

The Way of the Cross led by Pope Francis



Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff
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Foreward

These meditations on the fourteen stations of the Way of the Cross were written by fifteen young people between the ages of 16 and 27. Two things are unusual in this regard. First, there is the age of the authors: they are young people and adolescents, nine of whom are students at the Liceo Pilo Albertelli in Rome. Second, there is the 'choral' aspect of their work, which is a symphony of many voices of different tonalities and timbres. These are not 'young people' in general; instead, they are Valerio, Maria, Margherita, Francesco, Chiara, Greta and the others.

With the enthusiasm typical of their age, they took up the challenge presented by the Pope in the year devoted particularly to the younger generation. They did so using a precise methodology. Gathered around a table, they read the accounts of the passion of Christ from the four Gospels. In other words, they stood before each scene along the Way of the Cross and 'saw' it. Then, after a certain time had passed, each young person spoke about a detail of each scene that had struck him or her the most. In this way, it became easier and more natural to assign the individual stations.

Three key words, three verbs, mark the development of these texts: first, as already stated, is seeing, then encountering, and last, praying.

When we are young, we want to see, we want to see the world around us; we want to see everything. The scene of Good Friday is powerful, even in its horror: seeing it can lead to revulsion or to mercy that provokes an encounter. This was the way of Jesus in the Gospel and every day, including today. He encounters Pilate, Herod, the priests, the guards, his mother, the Cyrenean, the women of Jerusalem and the two thieves, his final companions on the way. When we are young, every day we have a chance to encounter another person, and every encounter is new and surprising. We grow old when we no longer want to see anyone, when fear closes doors and defeats trust and openness. It is the fear of change, because to encounter means to change, to be prepared to set out once more on our journey with new eyes. To see and to encounter leads, finally, to prayer, because seeing and encountering give rise to mercy, even in a world that seems pitiless and, in times like our own, abandoned to senseless anger, meanness and the desire not to be bothered.

Yet if we follow Jesus with all our heart, also on this mysterious journey to the cross, courage and trust can be reborn. After we have seen,

and opened ourselves to encounter, we will experience the grace of praying, no longer alone but together.

Meditations and prayers composed by: Valerio De Felice (I), Maria Tagliaferri and Margherita Di Marco (II), Caterina Benincasa (III), Agnese Brunetti (IV), Chiara Mancini (V), Cecilia Nardini (VI), Francesco Porceddu (VII), Sofia Russo (VIII), Chiara Bartolucci (IX), Greta Giglio (X), Greta Sandri (XI), Dante Monda (XII), Flavia De Angelis (XIII) and Marta Croppo (XIV). Coordinated by Professor Andrea Monda.

First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to Luke

A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him. But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and handed Jesus over as they wished (Lk 23: 22-25).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, standing before the governor, who tries three times to oppose the will of the people, and finally decides not to decide. I see you standing before the crowd; they are asked three times and each time they decide against you. The crowd, in other words, everyone and no one. Hidden in the throng, we lose our individuality; we become the voice of a thousand other voices. Even before we deny you, we deny ourselves, diluting our own responsibility in the seething tide of a faceless crowd. And yet we are responsible. Misled by the rabble-rousers, by the evil that insinuates itself with a deceitful and deafening voice, it is we, all humanity, who condemn you.

Today we are horrified at so great an injustice; we don't want to be a part of it. But in this way we forget all those times when we ourselves were ready to save Barabbas over you. All those times when our ears were deaf to the voice of goodness, when we preferred not to see the injustice all around us.

In that crowded square, it would have been enough for a single heart to hesitate, for a single voice to be raised against the thousand voices of evil. Whenever life sets before us a decision to be made, let us be reminded of that square and that mistake. Let us allow our hearts to hesitate and command our voices to speak out.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord,
keep watch over our decisions,
bring them clarity by your light,
and lead us to ask the right questions.
Evil alone never doubts.
Trees that sink their roots in the ground,
wither, if watered by evil,
but you have set our roots in heaven,
and our branches on earth, to know and follow you.

