

STATIONS OF THE CROSS 2024

In Prayer with Jesus on the Way of the Cross

March 29, 2024

Pope Francis

Introduction:

Lord Jesus, as we contemplate your cross, we realize that you sacrificed yourself completely for our sake. We now take this time to be with you. We want to spend it in closeness to you. On the way from Gethsemane to Calvary, you never stopped praying. In this Year of Prayer, we accompany you on your own journey of prayer.

From the Gospel according to Mark

They went to a place called Gethsemane... Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. He said to them, "Remain here and keep awake." Going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed... "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet not what I want but what you want." He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Could you not keep awake one hour?" (14:32-37).

Lord, you prepared for every day of your life with prayer, and now, in Gethsemane, you prepare for your Passover. *Abba, Father, for you all things are possible*, you say, for prayer is before all else dialogue and intimacy, yet at the same time struggle and supplication: *Remove this cup from me!* Prayer too is entrustment and offering: *Yet not what I want, but what you want.* In your prayer, you passed through the narrow door of our human suffering and experienced it fully. You were "distressed and agitated" (Mk 14:33), fearful in the face of death, crushed beneath the burden of our sin, and oppressed by untold grief. Yet in the midst of this struggle, you prayed "more earnestly" (Lk 22:44), and in this way turned your bitter anguish into a sacrifice of love.

Of us, you asked only one thing: *to remain* with you and to *keep awake*. You did not ask something impossible, but simply closeness. How many times, though, have I strayed far from you! How many times, like the disciples, rather than keeping awake, have I instead fallen asleep! How many times have I failed to find the time or the desire to pray, whether from weariness, distraction or dullness of mind and heart! Lord Jesus, say once more to me and to us, your Church: "Get up and pray" (Lk 22:46). Rouse us, Lord! Awaken our hearts from their lethargy, for today too – today above all – you count on our prayer.

First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But he was silent and did not answer... Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed (Mk 14:60-61; 15:4-5).

Jesus, you are life itself, and now you are sentenced to death. You are truth itself, and now you are falsely put on trial. Why don't you protest? Why don't you speak up and defend yourself? Why don't you confound the learned and powerful, as you did so often and so well? Your reaction troubles us, Jesus: at the decisive moment, you choose not to speak; you remain silent. Because the more potent evil is, the more radical is your response. And that response is silence. Yet that silence is itself pregnant: it is prayer, meekness, forgiveness; it is a means of redeeming evil, a means of converting your passion into a sacrificial gift. Jesus, I realize how little I know you, for I find it hard to understand your silence. Amid the frantic pace of my life, my absorption with the things of this world, my struggle to keep up with others or my need to be at the centre of attention, I fail to find time to stop and be with you. To allow you, Word of the Father, ever silently at work, to act in my life. Jesus, I find your silence troubling. It makes me realize that prayer is not about lips that move, but a heart that listens, for to pray is to become open to your word, and to adore your presence.

Let us pray together and say: *Speak to my heart, Jesus*

You, who respond to evil with good,

Speak to my heart, Jesus

You, who calm rage with meekness

Speak to my heart, Jesus

You, who detest gossip and complaints,

Speak to my heart, Jesus

You, who peer into the depths of my heart,

Speak to my heart, Jesus

You, who love me more than I do myself,

Speak to my heart, Jesus

Second Station: Jesus carries his cross

He bore our sins in his body on the cross,

so that, free from sins,

we might live for righteousness;

by his wounds you have been healed (1 Pet 2:24).

Jesus, we too have our crosses to bear. At times, they are heavy indeed: illness, an accident, the death of a dear one, disappointment in love, a child gone astray, a lost job, a hurt that will not heal, a failed project, the frustration of yet another hope... Jesus, how do I pray in those situations? What am I to do when I feel crushed by life, heavy of heart, under pressure and lacking the strength to go on? Your answer is an invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (*Mt 11:28*). "Come to me". Yet I take refuge in myself: I brood, I nurse my griefs, I wallow in negativity. *Come to me*. Saying this was not enough; you came to us and you took our cross upon your shoulders to lighten its weight. You want us to lay upon your shoulders all our problems and needs, because you want us to find freedom and love in you. Thank you, Jesus. I unite my cross to yours, I bring you my weariness and my cares, I cast upon you every burden of my heart.

