in her womb; she held you in her arms, she showered you with her love, and she accompanied you throughout your earthly life. How could she fail to follow you on the road to Calvary and share in the most tragic and painful moment of your life and her own?

### **Prayer:**

Lord, how many mothers even today share the experience of your Mother, as they weep for the fate of their daughters and sons? How many conceive and give birth to their children, only to see them suffer and die from disease,

malnutrition and lack of water, medical care and hope for the future? We pray for those who hold positions of responsibility, that they may heed the cry of the poor rising up to you from every part of our world. The plea of all those young lives condemned in different ways to death by the indifference born of selfish and discriminatory political policies. Grant that none of your children may lack employment and all that is needed for an honest and dignified life.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord help us to do your will”:  
in times of difficulty and despair;  
in times of physical and moral suffering;  
in times of darkness and loneliness.

## **SECOND STATION: JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS**

“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23)

### **Meditation:**

Lord Jesus, it is easy to wear a crucifix on a chain around our neck or to use it to decorate the walls of our beautiful cathedrals or homes. It is less easy to encounter and acknowledge today's newly crucified: the homeless; the young deprived of hope, without work and without prospects; the immigrants relegated to slums at the fringe of our societies after having endured untold suffering. Sadly, these camps, unsafe and insecure, are being razed to the ground along with the dreams and hopes of thousands of marginalized, exploited and forgotten women and men. How many children, too, suffer discrimination on the basis of their origin, the colour of their skin or their social status? How many mothers suffer the humiliation of seeing their children mocked and deprived of opportunities open to their schoolmates and others their age?

### **Prayer:**

We thank you Lord because by your own life, you have taught us how to show genuine and selfless love for others, especially for our enemies or simply those who are different from ourselves. Lord Jesus, how many times have we, your disciples, been ready to be identified as your followers when

you performed healings and wonders, when you fed the crowd and forgave sins. Yet we have not found it so easy when you spoke about serving and forgiving others, about self-sacrifice and suffering. Grant that we may put our lives always at the service of others.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord help us to hope”:  
when we feel abandoned and alone;  
when it is not easy to follow in your footsteps;  
when serving others becomes difficult.

### **THIRD STATION: JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME**

“He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Is 53:4)

#### **Meditation:**

Lord Jesus, on the steep path leading to Calvary, you chose to experience our human frailty and weakness. Where would the Church be today without the presence and generosity of so many volunteers, the new Samaritans of the third millennium? One cold January night, in a street on the outskirts of Rome, three young African women, little more than girls, poorly clad, were huddled near a brazier to keep warm. Some young people passing by in a car, just for fun, threw flammable material onto the fire, burning them badly. At that very moment, one of the many street units of volunteers passed by and came to their aid. They brought them to hospital and then welcomed them into a family home. How much time will it take for those young women to be healed not only of their painful burns, but also of the pain and humiliation of finding their bodies mutilated and disfigured forever?

#### **Prayer:**

Lord, we thank you for all those new Samaritans of the third millennium who, today too, can be found on our streets, stooping with love and compassion over the many physical and spiritual wounds of those who live every night in fear and the terror of darkness, loneliness and indifference. Sadly, Lord, often today we are no longer able to see those in need, those hurt and humiliated. We are quick to demand respect for our rights and interests, but we forget those of the poor and the last in line. Lord grant us the grace

to overcome our blindness to their tears, their sufferings and their cry of pain, so that through them we can encounter you.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord help us to love”:  
when it is challenging to be a Samaritan;  
when we find it hard to forgive;  
when we do not want to see the sufferings of others.

#### **FOURTH STATION: JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER**

“And a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2:35)

#### **Meditation:**

Mary, when you presented the infant Jesus in the Temple for the rite of purification, the aged Simeon predicted that a sword would pierce your heart. Now it is time to renew your “fiat”; your acceptance of the Father’s will, even though the experience of accompanying your child, treated as a criminal, to his execution causes you heartrending pain. Lord, have mercy on the many, all too many, mothers who have allowed their young children to depart for Europe in the hope of helping their poverty-stricken families, only to meet with humiliation, contempt and at times even death. Like young Tina, a mere twenty years old, brutally killed on the street, leaving behind a child just a few months old.