Our Father...

All: Were you there when they shouted, 'Crucify Him?'
Were you there when they shouted, 'Crucify Him?'
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they shouted, 'Crucify Him?'

Second Station: Jesus receives his cross

*V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world*

From the Gospel according to Mark

Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it" (Mk 8:34-35).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, crowned with thorns as you receive your cross. You accept it, as you always accept everything and everyone. They burden you with its wood, heavy and rough, yet you do not rebel, you do not reject that unjust and humiliating instrument of torture. You take it up and begin to walk, carrying it on your shoulders.

How many times have I rebelled in anger against burdens I have received, viewing them as heavy or unjust. That is not your way. You take seriously what life offers you, every opportunity it presents, as if you wanted to go to the very heart of things, to discover that there is always something beyond appearances, something remarkable and meaningful. Thanks to you, I understand that this is a cross of salvation and liberation, a cross that bears me up whenever I stumble, a yoke that is easy, a burden that is light.

The scandal of the death of God's Son, a sinner's death, a criminal's death, grants us the grace to discover amid sorrow your resurrection, amid suffering your glory, amid anguish your salvation. And the cross itself, which speaks to us of humiliation and pain, is now revealed, thanks to your sacrifice, as a promise that from every death new life will arise, and in every dark place light will shine. And so we can cry out: "Hail, holy cross, our one hope!"

Prayer

I ask you, Lord,
that in the light of the cross, the symbol of our faith,
we may accept our sufferings and, enlightened by your love,
embrace our own crosses, made glorious by your death and resurrection.
Give us the grace to look back on the story of our lives
and to rediscover in them your love for us.

Our Father...

All: Were you there when He meekly bore His Cross?
Were you there when He meekly bore His Cross?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He meekly bore His Cross?

Third Station: Jesus falls for the first time

V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world

From the book of the prophet Isaiah

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted (*Is 53:4*).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, making your way to Calvary bearing our sins. I see you fall, hands and knees on the ground, in pain. With what great humility did you fall! And what great humiliation you now endure! Your human nature, your true manhood, is clearly seen in this fragment of your life. The cross you carry is a heavy one. You need help to carry it, but when you fall to the ground, no one helps you. Instead, people make fun of you, they laugh at the sight of a God who falls. Perhaps they are disappointed, perhaps they had a mistaken idea of who you are. Sometimes we think that having faith in you means never falling in life. Together with you, I also fall, and my ideas with me, those ideas I had about you. How fragile they were!

I see you Jesus, as you grit your teeth and, in complete surrender to the love of the Father, you get up and resume your journey. With these, your first, faltering steps beneath the cross, Jesus, you remind me of a child taking his first steps in life. Losing his balance, he falls and cries, but then keeps going. He trusts in the hands of his parents and does not give up. He is afraid but he keeps walking, because trust is stronger than fear.

By your courage, you teach us that our failures and falls must never halt our journey, and that we always have a choice: to give up or to get up, in union with you.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, give us
the courage to get up after every fall,
as you did on the way to Calvary.
Grant that we may always appreciate
the great and precious gift of life,
and that our failures and falls

may never be a reason for throwing it away.

We know that if we trust in you,
we will be able to get up again
and find the strength to keep going,
always.

Our Father...

All: Were you there when He trembled 'neath the weight?
Were you there when He trembled 'neath the weight?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He trembled 'neath the weight?

Fourth Station: Jesus meets his mother

V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to Luke

Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed, so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk 2:34-35).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, as you meet your mother. Mary is there, making her way through the crowded street, with many persons all around her. The only thing that makes her different from the others is the fact that she is there to accompany her son. Something we see every day: mothers accompanying their children to school or to the doctor, or bringing them to work. Yet Mary is different from other mothers: she is accompanying her son to his death. To see your own child die is the worst, the most unnatural thing that anyone could imagine for a person, and it is all the more atrocious if that child is dying at the hands of the law. How unnatural and unjust is this scene before my eyes! My own mother instilled in me a sense of justice and trust in life, but what I see today has nothing to do with that: it is senseless and painful.

