

31 March, 2021

WAY OF THE CROSS - YOUTH



Introduction

As I walk together with Jesus on this Way of the Cross, I want to keep my mind and heart open to feel the depth of his pain and suffering. At each Station, let me remember the struggles and life experiences that Youth and Young Adults all over the world are facing and pray for them. May this Lenten journey with Jesus help to transform my life and make me more worthy as an Ambassador for Christ.

First Station - Jesus is condemned to death

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Although sinless, Jesus was falsely sentenced to death as a criminal. He had spent his life standing up for truth and justice but today he stood alone before Pilate with no one to defend him. It was so unfair. But Jesus bore it with dignity knowing that it was his Father's will.

Many Youth today are subjected to unfair condemnation due to poverty, social standing, ethnicity, gender etc. They are not given equal opportunities in life. Sometimes, they are bullied and harassed by their peers. They get stuck in situations that are out of their control and they are powerless to do anything about it.

Prayer: Lord, sometimes I too feel unjustly condemned or victimized for something that isn't my fault. My family background or financial status may make me a scapegoat among my peers. Lord, help me to remember that you are always with me when the going gets tough. In turn, never let me fall into the trap of bullying the poor and the weak.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Second Station - Jesus carries His Cross

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Jesus was forced to carry a big, heavy cross all the way to Calvary. He knew that the journey would be long and difficult but he didn't protest or complain. He was carrying the weight of my sins and he did it out of love for me.

Today, many Youth carry heavy burdens and responsibilities on their young shoulders. Due to the Pandemic, their parents are ill or have lost their jobs so these youth either struggle between their studies and jobs or give up their studies to work and support their families or supplement the family income.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, how easy it is for me to whine when I am faced with hardships. When I am bogged down with the pressure of studies or pressure to succeed or pressure to measure up to my companions, help me to realize that my burdens are so light compared to those the other youth of my age are carrying.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Third Station - Jesus falls the first time

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

The Cross was heavy and it dug into Jesus' shoulder and he stumbled and fell. It was the weight of my sins that brought him to the ground. The crowds mocked him and the soldiers whipped him, urging him to get going.

We come across Youth from broken families or single parent households who are weighed down by the absence of one parent. The separation of parents causes shame, custody battles, financial problems and greatly affects the children mentally and emotionally and causes them grief as well as anger. Youth sometimes blame themselves for the outcome and fall into depression and cannot get out. They lose their self-esteem and feel helpless with no one to turn to.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, sometimes I too feel I'm falling... I blame myself for some unpleasant situation in my family and begin to doubt myself. I have trouble with my beloved and I don't know how to handle it.

Growing into adulthood is difficult and I stumble as I try to find my way. But I know you are there to guide my steps and pick me up when I fall.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Fourth Station - Jesus meets his Mother

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

All Mother Mary could do was hold back her tears as she watched her beloved Son Jesus, covered in blood and sweat and suffering so much. What agony it must have been for her!! He didn't deserve this! And yet, there was power, love and compassion in each other's eyes which gave them the strength to bear this suffering, trusting that it was God's will.

Many Youth have gone astray because of the absence of a Mother due to death, separation or divorce. They crave their mother's presence, love and guidance. They make the wrong choices, get into bad company and engage in vices and anti-social behaviour. Some youth have moved away from home for studies or jobs. They all long for someone to protect them and care for them.

Prayer: Lord, as I grow into adulthood and become more independent, I struggle with life's challenges. Sometimes I become stubborn and aloof and make selfish decisions thus hurting my family members and I don't even care. I blame it on the "generation gap", that no one understands me, especially my parents. My family worries that I may fall badly and try to protect me from getting hurt. Lord, help me to remember that the love of my family is precious to me and that I am never alone in my struggles. Mother Mary is always with me to get me through the difficult times.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

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

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Simon was just passing by when the soldiers picked him out to help Jesus carry the Cross. Simon felt sorry for Jesus and lent his shoulder and Jesus gratefully accepted it but this act of kindness changed Simon's life forever.

There are so many Simons in this world who step in to help and act when Youth are struggling or in trouble – teachers, doctors, psychologists, counsellors, mentors, youth ministers etc. Many older youth themselves step forward to mentor younger troubled teenagers knowing what they are going through. It is not a sign of weakness for us to accept help from these Simons in times of distress.

Prayer: Lord, let me not be a bystander when I see someone being bullied or treated unfairly. When I am called to help, let me not turn the other way. Help me to believe that I can make a difference by sharing the burden of another and easing their pain. When I am in trouble, help me to gratefully accept advice, help and support from trusted adults without feeling shame or embarrassment knowing that they care for me. Let me never take them for granted.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Sixth Station - Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Veronica pushed her way through the crowd towards Jesus, unafraid of the soldiers. Maybe it was compassion that drove her to offer whatever little comfort she could extend to Jesus. She lovingly wiped his bleeding face with her veil and in return for her kind gesture, he gifted her with an imprint of his face on her veil.