#### **Prayer:**

Mary, at this very moment, you experience the same tragedy as all those mothers who suffer for their children who set out for other countries with the hopes of a better future for themselves and their families, but sadly find humiliation, contempt, violence, indifference, loneliness and even death. Give them strength and courage.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord, grant that we may always give support and comfort, and be present to offer help”:  
to console mothers who weep for the fate of their children;  
to those who have lost all hope in life;  
to those who daily experience violence and contempt.

## **FIFTH STATION: SIMON THE CYRENEAN HELPS JESUS TO CARRY THE CROSS**

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2)

### **Meditation:**

Lord Jesus, on the way to Calvary you were crushed by the weight of carrying that rough wooden cross. In vain, you hoped for a sign of help from a friend, from one of your disciples, from one of the many persons whose sufferings you relieved. Sadly, only a stranger, Simon of Cyrene, out of obligation, came to your aid. Where are the new Cyreneans of the third millennium? Where do we find them today? I think of the experience of a group of religious women of different nationalities, places of origin and communities with whom, for more than seventeen years, every Saturday, we visit a centre for undocumented immigrant women. Women, often young, anxiously waiting to know their fate, whether it be expulsion or the chance to remain. How much suffering we see, yet at the same time how much joy when these women find Sisters from their own country, who speak their language, dry their tears, share moments of prayer and celebration, and make easier the long months spent behind iron bars and on cement pavements.

### **Prayer:**

For all the Cyreneans of our history, that they may never falter in their desire to welcome you in the least of our brothers and sisters, in the knowledge that in welcoming the poorest members of our society, we welcome you. May these Samaritans speak out on behalf of those who have no voice.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord, help us to carry our cross”:  
when we are tired and disheartened;  
when we feel the burden of our weaknesses;  
when you ask us to share the sufferings of others.

## **SIXTH STATION: VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS**

“As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40)

### **Meditation:**

Let us think of all those children in various parts of the world who cannot go to school but are instead exploited in mines, fields and fisheries, bought and sold by human traffickers for organ harvesting, used and abused on our streets by many, including Christians, who have lost the sense of their own and others' sacredness. Like the young girl with a slim body we met one evening in Rome while men in luxury cars lined up to exploit her. She might have been the age of their own children. What kind of imbalance can this violence create in the lives of all those young women who experience only the oppression, arrogance and indifference of those who, night and day, seek them out, use them and exploit them, only to cast them back onto the street again, as prey for the next trader in human lives?

### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, cleanse our eyes so that we can see your face in our brothers and sisters, especially in all those children who, in many parts of the world, are living in poverty and squalor. Children deprived of their right to a happy childhood, education and innocence. Little ones used as cheap goods, bought and sold at will. Lord, we ask you to have mercy and compassion on this sick world. Help us rediscover the beauty of our dignity, and that of others, as human beings created in your image and likeness.

Let us pray together, saying: "Lord, help us to see":  
the faces of innocent children who ask for our help;  
social injustices;  
people's inherent dignity that is violated.

### **SEVENTH STATION: JESUS FALLS FOR THE SECOND TIME**

"When he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly" (1 Pet 2:23)

### **Meditation:**

What a thirst for vengeance we see all around us! Our societies today have lost the great value of forgiveness, a gift second to none, a cure for wounds, the basis of peace and human coexistence. In a society where forgiveness is seen as weakness, you, Lord, ask us not to stop at appearances. Not with

words, but by your example. To those who tortured you, you asked: “Why do you persecute me?” For you knew very well that true justice can never be based on hatred and revenge. Make us capable of asking for, and granting forgiveness.

### **Prayer:**

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). Lord, you too bore the burden of condemnation, rejection, abandonment and suffering inflicted by persons who had met you, listened to you, and followed you. In the certainty that the Father had not abandoned you, you found the strength to accept his will by offering forgiveness, love and hope to those who today, like you, walk the same path of ridicule, contempt, mockery, abandonment, betrayal and loneliness.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord, help us to give comfort”:  
to those who feel offended and insulted;  
to those who feel betrayed and humiliated;  
to those who feel judged and condemned.