I see you, Mary, as you look at your poor child. He bears on his back the marks of the scourge and he is forced to carry the weight of the cross;

soon, no doubt, in his exhaustion he will fall beneath it. Yet you knew that, sooner or later, this would happen. It was prophesied to you, but now that it is taking place, everything is different. That is how things are: we are always unprepared before the harsh realities of life. Mary, now you are sorrowful, as any woman would be in your place, but you do not despair. Your eyes are undimmed; you are not forlorn and downcast. You are radiant even in your sorrow, because you have hope. You know that this journey of your son will not be a one-way trip. You know, you feel, as only mothers can feel, that soon you will see him again.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord: help us always
to keep before our eyes the example of Mary,
who accepted the death of her son
as a great mystery of salvation.
Help us to act with our gaze fixed on the good of others
and to die in the hope of the resurrection,
conscious that we are never alone
or abandoned by God or Mary,
the loving mother ever concerned for her children.

Our Father...

All: Were you there when the Virgin shared His pain?
Were you there when the Virgin shared His pain?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when the Virgin shared His pain?

Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry the cross

V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to Luke

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus (*Lk 23:26*).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, crushed beneath the weight of the cross. I see that you can't do it alone: At your moment of greatest need, you remain alone, without those who called themselves your friends. Judas betrayed you, Peter denied you, the others abandoned you. Yet suddenly there is an unexpected encounter with someone unknown, a mere passerby, who perhaps had only heard about you and not followed you. Yet now here he is, at your side, shoulder to shoulder, to share your yoke. His name is Simon and he is a stranger come from afar, from Cyrene. For him today something unexpected happens, which becomes an encounter.

Every day we experience any number of encounters and conflicts, especially those of us who are young people. We continually encounter new experiences and new people. In unexpected meetings, in accidental events, in strange surprises, there are hidden opportunities to love, to see the best in our neighbours, even those who seem different from ourselves. At times, Jesus, we feel like you, abandoned by those we thought were our friends, crushed by a heavy burden. Yet we must not forget that there is a Simon of Cyrene ready to carry our cross. We must remember that we are not alone and, in that realisation, we will find the strength to take up the cross of those around us.

I see you, Jesus: now you seem to be experiencing a bit of relief. You manage, momentarily, to catch a breath, now that you are no longer alone. I also see Simon. Who knows if he has realised that your yoke is light, and if he appreciates the meaning of this unexpected event in his life.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, to give each of us the courage
to be like Simone of Cyrene,
who takes up your cross and follows in your steps.
May each of us be sufficiently humble and strong
to take up the crosses of those whom we meet.
Grant that, when we feel alone,
we may recognise on our journey a Simon of Cyrene
who will halt and help bear our burden.
Grant that we may see the best in every person,
and be open to all different kinds of encounter.
I ask that each of us may unexpectedly
find himself or herself walking at your side.
Our Father...

All: Were you there when a stranger shared His Cross?
Were you there when a stranger shared His Cross?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when a stranger shared His Cross?

Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

*V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world*

From the book of the prophet Isaiah

He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account (*Is 53:2-3*).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, wretched and barely recognisable, treated like the least of men. You walk, faltering, to your death, your face bleeding and disfigured, yet, as always, meek and humble, looking up. A woman steps out of the crowd to see at close hand that face of yours which, perhaps, had spoken so often to her soul and which she loved. She sees its pain and wants to help. They do not let her pass, there are so many of them, all too many, and they are armed. But to her, none of that matters; she is determined to reach you and for a moment she manages to touch you, caressing you with her veil. Hers is the power of tenderness. Your eyes meet for a second, face meets face.