The Youth of today face problems due to early maturity, easy access to internet, media, video-sharing websites etc. where they are exposed to adult-related content and onscreen violence and influenced by social media. This has an impact on their mental health and often results in a poor self-image and lack of self-acceptance. They do not know how to deal with such problems and whom to turn to. That's where the many Veronicas in the world step in – parents, family members, friends, friend's parents – they care for us, can identify with our struggle and are willing to ease our pain. We should not consider ourselves weak if we seek help from trusted adults in our family, school, college or church.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I realise that I don't have to do big things to make a difference. Like Veronica, I can be a source of comfort and motivation to others who are hurting, depressed, lonely or friendless. I can volunteer my services in my Society, my community, my Parish and use my time and talents to benefit others and bring them some happiness.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us

Seventh Station - Jesus falls the second time

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Jesus was weak and tired but he still had a long way to go. The weight of the Cross was unbearable and he struggled with each step. Jesus fell to the ground once more. But he gathered his strength, got back on his feet and kept going.

Life is so difficult for the Youth of today. Video games, TV, internet, fast food and a sedentary lifestyle have resulted in obesity leading to low self-esteem, depression, alienation, fat-shaming etc. Well-meaning parents have taught their children that success and happiness is measured by wealth and position which has resulted in pressure to succeed at all costs. Schools and colleges which used to be sacred places of learning and a safe haven for children are witnessing increased incidents of aggressive behaviour, shootings, stabbings, suicides etc. Cheating during exams in order to score well has become a norm. Personal interaction and outdoor sports with friends is minimal resulting in isolation and loneliness. They fall, get up and fall again into the same deep ditch till they are no longer able to cope and consider themselves a failure.

Prayer: Lord, sometimes life delivers a series of blows and I feel I'm sinking into an abyss. When I am almost ready to give up, I discover the value of resilience – the ability to recover after set-backs. It is strengthened by faith that no matter what, You will always be there to lift me up and put me on the right path again. Lord, give me the grace and strength to endure the difficult phases in my life and never to give up.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Eighth Station - Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Amidst the jeering crowd, there was a group of women who came out to support and thank Jesus, their friend and teacher. Their faith in him remained steadfast even when others deserted him. And, despite his suffering, Jesus stopped to console them and offer them comfort.

Jesus always showed special concern for the weak and less fortunate. Today's Youth are facing educational disparity and inadequate employment opportunities because of their poor financial situation, family background etc. They are not able to get admission in good schools and colleges or find good jobs. Everyone is studying to a higher level, some with multiple degrees, but there aren't enough jobs available for the economically and socially backward. This leads to frustration, a sense of failure, juvenile delinquency etc. Life seems so unfair and prejudiced!!

Prayer: Lord, you have blessed me abundantly with more than I deserve. I cannot forget the caring people who have stood by me, had confidence in me and helped me to reach where I am today. Let me never forget their kindness. Help me not to be indifferent to the struggles of the Youth around me but to be supportive and considerate. If there is anything I can do to lessen the pressure on them, let me do it willingly.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Ninth Station - Jesus falls the third time

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

After such a difficult walk, dragging a big, heavy Cross, Jesus was exhausted and he collapsed to the ground. It was the third and final fall... This time, it was nearly impossible for him to get up but he didn't accept defeat. His journey's end was near and knowing that his Father was with him, he was determined to reach his destination.

Many Youth are going through troubled times. It started small but now they are in big trouble. They wanted to be considered “cool” amongst their friends or the “peer pressure” was too strong for them. A quick smoke, a hurried gulp of alcohol, a sniff here and there and now they are addicted. Substance abuse is on the rise amongst our Youth and some are so far gone that they cannot stop. This has resulted in more serious problems – stealing, criminal activities, drunk driving, rape, murder, suicides etc. They are so deep in trouble, they can find no way out.

Prayer: Lord, I too sometimes feel bogged down by “peer pressure”– pressure to break rules, pressure to conform, to forgo my values in order to “fit in” etc. I face temptations everywhere. I can understand how helpless and desperate you felt when you fell the third time. My parents and teachers have taught me skills to cope with situations like these, to use each fall as a stepping stone to success. Help me to use these safeguards instead of giving into pressure, to open up to my parents and trusted friends when I feel threatened and to have faith that you will help me to overcome the obstacles.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Tenth Station - Jesus is stripped of his garments

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

The soldiers had not yet finished humiliating Jesus; there was more in store for him. When Jesus finally reached Calvary, the soldiers stripped him of his garments and divided them amongst themselves leaving him naked in front of a mocking crowd.

