

WAY OF THE CROSS

Text proposed by Jean Vanier

Introduction

Who has believed our message, (*Isaiah 53*)

Isaiah described the man of sorrow who was rejected and despised and he continued:

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him,

and by his wounds we are healed. (*Isaiah 53,5*)

This prophecy foreshadowed Jesus, a man of sorrow, despised and crucified.

Who would believe that by dying this man could give us life?

Who would believe that the crucified of our world could give us life?

Certainly inspired by this text, the early Church loved to sing the words of Paul:

*He, who being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with
God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself,
and became obedient to death - ,
even death on a cross! (Ph 2,6-8)*

Jesus took the road of subservience. He went down into darkness and human weakness to take on everything but he was to rise again, with all his brothers and sisters in humanity, to his beloved Father. Jesus invites all of us to follow him on this downward journey in order to rise with him in the glory of the Father.

I. Jesus is sentenced to death

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, (*Isaiah 53,5*)

Jesus, bound hand and foot, with a crown of thorns and wearing a purple robe was brought before Pilate.

He was the poor king, humiliated, bound hand and foot, the king of hearts, the king of communion of hearts.

The people proclaimed: '*Crucify him, crucify him!*'

Disillusion was hidden behind these words. '*He has deceived us. We thought that he was strong, powerful enough to free us from the oppression of the Romans.*'

They did not want a small and weak Messiah, who sought not power only the communion of hearts.

And us, where are we today?

Are we close to the men and women condemned by illness, rejection, humiliation and poverty?

Prayer

Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, Jesus bound hand and foot, king of hearts, give us your heart relinquished into the hands of the Father. Help us to never condemn others, those who are different or who are outsiders.

II. Jesus takes the burden of the cross

*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. (Isaiah 53,2b)*

Jesus, exhausted, welcomed onto his fragile shoulders the beams of heavy wood.

He welcomed the ordeal. He kept quiet.

The time was coming – and it came -

where you would each be scattered each in your own direction
and it would just be me.

Yet I am not alone;

for my Father is with me. (John 16,32)

We are each called every day to bear his cross.

*'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and
take up his cross daily and follow me.'* (Luke 9)

For each one of us, there is a trying time.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for going before us. We want to follow you. Give us the strength of your Holy Spirit so that, day after day, we are able to become more like you, welcoming the adversity that will cleanse us and that will unite us in you so that your reign of love comes.

III. Jesus falls under the weight of the cross

*He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. (Isaiah 53,3)*

Jesus collapsed with exhaustion.

He fell under the weight of the great beams and the cruelty of men.

He fell in front of those who mocked him because they wanted a strong messiah.

Here was the weak one, a man of sorrows, who fell crying.

Who picked him up?

Prayer

Today, so many people fall prey to depression, ground down by sadness, isolation, devastated by feelings of guilt. They are unemployed, immigrants or have fragile health. Their friends have abandoned them, not knowing what to do, nor even how to approach them. They want them to be strong and able. Here are the weak ones, men and women of sorrow who fall and cry. Who will pick them up?

IV. Jesus meets his mother

*Like one from whom men hide their faces,
he was despised and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53,3b)*

The mother of Jesus did not bury her head in the sand.

She knew that he was, the beloved Son of the Father, her beloved son, her unique son.

She knew about his mission of love and accompanied him to the very end.

They looked at each other.

With a loving and sorrowful face, Mary said to him: *'I am always with you. I trust in you.'*

Prayer

Father, give us the love and trust that will allow us to remain close to those who are suffering, to commit ourselves to those bearing the cross of rejection, to look with love upon those who are suffering, to never flee but to accompany them to the end, to say with all our being: *'I have trust in you. I am with you.'*

V. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross

*Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him and afflicted. (Isaiah 53,4)*

A farmer, a simple man, Simon, returning from the fields was commandeered by the soldiers to help Jesus.

The soldiers were afraid that Jesus was exhausted, that he would be unable to keep going to the end.

Simon looked at Jesus. He was moved by his suffering and the sorrowful peace in his gaze.

He helped him to carry the heavy beams, without knowing that, in fact, it was Jesus who was carrying our suffering.

Are we ready to walk with those who are crushed by suffering, to help them to carry their cross, perhaps without saying anything?

Prayer

Jesus, you who are there, hidden in those who fall and cry, give us the strength and love to be there, to carry their too heavy burden with them.

VI. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

*But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities. (Isaiah 53,5a)*

Oh woman, oh Veronica!

Oh you who loved Jesus!

You who dared to leave the crowd to wipe his face, his eyes blinded by blood and sweat.

Jesus looked at you with such tenderness and such gratitude.

His face both so beautiful and so disfigured was now imprinted forever in the memory of your heart.