We know nothing about that woman, Veronica, or her story. She earns heaven with a simple gesture of charity. She approaches you, sees your suffering face and loves it even more than before. Veronica does not stop at appearances, which today are so important in our image-conscious society. She loves, unconditionally, a face that is unsightly, marred, unlovely and imperfect. That face, your face, Jesus, in its very imperfection, shows the perfection of your love for us.

Prayer

I ask you, Jesus, grant me the strength
to approach others, to approach every person,
young or old, poor or rich, friends or strangers,
and to see your face in all those faces.
Help me never to hesitate in coming
to the aid of my neighbour, in whom you dwell,
even as Veronica came to help you on the way to Calvary.
Our Father...

All: Were you there when she wiped His Holy Face?
Were you there when she wiped His Holy Face?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when she wiped His Holy Face?

Seventh Station: Jesus falls for the second time

*V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world*

From the book of the prophet Isaiah

By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people... Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain (*Is53:8.10*).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, fall once more before my eyes. By falling again, you show me that you are a man, a true man. And I see you get up again, more resolute than before. You do not get up with pride; there is no pride in your gaze, there is love. In continuing on your journey, getting up after each fall, you proclaim your resurrection. You show that you are ready, once again and always, to bear on your bleeding shoulders the burden of human sin.

By falling again, you sent us a clear message of humility. You fell on the ground, on that *humus* from which we 'humans' are born. We are dust, we are mud, we are nothing in comparison to you. But you want to become like us, and now you show yourself close to us, with our troubles,

our weaknesses, the sweat of our brow. Now, as often happens to us, you overwhelmed by sorrow. But you have the strength to go forward, you are not afraid of the difficulties that lie ahead, and you know that at the end of your struggle there is heaven. You get up precisely to get there, to, open before us the gates of your kingdom. What a strange king you are, a king lying in the dust.

Suddenly I am thrown into confusion: we are not worthy of comparing our efforts and our falls to yours. Your falls are a sacrifice, the greatest sacrifice that my eyes and all of history will ever be able to see.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, grant that we may be ready to get up after falling, that we may learn from our failures.

Remind us that, when it is our turn to make mistakes and fall, if we but stay with you, and hold fast to your hand, we can learn to get up again.

Grant that we may bring to everyone your message of humility, that future generations may open their eyes to you and learn to understand your love.

Teach us to help those who suffer and fall beside us, to wipe away their sweat, and to stretch out a hand to lift them up.

Our Father...

All: Were you there when He fell beneath the weight?
Were you there when He fell beneath the weight?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He fell beneath the weight?

Eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to Luke

A number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when

they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Lk 23:27-31)

Meditation

I see you and I hear you, Jesus, as you speak to the women whom you meet on the way to your death. Each day you would meet any number of people; you would approach everyone and talk to all. Now you speak with the women of Jerusalem, who look at you and weep. I too am one of those women. But you, Jesus, speak words of warning that for me are striking: they are so concrete and direct. At first, they might appear harsh and severe, but that is because they are so direct. Nowadays we are used to a world where people beat around the bush. A cool hypocrisy veils and filters what we really mean. We are unwilling to correct others. We prefer to leave them to their own devices, not bothering to challenge them for their own good.

Whereas you, Jesus, speak to the women like a father, also admonishing them. Your words are words of truth and they are forthright for the sole sake of correction, not judgment. Yours is a language different from the one we speak. You always speak with humility and you go straight to the heart of the matter.

In this meeting, your last before the cross, we see once more your boundless love for the least, the marginalised. Women in those days were not considered worthy of being spoken to, whereas you, in your kindness, are truly revolutionary.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, grant that,
together with the women and men of this world,
I may become ever more charitable
towards those in need, even as you were.
Give all of us the strength to go against the grain
and to enter into authentic contact with others,
building bridges and not enclosing ourselves in the selfishness
that leads us to the solitude of sin.

Our Father...