Today, many Youth are stripped of their dignity because they are weak and vulnerable. Some are humiliated by parents who compare them to their brighter and smarter siblings or friends; others because they are physically or mentally weaker. Some are humiliated because of the wrong choices they have made concerning their education or career; some are never allowed to forget that they made a mistake, rehabilitated juvenile delinquents who are not given a chance to make a fresh start.

Prayer: Lord, how terrible I feel when I am humiliated or disrespected. I am human; I make mistakes or poor choices. But I need a second chance to make amends. I don't want my parents to judge me or overreact but to guide and support me instead. Help me to see your image in the Youth around me and to stand up for the dignity of those who are being humiliated and exploited.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Eleventh Station - Jesus is nailed to the Cross

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

The soldiers had more sinister plans for Jesus. They stretched him out on the Cross and hammered long, rusty nails into his hands and feet and crucified him. As human, he suffered excruciating pain and torment but being divine, he knew that his mission was yet to be accomplished. All Jesus said was: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*”.

Many Youth are nailed to the cross today because of unreasonable demands and pressure from their families. Parents often impose their unfulfilled aspirations on their children forcing them to choose careers that don't interest them thus leading to psychological problems. Some are nailed because their desires to take up the arts, music or sports are suppressed. Some suffer a toxic environment at home because of daily squabbles and violence between parents or alcoholic or unemployed parents. Some youth are unable to find employment because they are labelled “useless.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, my world is so secure and comfortable; I cannot even imagine the suffering other youth endure. But your pain becomes real for those who are in agony. Lord, my sins have nailed you to the Cross; let my indifference and actions not nail another person but help me instead to make small changes in my life that will ease someone else's pain.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Twelfth Station - Jesus dies on the Cross

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

After hanging on the Cross for three hours, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*" When he had said this, he breathed his last. **(Pause)** Now, this part of his life was over; his mission was accomplished. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice and paid the price for our sins.

Youth die daily all over the world due to illness, accidents, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide etc. Some youth die over and over again because of miserable living conditions, sexual abuse or battering. Some die unknown or unidentified, no one misses them and no one cares.

Prayer: Lord, I shudder to think – did someone die because of my apathy, because I was too wrapped up in my own struggles that I failed to see the suffering of another? Lord, help me to do what I can to bring comfort to another, to ease the suffering of someone. They need a compassionate friend, a shoulder to cry on, someone who will not rebuke, humiliate or condemn them. Let that person be ME. Just as I know you will never forsake me, let me not forsake them either.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Thirteenth Station - Jesus is taken down from the cross

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Can we fathom the anguish of Mother Mary as Jesus' lifeless body was taken down from the Cross and placed in her arms? Surely, a sword had pierced her heart! He gave everything, yet received nothing in return... only humiliation and suffering.

There are many grieving mothers all over the world who sit at the bedside of a dying child or who have lost their child due to sickness, accidents, war and other calamities, violence, suicide, drug or alcohol abuse. How deep is their sorrow! Their will to live has been taken away... they only exist! We entrust all these mothers and children to the mercy of God our Father.

Prayer: Lord, I cannot even imagine the depth of grief I would feel at the loss of a loved one! I have grieved my parents so many times by my actions without realising the consequences. What if they were no longer with me? Lord, help me to show compassion and solidarity with those who are grieving. May your Mother, Mary, bring them comfort and consolation.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

Fourteenth Station - Jesus is laid in the tomb

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

"It is finished." Along with Mother Mary, Jesus' friends were sad too. They lovingly washed and wrapped his body and took it to its final resting place and rolled a large stone over the entrance of the tomb. He was born with nothing and he died detached from everything. Their lives would never be the same again.

Lord, we know how sad we feel when someone we loved has died. How we miss that person! If only we had shown our love, gratitude and appreciation while they were still alive. Many people stand at the graveside of their loved ones, totally shattered, wondering how they will carry on. At times like these, our faith can be tested to the full.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, by your death, help me to understand that our loved one did not die in vain. Help me to appreciate the good in people around me and to make an effort from now on to be more loving, caring and sensitive towards them.

Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us.

CONCLUDING PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank you for the opportunity and the experience of walking your path of suffering. It has made me realise how much you sacrificed for my sake. You came to set us free from sin, anger, fear and ignorance. Your sacrifice brings healing to my mind and body. Let your love keep me away from sin, evil and wrongdoing. Let me find peace, joy and strength by following you. May the Cross always remind me of your love and sacrifice for me. Amen.