You never forgot this loving and grateful look.

Prayer

Today, Jesus, give us the courage and the strength of love to leave ourselves, our comfort and our fears, to leave the indifference of the crowd, to wipe your face in the face of the poor, to look at you in the gaze of the poor.

VII. Jesus falls for the second time

It is by his wounds that we are healed.

Despite the meeting with his mother, the presence of Simon and the kindness of Veronica, Jesus fell a second time.

His flesh was bloody.

Now it is up to me, to all of us, to be there for him, to help him get up again.

By touching his wounds, dare we believe that we are cured?

Prayer

At times, we too fall under the weight of depression, in the agony of bereavement and separation, in physical and psychological suffering. We expect someone to come and pick us up, to give us back our confidence in ourselves and in life. Will you be there, my brother, my sister?

VIII. Jesus comforts the women

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way, (Isiah53,6)*

So many men and women today wander in our towns and villages, lost, with neither landmark nor guide. They cry when the horrors of war, genocides and refugee camps are revealed on television. Jesus, weakened, said:

'Do not weep for me! Weep for yourselves and your children!' (Luke 23)

Let us cry for our world.

Prayer

Jesus, make appear in your church and in society, good shepherds, guides and witnesses to awaken hope and show the way to unity and peace.

IX. Jesus falls for the third time

*And the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53)*

Jesus took our iniquities upon himself.

He was crushed by the violence and the beatings.

Him, the gentle one, who loves each of us.

His heart was torn apart by the blocks of fear and hate that live in us and prevent us from welcoming love.

He sank into the depths of despair.

Prayer

Jesus, your prophet announced Good News to the people: *'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.'* (Ez 36,26). Break our hearts of stone, take away our fears: open us up to love and to your presence. You came to live a communion of heart with each one of us and to give us life. Come, Jesus, come!

X. Jesus is stripped of his clothes

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53,7)

Jesus was stripped,
stripped of energy and any movement,
stripped of honour and dignity,
and finally, stripped of his clothes.

He was there, naked, left to the view and mockery of men.

He told us:

*I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me,
take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you. (Mt. 25,34)*

Prayer

Jesus, give us the courage and strength to clothe those who are naked, stripped of their dignity and cover them with our respect.

XI. Jesus is nailed to the cross

*He was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so did he not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53,8b)*

First of all, Jesus stood to show the way. Therefore, he was the good shepherd who guides his sheep to green pastures.

Then, he knelt before his disciples to wash their feet and raise them.

Now he is laid on the cross; he does not open his mouth.

The king of love is bound hand and foot.

He gave his life by offering himself as the lamb of God, who removed the sins of the world.

He turned the hate and violence that overcame him into forgiveness and tenderness.

Prayer

Jesus, give your light to those who are bound by illness and suffering, to all those who are behind the walls of monasteries, so that they discover an overabundance of life and their place in the Church,
like a hidden spring, called to irrigate the arid ground of our world.

XII. Jesus dies on the cross

By oppression and judgement he was taken away. (Isaiah 53,8a)

Jesus was seized, tortured and crucified by fear and hatred.

He who offered love was rejected, alone and put to death.

But no, he was not alone!

Mary was there, stood by the cross.

He was stripped of all except this presence of communion.

Mary told him: *'I love you. I am offering myself to the Father with you.'*

A sword pierced her heart.

She was the woman of compassion.

Prayer

Jesus, give us hearts of compassion so that we can remain standing close to the crucified of this world and offer ourselves to the Father with them.

XIII. Jesus is taken down from the cross.

*And who can speak of his descendants?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was stricken. (Isaiah 53,8b)*

Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus and John took the body of Jesus down from the cross.
Water and blood flowed from his pierced heart.
They placed his body, so beautiful, so delicate and so wounded, on Mary's knees.
She stayed there.
Silent, broken, crushed, she cried.
They were tears of sorrow and trust.

Prayer

Father, in the face of all the suffering in the world, all the violence and death that we encounter, we ask you to give us Mary, the mother of Jesus, the mother of consolation, the mother of beautiful love.

XIV. Jesus is put in the tomb

*He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth. (Is 53, 9)*

The stone sealed the tomb: it was finished
Peter and the Apostles were distressed and confused.
Mary Magdalene cried.
Mary kept the words and promises of Jesus in her heart.
She began a great silence on this Saturday, a day of expectation and a day of trust.
When it all seemed to be over, the hope in the promises of Jesus remained.

Prayer

When our hearts are broken and crushed, when despair threatens us, we pray, Jesus, that you will put a seed of hope within us.

Your word:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (1 P. 2,24)

Because Jesus was destroyed,

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Ph 2,9-11)