*All: Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

Ninth Station: Jesus falls for the third time

*V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world*

From the book of the prophet Isaiah

But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (*Is 53:5-6*).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, as you fall for the third time. Twice now you have fallen, and twice you have got up. By now, there are no limits to your struggle and your pain. Now, in this third and last fall, you seem completely overwhelmed. How many times, in everyday life, do we fall! We fall so often that we lose count. Yet we always hope that each fall will be the last, because we need the courage of hope to face suffering. When a person falls that many times, ultimately all strength fails and all hope vanishes.

I imagine myself beside you, Jesus, as you make your way to your death. It is hard to think that you are the Son of God himself. Someone has already tried to help you, but now you are exhausted, at a stand-still, paralysed: it seems that you cannot possibly go any further. Unexpectedly, however, I see you get up, straighten your legs and your back, despite the weight of the cross on your shoulder, and begin to walk once more. Yes, you are walking to your death, but you want to do so to the very end. Perhaps this is love. What I understand is that it makes no difference how many times we will fall; there will always be one last time, perhaps the worst, the most terrible trial, when we are called to find the strength to endure to the end of the journey. For Jesus the end is the crucifixion, the apparent absurdity of death, which nonetheless reveals a deeper meaning, a more sublime purpose, that of saving us all.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, grant us every day
the courage to go forward on our journey.
Grant that we may receive to the very end
the hope and the love that you have given us.
May everyone confront the challenges of life
with the strength and the fidelity which were yours
in the final moments of your journey
to death on the cross.

Our Father...

All: Were you there when He fell beneath the weight?
Were you there when He fell beneath the weight?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He fell beneath the weight?

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to John

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top (*Jn 19:23*).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, naked, as I have never seen you before. They have stripped you of your garments, Jesus, and are casting dice for them. In the eyes of these men, you have lost the last shred of your remaining dignity, your one possession on this, your journey of suffering. At the beginning of time, your Father had sewn garments for men, to clothe them in dignity; now men strip that garment off your back. I see you, Jesus, and I see a young migrant, his body ravaged, who arrives in a land that all too often is heartless, ready to strip off his garment, his one treasure, and to sell it. To leave him alone with his cross, like yours, alone with his disfigured skin, like yours, alone with his eyes brimming with tears of pain, like yours.

Yet there is something we often forget about dignity. It is found beneath your skin; it is part of you, and it will always be with you. All the more, at this moment, in this nakedness.

The nakedness in which we are born is the same as the nakedness with which the earth will receive us in the evening of our lives. From one mother to another. And now, here on this hill, your mother is also present. Once again, she sees you naked.

I see you and I understand the grandeur and the splendour of your dignity, the dignity of every man, which no one will ever be able to erase.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, grant that all of us may acknowledge the dignity belonging to our nature, even when we find ourselves naked and alone before others. Grant that we may always see the dignity of others, respect it and defend it.

We ask you to grant us the courage needed to understand ourselves as more than the clothing we wear, and to accept our own nakedness.

It reminds us of our poverty, with which you fell in love, even to giving your life for us.

Our Father...

*All: Were you there when they cast lots for His clothes?
Were you there when they cast lots for His clothes?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they cast lots for His clothes?*

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to Luke

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:33-34).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, stripped of everything. They wanted to punish you, an innocent person, by nailing you to the wood of the cross. What would I have done in your place? Would I have had the courage to acknowledge your truth, my truth? You had the strength to bear the weight of the cross, to meet with disbelief, to be condemned for your provocative words. Today we can barely swallow a critical comment, as if every word was meant to hurt us.

You did not stop even before death. You believed deeply in your mission and you put your trust in your Father. Today, in the world of Internet, we are so conditioned by everything that circulates on the web; there are times when I doubt even my own words. But your words are different; they are powerful in your weakness. You have forgiven us, you held no grudge, you taught us to offer the other cheek and you kept going, even to the total sacrifice of your self.