Let us pray together and say: *I come to you, Lord*

With the story of my life,

I come to you, Lord

With all my cares,

I come to you, Lord

With all my frailty and shortcomings,

I come to you, Lord

With all my fears,

I come to you, Lord

With complete trust in your love for me,

I come to you, Lord

Third Station: Jesus falls the first time

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (Jn 12:24).

Jesus, you have fallen. What are you thinking, how are you praying, prostrate in the dust? Above all, what gives you the strength to pick yourself up again? As you lie face-down on the ground, unable to see the sky above, I imagine you praying in your heart: *Father, who art in heaven*. The loving gaze of the Father is the source of your strength. At the same time, I imagine that, as you kiss the cold dry ground, you think of man, formed from the dust of the earth. You think of all of us whom you hold in your heart, and you repeat once again the words of your testament: "This is my body, which is given for you" (*Lk 22:19*). The Father's love for you and your love for us: that love is the force that makes you get up and go forward. For those who love do not stay down but start over again; those who love do not tire, but keep

going; those who love take wing and fly. Jesus, I keep asking you for many things, but there is only one thing that I need, and that is the ability to love. I will fall often in life, but with your love, I will be able to pick myself up and go forward, even as you did. For you know what it means to fall. Your life was a constant descent for our sake: from God to man, from man to slave, from slave to crucifixion and the tomb. Like the seed that falls to the ground and dies, you came down in order to lift us up from the earth and bring us to heaven. You, who raise us from the dust and give us new hope, grant me the strength to love and to begin anew.

Let us pray together and say: *Jesus, give me the strength to love and begin anew*

When I am overcome by disappointment,

Jesus, give me the strength to love and begin anew

When I am weighed down by the judgements of others,

Jesus, give me the strength to love and begin anew

When things go wrong and I lose my patience,

Jesus, give me the strength to love and begin anew

When I feel that I cannot go on,

Jesus, give me the strength to love and begin anew

When I fear that nothing will ever change,

Jesus, give me the strength to love and begin anew

Fourth Station: Jesus meets his Mother

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home (Jn 19:26-27).

Jesus, your disciples abandoned you, Judas betrayed you and Peter denied you. You are left alone with your cross. Yet your Mother is there for you. She needs no words, it is enough to look into her eyes that understand and share in your suffering. Jesus, in Mary's eyes, bright with tears, you see mirrored the tender love, the warm caresses and the loving embrace that surrounded and sustained you from your earliest years. A mother's eyes remind us too of all the goodness we have known. All of us need a mother to bring us into the world, but also to help us find our proper place in the world. You know this, and, from the cross, you give us your own Mother. *Here is your Mother*, you say to your disciple and to each of us. After the gift of the Eucharist, you gave us Mary as your final, parting gift. Jesus, on your journey you drew strength from the memory of her love; my journey too needs to be grounded in the memory of all the goodness I have known. Yet I realize how little room I make in my prayer for grateful remembrance. My prayer is all too hurried, a quick list of things I need for today and tomorrow.

Mary, stop me from rushing. Help me to recall and cherish the graces I have received, to remember God's forgiveness and his blessings, to revive my first love, to savour anew the wonders of his providence, and to shed tears of gratitude.

Let us pray together and say: *Lord, renew in me the memory of your love*

When the wounds of the past are re-opened,

Lord, renew in me the memory of your love

When I lose my sense of reality,

Lord, renew in me the memory of your love

When I take for granted all the gifts I have received,

Lord, renew in me the memory of your love

When I lose sight of the gift that I am,

Lord, renew in me the memory of your love

When I neglect to give you thanks,

Lord, renew in me the memory of your love

Fifth Station: Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene

As the soldiers 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).