### **EIGHTH STATION: JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN**

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” (Lk 23:28)

### **Meditation:**

The social, economic and political situation of migrants and the victims of human trafficking challenges and disturbs us. We must have the courage, as Pope Francis firmly maintains, to denounce human trafficking as a crime against humanity. All of us, and Christians in particular, must come to realize that we are all responsible for the problem, and that all of us can and must be part of the solution. All of us, but above all we women, are challenged to be courageous. Courageous in knowing how to see and take action, as individuals and as a community. Only by being united in our poverty can we make it a great treasure, capable of changing people’s approach and alleviating humanity’s sufferings. The poor, the foreigner, the other, must not be seen as an enemy to be rejected and resisted, but as a brother or a sister to be welcomed and assisted. They are not a problem, but a precious

resource for our fortified citadels, where prosperity and consumption fail to alleviate our growing weariness and fatigue.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, teach us to see with your eyes, with that welcoming and merciful gaze with which you see our limitations and our fears. Help us to imitate you in how we regard different ideas, behaviours and points of view. Help us to realize that we are part of the same human family, and to find bold new ways of accepting diversity and working together to build communities, families, parishes and civil society.

Let us pray together and say: “Help us to share in the suffering of others”:  
those grieving the death of loved ones;  
those who find it hard to ask for help and comfort;  
those who have experienced oppression and violence.

### **NINTH STATION: JESUS FALLS FOR THE THIRD TIME**

“He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Is53:7)

### **Meditation:**

Lord, you fell a third time, exhausted and humiliated, beneath the weight of your cross. Like all those girls forced onto the streets by groups of traffickers in human slavery. Like you, they cannot hold up under the exhaustion and humiliation of seeing their young bodies manipulated, abused and ruined, together with their hope and dreams. Those young women feel divided in two: sought out and used, while at the same time rejected and condemned by a society that conveniently ignores this kind of exploitation, the fruit of its throwaway culture. On one of many nights spent on streets of Rome, I looked for a young woman recently arrived in Italy. Not seeing her in her group, I kept calling out her name: “Mercy!” In the darkness, I caught sight of her curled up and half asleep at the edge of the street. When she heard me calling, she awoke and said she couldn’t go on. “I can’t take it any more”, she kept repeating. I thought of her mother. If she knew what had happened to her daughter, she would burst into tears.



### **Prayer:**

Lord, how many times have you asked us this disturbing question: “Where is your brother? Where is your sister?” How many times have you reminded us that their heartbreaking cry rises up to you? Help us to share the sufferings of all those treated as refuse. It is all too easy to condemn people and difficult situations that offend our false sense of decency. It is less easy to accept our responsibilities as individuals, as governments, and as Christian communities.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord, give us the strength and courage to repudiate”:

the exploitation and humiliation faced by many young people;

the indifference and silence of many Christians;

unjust laws lacking in humanity and solidarity.

### **TENTH STATION: JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS**

“Put on then compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience” (Col 3:12)

### **Meditation:**

Money, comfort, power. These are the idols of every age. Especially our own, which can boast of enormous progress in the acknowledgment of individual rights. Everything can be bought, including the body of minors, stripped of their dignity and hope for the future. We have forgotten the centrality of the human being, the dignity, beauty and strength of each man and woman. Even as the world is building walls and barriers, we want to recognize and thank all those who in various ways during these past months have risked their own lives, especially in the Mediterranean, to save the lives of so many families in search of safety and opportunity. Human beings fleeing poverty, dictatorships, corruption and slavery.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, help us to rediscover the beauty and richness present in every person and people as your unique gift, to be placed at the service of society as a whole and not used for our personal profit or gain. Grant, Jesus, that your

example and your teaching on mercy and forgiveness, on humility and patience, may make us a little more human, and thus, more Christian.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord, give us merciful hearts”:

when faced with lust for pleasure, power and money;

when faced with injustices inflicted on the poor and the weak;

when faced with the illusions born of self-interest.

## **ELEVENTH STATION: JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS**

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34)

### **Meditation:**

Our society proclaims equal rights and dignity for all human beings. Yet it practises and tolerates inequality. It even accepts extreme forms of inequality. Men, women and children are bought and sold like slaves by the new traders in human lives. The victims of trafficking are then exploited by others. And in the end, they are cast aside, discarded as worthless goods. How many people are growing rich by devouring the flesh and blood of the poor?