I look all around and I see eyes glued to telephone screens, people trolling the social networks in order to nail others for their every mistake, with no possibility of forgiveness. People ruled by anger, screaming their hatred of one another for the most futile reasons.

I look at your wounds and I realise, now, that I would not have had your strength. But I am seated here at your feet, and I strip myself of all hesitation. I get up in order to be closer to you, even if by a fraction of an inch.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, that in the face of good
I may be ready to recognise it,
that in the face of injustice I may find the courage
to take my life in my hands and to act differently.
Grant that I may be set free from all the fears
that, like nails, immobilise me and keep me far
from the life you have desired and prepared for us.
Our Father...

*All: Were you there when they nailed Him to the Cross?
Were you there when they nailed Him to the Cross?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed Him to the Cross?*

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross

V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world

From the Gospel according to Luke

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent" (*Lk 23:44-47*).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, but this time I would rather not see. You are dying. You were beautiful to behold when you spoke to the crowds, but now all that has come to an end. I do not want to see that end; all too often I have averted my gaze, I have become almost accustomed to flee pain and death. I have become numb to them.

Your cry on the cross is loud and heartrending. We were not prepared for all that pain; we are not nor will we ever be. Instinctively, we flee, in panic, before death and suffering. We reject them; we prefer to look away or to close our eyes. Instead, you remain there, on the cross; you await us with open arms. You open our eyes.

This is a great mystery, Jesus. You love us by dying, by suffering abandonment, by bestowing your spirit, by doing the Father's will, by withdrawing. You remain on the cross, and that is all. You do not try to explain the mystery of death, the destruction of all things. You do more: you cross over it completely in body and spirit. A great mystery. One that continues to question us and to unsettle us. It challenges us and it invites us to open our eyes and to see your love even in death, indeed even starting from death itself. It is there that you loved us as we really are, truly and inevitably. It is there that we grasp, however imperfectly, your living and authentic presence. We will always thirst for this: for your closeness, for your being God-with-us.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, open my eyes
to see you also in suffering, in death,
in the ending which is not the real ending.
Upset my complacency by your cross: shake off my drowsiness.
Challenge me always by your disturbing mystery,
that overcomes death and grants life.
Our Father...

All: Were you there when He died that we might live?
Were you there when He died that we might live?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He died that we might live?

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

*V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world*

From the Gospel according to John

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews (Jn 19:38-40).

Meditation

I see you, Jesus, remaining there, on the cross. A man of flesh and bones, with all their frailty, all their fears. How greatly did you suffer! It is an unbearable scene, perhaps because it is so drenched in humanity. This word is the key, the cypher of your journey, filled with such suffering and fatigue. It is your humanity that so often we forget to acknowledge in you and to seek in ourselves and in others, for we are all too caught up in a life ever more fast-paced, blind and deaf to the difficulties and the pain of others.

I see you, Jesus. Now you are no longer there, on the cross. You have gone back from where you came, laid upon the lap of the earth, upon the lap of your mother. The suffering is now past, vanished. This is the hour of mercy. Your lifeless body continues to speak of the strength with which you faced suffering; the meaning that you gave it is reflected in the eyes of those still there at your side and will always remain there in love, given and received. Before you, and before us, opens a new life, heavenly life, marked by the one thing that resists and remains unbroken by death: love. You are here with us at every moment, at every step, in every uncertainty, in every shadow. While the shadow of the tomb lengthens on your body, held in the arms of your mother, I see you and I am afraid, yet I do not despair. I trust that the light, your light, will shine once again.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord,
keep hope ever alive in us,
and faith in your unconditional love.
Grant that we may continue, our hearts inflamed,
to fix our gaze on eternal salvation,
and thus find refreshment and peace on our journey.

Our Father...

*All: Were you there when they took him from the Cross?
Were you there when they took him from the Cross?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they took him from the Cross?*

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb

*V./ We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
R./ because by your cross you have redeemed the world*

From the Gospel according to John

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there (*Jn 19:41-42*).