Jesus, how often in the face of life's challenges we think that we can go it alone! How hard we find it to ask for help, lest we give the impression that we are not up to the task! What pains we take to put ourselves in the best light, to put on a good show! It is not easy to trust others, and even less to depend on them. Yet those who pray know their needs, and you, Jesus, in your own prayer, knew what it meant to entrust yourself completely. So you did not refuse the help offered by the man from Cyrene. You allowed this simple man, a farmer returning from the fields, to witness your weakness. Thank you, Jesus, because, by letting yourself be helped in your need, you have shown us the image of a God who is not distant and untouchable. In your vulnerability, you have shown us the triumph of your love. You have taught us that to love means to reach out to those who may be ashamed to ask for our help. In this way, weakness becomes an opportunity for growth. That is what happened to Simon of Cyrene. Your weakness changed his life; one day he will realize that he helped his Saviour and was redeemed by the very cross he carried. Jesus, grant that my life too may change. Help me lower my defenses and allow you to love me in those places where I have fallen most grievously.

Let us pray together and say: *Heal me, Jesus*

From the presumption of self-sufficiency,

Heal me, Jesus

From thinking that I can do without you or anyone else,

Heal me, Jesus

From my obsession with being perfect,

Heal me, Jesus

From my reluctance to entrust my frailty to you,

Heal me, Jesus

From hurrying past the needy whom I encounter on my way,

Heal me, Jesus

Sixth Station: Jesus is comforted by Veronica, who wipes his face

Blessed be God, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction... For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ (2 Cor 1:3-5).

Jesus, crowds of people witness the brutal spectacle of your execution. Without knowing you or knowing the truth, they make judgements, they cast aspersions, they mock you and condemn you. The same thing happens even now, Lord, without the need for a gruesome parade: all it takes is a keyboard to spew insults and condemnation. Yet amid the roar of the crowd, a woman makes her way to Jesus. She says nothing; she acts. She does not rant and rail; she shows mercy and compassion. She goes against the tide: alone, with the courage of compassion and love, she finds a way to pass among the soldiers, merely to give you the comfort of a caress. Her gesture of mercy will be remembered for all time. Jesus, how often I ask you to be consoled! Veronica reminds me that you too want to be consoled. You, the God who draws near to us, ask us to draw near to you. You, my comfort, desire to be comforted by me. Jesus, Love unrequited, today too you look among the crowd for hearts sensitive to your suffering and pain. You seek *true worshippers*, those who adore in spirit and truth (cf. *Jn 4:23*), and abide in you (cf. *Jn 15*). Jesus, Love forsaken, awaken in me the desire to remain in your presence, to adore you and to console you. Grant that, in your name, I may be a source of consolation for others.

Let us pray together and say: *Make me a witness of your consolation*

God of mercy, ever close to the heartbroken,

Make me a witness of your consolation

God of tender love, who take pity on us,

Make me a witness of your consolation

God of compassion, who detest apathy and indifference,

Make me a witness of your consolation

You, who are grieved when I point a finger at others,

Make me a witness of your consolation

You, who came not to condemn but to save,

Make me a witness of your consolation

Seventh Station: Jesus falls again beneath the weight of the cross

[The younger son] came to himself and said... "I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned' ... So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said... "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Lk 15:17-18.20-22.24).

Jesus, the cross is heavy: it bears all the weight of disappointment, failure and humiliation. I realize this whenever I feel overwhelmed, beleaguered and misunderstood; when I am weighed down by the burdens of responsibility and work, when I find myself in the grip of anxiety and desperation, and keep saying to myself: "This is it; this time you won't get back up." And it only gets worse. Every time I fall back into my sins and faults, I hit rock bottom: I am critical of others and then realize that I am no different. There is nothing worse than self-remorse and the overwhelming sense of guilt. Jesus, you fell again and again beneath the weight of the cross, and so you are at my side whenever I stumble and fall. With you, hope always springs anew; after every fall, I can get up again. When I stumble, you do not give up on me but draw even closer. Thank you for watching over me. Thank you, because I fall so often, yet you never cease to forgive me. Keep reminding me that every fall can become a crucial step on my journey, since it helps me to realize the one thing that matters: my need for you. Jesus, plant in my heart the firm realization that I truly rise only when you lift me up, when you set me free from my sins. For life begins anew not from my resolutions, but from your forgiveness.

Let us pray together and say: *Raise me up, Jesus*

When I am disheartened, dismayed and discouraged,

Raise me up, Jesus

When I recognize my failings and feel worthless,

Raise me up, Jesus

When I feel overwhelmed by feelings of shame and inadequacy,

Raise me up, Jesus

When I am tempted to lose hope,

Raise me up, Jesus

When I forget that my strength lies in your forgiveness,

Raise me up, Jesus

Eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him (Lk 23:27).