### **Prayer:**

Lord, how many men and women even today are nailed to a cross, victims of brutal exploitation, stripped of dignity, freedom and hope for the future! Their cry for help challenges us as individuals, as governments, as society and as Church. How is it possible that we continue to crucify you by our complicity in the trafficking of human beings? Give us eyes to see and a heart to feel the suffering of all those who today too are nailed to a cross by our systems of life and consumption.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord, have mercy”:

on those newly crucified throughout today’s world;

on those in society who enact laws and exercise power;

on those unable to forgive and unable to love.

## **TWELFTH STATION: JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS**

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34)

### **Meditation:**

On the cross, Lord, you too bore the weight of scorn, mockery, insults, violence, abandonment and indifference. Only Mary, your Mother, and a few other women stayed with you as witnesses to your suffering and death. May their example inspire in us a commitment to stand by all those dying today on Calvaries throughout the world: in transit camps, on boats denied entry to safe ports, in shelters, hot spots and camps for seasonal workers, amid protracted negotiations about their final destination.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, we implore you: help us to be true neighbours to those newly crucified and despairing in today's world. Teach us to wipe away their tears, to comfort them, even as you were consoled by the presence of Mary and the other women beneath your cross.

Let us pray together and say: "Lord help us to give freely of ourselves":  
to all those suffering from injustice, hatred and vengeance;  
to all those unjustly slandered and condemned;  
to all those who feel alone, abandoned and humiliated.

## **THIRTEENTH STATION: JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS**

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24)

### **Meditation:**

In this era of news flashes, who remembers those twenty-six young Nigerian women who drowned and whose funerals were held in Salerno? Their Calvary was lengthy and difficult. First the crossing of the Sahara desert, crammed in ramshackle buses. Then their forced stay in frightful detention centres in Libya. Finally the leap into the sea, where they met death at the gates of the "promised land". Two of them were bearing in their womb the gift of a new life, children who would never see the light of day. Yet their death, like that of Jesus taken down from the Cross, was not in vain. We entrust all these lives to the mercy of God our Father and the Father of all, especially the poor, the desperate and the abased.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, at this hour, we hear once more the cry of Pope Francis at Lampedusa, the site of his first apostolic journey: “Has anyone wept?” And now after countless shipwrecks, we continue to cry out: “Has anyone wept?” Has anyone wept, we wonder, before those twenty-six coffins lined up and covered with white roses? Only five of those women have been identified. Nameless or not, all of them are our daughters and sisters. All deserve respect and remembrance. They appeal to us – our institutions, our authorities and each of us – to accept responsibility for our silence and indifference.

Let us pray together and say: “Lord, may we join in weeping”:  
at the sufferings of others;  
at all those nameless coffins;  
at the tears of so many mothers.

### **FOURTEENTH STATION: JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB**

“It is finished” (Jn 19:30)

### **Meditation:**

The desert and the seas have become the new cemeteries of our world. These deaths leave us speechless. Yet responsibility has to be taken. People let their brothers and sisters die: men, women, children that we could not, or would not, save. While governments, closed off in their palaces of power, debate, the Sahara is filled with the bones of men and women who could not survive exhaustion, hunger and thirst. How much pain is involved in these new exoduses! How much cruelty is inflicted on those fleeing their homelands: in their desperate journeys, in the extortion and tortures they endure, in the sea that becomes a watery grave.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, make us realize that we are all children of one Father. May the death of your Son Jesus grant to the leaders of nations and lawmakers consciousness of the role they must play in the defence of every person created in your image and likeness.

## **CONCLUSION:**

We would like to recount the story of Favour, a nine-month old baby, who left Nigeria together with her young parents who sought a better future in Europe. During the long and dangerous journey in the Mediterranean, her father and mother died along with hundreds of other people who had relied on unscrupulous traffickers to come to the promised land. Only Favour survived; like Moses, she was saved from the waters. May her life become a light of hope on the path towards a more fraternal humanity.

## **Prayer:**

At the conclusion of your way of the cross, we ask you, Lord, to teach us to keep watch, together with your Mother and the women who stood by you on Calvary, in expectation of your resurrection. May it be a beacon of hope, joy, new life, fraternity, acceptance and communion among peoples, religions and systems of law. So that all the sons and daughters of man will be truly recognized in their dignity as sons and daughters of God, and never again treated as slaves.