Meditation

No longer do I see you, Jesus, now all is dark. Long shadows fall from the hills, and the Shabbat lamps light up Jerusalem, outside homes and within. They beat against the gates of heaven, closed and impregnable: for whom is all this solitude? Who can sleep on a night like this? The city is filled with the sound of children crying, mothers singing, soldiers making their rounds. The day is dying and you alone are sleeping. Are you sleeping? And on what bed? What blanket hides you from the world?

From afar, Joseph of Arimathea followed your steps, and now, with quiet steps, accompanies you in your sleep, withdraws you from the stares of the indignant and malicious. A sheet enfolds you in the chill of death and dries your blood, sweat and tears. From the cross you descend, but lightly. Joseph carries you on his shoulders, but you are light: you no longer bear the burden of death, of hatred and anger. You sleep as you did on the warm straw when you were wrapped in swaddling clothes and another Joseph held you in his arms. Just as there was no room for you then, so now you have nowhere to lay your head. Yet on Calvary, on the stiff neck of the world, there grows a garden in which no one had yet been buried.

Where have you gone off to, Jesus? Where have you descended, if not into the depths? Where if not in a place still untouched, in an even tighter cell? You are caught in our snares, imprisoned in our sadness. Like us, you walked on the earth, and now, like us, under the earth, you make room for yourself.

I would like to run far away, but you are there within me. I need not to go out to seek you, because you are knocking at my door.

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, who revealed yourself not in glory
but in the quiet of a dark night.

You who see not the surface, but in secret,
entering into the depths.

From the depths, hear our voice:

grant that, in our weariness, we may find rest in you,

seeing in you our nature,
and in the love of your sleeping face,
the beauty we have lost.
Our Father...

*All: Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?*

Conclusion

Almighty and eternal God, merciful Father,
who has given to the human race your beloved Son
as an example of humility, obedience, and patience,
to precede us on the way of life, bearing the cross:
Graciously grant us that we,
inflamed by His infinite love,
may take up the sweet yoke of His Gospel
together with the mortification of the cross,
following Him as His true disciples,
so that we shall one day gloriously rise with Him
and joyfully hear the final sentence:
'Come, you blessed of My Father,
and possess the kingdom which was prepared for you
from the beginning,'
where you reign with the Son and the Holy Spirit,
and where we hope to reign with you,
world without end.
Amen.

St Francis of Assisi

Were you there when in agony, He prayed?
Were you there when in agony, He prayed?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when in agony, He prayed?

Were you there when they shouted, "Crucify Him!"?
Were you there when they shouted, "Crucify Him!"?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they shouted, "Crucify Him!"?

Were you there when He meekly bore His Cross?
Were you there when He meekly bore His Cross?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He meekly bore His Cross?

Were you there when He trembled 'neath the weight?
Were you there when He trembled 'neath the weight?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He trembled 'neath the weight?

Were you there when the Virgin shared His pain?
Were you there when the Virgin shared His pain?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when the Virgin shared His pain?

Were you there when a stranger shared His Cross?
Were you there when a stranger shared His Cross?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when a stranger shared His Cross?

Were you there when she wiped His Holy Face?
Were you there when she wiped His Holy Face?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when she wiped His Holy Face?

Were you there when He fell beneath the weight?
Were you there when He fell beneath the weight?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He fell beneath the weight?

Were you there when they cast lots for His clothes?
Were you there when they cast lots for His clothes?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they cast lots for His clothes?

Were you there when they nailed Him to the Cross?
Were you there when they nailed Him to the Cross?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed Him to the Cross?

Were you there when He died that we might live?
Were you there when He died that we might live?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He died that we might live?

Were you there when they took him from the Cross?
Were you there when they took him from the Cross?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they took him from the Cross?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Were you there when they sealed the tomb with stone?
Were you there when they sealed the tomb with stone?
O Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they sealed the tomb with stone?