Jesus, who remains with you to the end along the way of the cross? Not the powerful, who wait for you on Calvary, nor the onlookers standing at a distance, but those ordinary people who are great in your eyes, yet small in the eyes of the world. There are the women, in whom you inspired hope: they have no voice, yet they make their presence felt. Help us to recognize the dignity of those women who remained faithful and stood by you in your passion, and those who in our own day are exploited and endure injustice and indignity. Jesus, the women you encounter beat their breasts and weep for you. They do not weep for themselves, but for you; they weep for the evil and sin of the world. Their tearful prayers touch your heart. Is my own prayer capable of tears? Am I moved as I gaze upon you, crucified for my sake, and contemplate your gentle, wounded love? Do I grieve for my hypocrisy and my infidelity? When I am faced with the tragedies of today's world, is my heart frozen or does it melt? How do I react when I see the madness of war, the faces of children no longer able to smile and of mothers who see them hungry and underfed, and have no more tears to shed? Jesus, you wept over Jerusalem; you weep over the hardness of our hearts. Touch my heart; add tears to my prayer and prayer to my tears.

Let us pray together and say: *Jesus, melt my hardened heart*

You know the secrets of every heart,

Jesus, melt my hardened heart

You are grieved by the hardness of our hearts,

Jesus, melt my hardened heart

You love hearts that are humble and contrite,

Jesus, melt my hardened heart

You dried Peter's tears by your forgiveness

Jesus, melt my hardened heart

You turn our mourning into song,

Jesus, melt my hardened heart

Ninth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" ... And he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Mt 25:37-40).

Jesus, you spoke these words before your passion. Now I know why you insisted on identifying yourself with those in need. You too were imprisoned; you too were a stranger, led outside the city to be crucified. You too were naked, stripped of your clothes. You too were sick and wounded; on the cross, you too were thirsty and hungered for love. Teach me to see you in those who suffer, for you are there, and in those stripped of their dignity, demeaned by the arrogance, injustice and power of those who exploit the poor amid general indifference. I look at you, Jesus, stripped of your garments, and I realize that you are asking me to strip myself of so many unnecessary things. For you do not look at appearances, but at the heart, and you ask for a prayer that is not empty but rich in love. Divested of everything, divest me in the same way. Words are cheap. Do I really love you in the poor, your wounded flesh? Do I pray for those stripped of their dignity? Or do I pray only for my own needs and garb myself in my own certainties? Jesus, your truth lays me bare and forces me to focus on what really matters: on you, the crucified Lord, and our crucified brothers and sisters. Grant that I may understand this now, lest I be found naked, bereft of love, when I stand before you on the last day.

Let us pray together and say: *Strip me, Lord Jesus*

Of my attachment to appearances,

Strip me, Lord Jesus

Of my armour of indifference,

Strip me, Lord Jesus

Of my idea that helping others is not my job,

Strip me, Lord Jesus

Of empty words and routine prayer,

Strip me, Lord Jesus

Of the notion that life is good if it is good for me,

Strip me, Lord Jesus

Tenth Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

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).

Jesus, they pierce your arms and legs with nails, tearing through your flesh; yet even now, when your physical pain is most excruciating, you utter the unthinkable prayer: you forgive the very ones who drive nails into your wrists. Nor is this the first time, for so many other times, as the Gospel tells us, you repeated: "Father, forgive...". With you, Jesus, I too can find courage to embrace the forgiveness that sets our hearts free and enables life to begin anew. Lord, it was not enough for you to forgive us; you also excused us before the Father: "*for they do not know what they are doing*". You take our side, you become our advocate, you intercede on our behalf. Now your hands that blessed and healed are nailed fast; now your feet that brought glad tidings to the poor can no longer move; now, in utter helplessness, you show us the triumphant power of prayer. Atop Golgotha, you reveal to us the heights of intercessory prayer, which brings salvation to the world. Jesus, let me pray not merely for myself and for my dear ones, but also for those who do not love me and for those who hurt me. Let me pray, according to the intentions of your heart, for those who wander far from you. Let me make reparation for, and intercede for, all those who do not know you or the joy of experiencing your love and forgiveness.

Let us pray together and say: *Father, have mercy on us and on the whole world*

Through the sorrowful passion of Jesus,

Father, have mercy on us and on the whole world

Through the power of his wounds,

Father, have mercy on us and on the whole world

Through his forgiveness offered on the cross,

Father, have mercy on us and on the whole world

For all those who forgive others out of love for you,

Father, have mercy on us and on the whole world

By the prayers of all those who believe and hope in you, adore you and love you,

Father, have mercy on us and on the whole world

Eleventh Station: Jesus' cry of abandonment

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:45-46).

Jesus, this prayer of yours is unexpected: you cry out to the Father in your abandonment. You, the eternal Son, dispense no answers from on high, but simply ask *why*? At the height of your passion, you experience the distance of the Father; you no longer even call him "Father", but "God", almost as if you can no longer glimpse his face. Why? So that you can plunge into the abyss of our pain. You did this for my sake, so that when I see only darkness, when I experience the collapse of my certainties and the wreckage of my life, I will no longer feel alone, but realize that you are there beside me. You, the God of closeness, experienced abandonment so that I need no longer fall prey to feelings of isolation and abandonment. When you asked the question *why*, you did it in the words of a Psalm. You made even the utmost experience of desolation into a prayer. As we too must do, amid the storms of life. Rather than keeping silent, closed in on ourselves, we should cry out to you. Glory to you, Lord Jesus, for you did not flee from my pain and confusion, but tasted them to the full. Praise and glory to you, for you bridged every distance in order to draw near to those who were farthest from you. In my own dark night, when I keep asking *why*, I find you, Jesus, the light that shines in the darkness. And in the plea of all those who are alone, rejected, oppressed or abandoned, I find you, my God. May I always recognize your presence and turn to you in love.

Let us pray together and say: *Jesus, help me to recognize you and love you*

In unborn and abandoned children,

Jesus, help me to recognize you and love you

In young people who long for someone to hear their cry of pain,

Jesus, help me to recognize you and love you

In the many elderly people left alone and forgotten,

Jesus, help me to recognize you and love you

In prisoners and in the lonely,

Jesus, help me to recognize you and love you

In those peoples most exploited and ignored,

Jesus, help me to recognize you and love you

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies, commending himself to the Father and the good thief to Paradise

[One of the criminals who were crucified with him] said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" ... Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last (Lk 23:42-43.46).

A criminal in Paradise! He entrusts himself to you, Jesus, and you entrust him, along with yourself, to the Father. God of the impossible, you turn a thief into a saint. And not only that: on Calvary you change the course of history. You turn the cross, the emblem of torture, into the very icon of love. You make the wall of death a bridge to life. You turn darkness into light, division into fellowship, sorrow into dancing. You even turn the tomb, the last outpost of life, into a doorway of hope. All these reversals you bring about in union with us, and never without us. *Jesus, remember me!* This heartfelt prayer was all it took to work a miracle in the life of that criminal. Such is the amazing power of prayer. At times, I may feel that my prayers go unheard, yet what is most important is to persevere, to persist, to keep saying to you: "Jesus, remember me!" If you remember me, my evil will no longer be an endpoint but a new beginning. Remember me: welcome me once more into your heart, even when I stray, when I lose my way in the tumult of life. Remember me, Jesus, for to be remembered by you – as the Good Thief shows us – is to enter into paradise. Above all, remind me, Jesus, that my prayer can change the course of history.

Let us pray together and say: *Jesus, remember me*

When hope fades and disappointment reigns,

Jesus, remember me

When I am powerless to make a decision,

Jesus, remember me

When I lose faith in myself and in others,

Jesus, remember me

When I lose sight of the immensity of your love,

Jesus, remember me

When I think that all my prayers are fruitless,

Jesus, remember me

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the Cross and placed in the arms of Mary

Simeon 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... and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk 2:33-35).

Mary, because you said "yes", the Word took flesh in your womb. Now his broken body lies on your lap. The child you once cradled in your arms is now a mangled corpse. Yet even now, in the depths of your grief, you demonstrate your complete self-abandonment. A sword has pierced your soul, yet in your prayer, you continue to say "yes" to God. We find it so hard to say "yes"; more often we say "but": but if I had better parents, but if I had been better understood and loved, but if my career had taken off, but if I hadn't had that problem or that illness, but if God had only granted my request... We keep asking why things happen as they do, and so we find it hard to live the present moment with love. You, Mary, could have had any number of "ifs" to say to God, but you persisted in saying "yes". Steadfast in your faith, you believed that sorrow, experienced in love, bears saving fruit. That with God, suffering never has the final word. As you hold the lifeless body of Jesus in your arms, you hear once more his last words to you: *Behold your son*. Mother, I am that son! Take me into your arms and tend my wounds. Help me to say "yes" to God, "yes" to love. Mother of mercy, we live in a merciless age and we yearn for compassion and understanding. In the strength of your love, anoint us with the balm of meekness. Overcome the resistance of our hearts and untie the knots of our souls.

Let us pray together and say: *Mary, take my hand*

When I indulge in recrimination and self-pity,

Mary, take my hand

When I give up and succumb to my failings,

Mary, take my hand

When I am weak and find it hard to say "yes" to God,

Mary, take my hand

When I am indulgent with myself and unbending with others,

Mary, take my hand

When I want the Church and the world to change, yet refuse to change myself,

Mary, take my hand

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus... Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock (Mt 27:57-60).

Joseph. The name that, along with the name of Mary, appears at the dawn of Christ's coming, now returns at the first light of Easter. Joseph of Nazareth had a dream and courageously took Jesus and saved him from Herod. You, Joseph of Arimathea, now take his body, without realizing that something incredible and wonderful would happen there, in the tomb you provided for Jesus when all seemed lost. Yet how true it is that every gift given to God receives an even greater reward. Joseph of Arimathea, you are a prophet of boldness and courage. To bestow your gift on one who was dead, you approach the dreaded Pilate and ask permission to bury Jesus in the tomb that you had prepared for yourself. Your plea is insistent and you do what you said. Joseph, remind us that persevering prayer bears fruit and overcomes even the darkness of death. Love never goes unanswered, but always grants new beginnings. Your tomb, which – alone in history – would be the wellspring of new life, was itself new, freshly hewn from the rock. As for me, what new gift will I give Jesus this Easter? A little more time to spend with him? A little more love for others? My fears and my buried sorrows, which Christ is waiting for me to offer to him, as you did with your tomb? It will truly be Easter if only I give something of myself to the One who gave his life for me. For it is in giving that we receive, and we find our lives whenever we lose them, our possessions whenever we give them away.

Let us pray together and say: *Have mercy, Lord*

On me, so loath to be converted,

Have mercy, Lord

On me, so prone to take and so reluctant to give,

Have mercy, Lord

On me, who find it so hard to surrender to your love,

Have mercy, Lord

On us, so ready to use things but so slow to serve others,

Have mercy, Lord

On our world, dotted with sepulchres of selfishness,

Have mercy, Lord

Concluding Invocations to the Holy Name of Jesus

Lord, we lift our prayer to you, like the poor, the needy and the sick in the Gospels, who called upon you in the simplest and most direct of ways: by crying out your name.

Jesus, your name itself saves, for you are our salvation.

Jesus, you are my life. I need you, lest I go astray, for you forgive me and raise me up; you bring healing to my heart and give meaning to my pain.

Jesus, you took my evil upon yourself. From the cross, you do not accuse me but embrace me. Meek and humble of heart, heal me of jealousy and resentment; set me free from suspicion and distrust.

Jesus, as I contemplate you on the cross, I find pure love, the meaning of my life and the goal of my journey. Help me to love and forgive, to leave behind my impatience and indifference, and not to feel sorry for myself.

Jesus, on the cross you thirsted. You thirsted for my love and my prayer; you count on them, in bringing to fulfilment your plan of goodness and peace.

Jesus, I thank you for all those who answer your call and persevere in prayer, firm faith and constancy in confronting every challenge and difficulty.

Jesus, I lift up to you the pastors of your flock, whose prayer sustains your holy people. May they make time to dwell in your presence and may they conform their hearts to your own.

Jesus, I praise you for those contemplatives, male and female, whose prayer, hidden from the world and pleasing to you, sustains the Church and our human family.

Jesus, I bring before you all those families and individuals who have prayed with us tonight in their homes: the elderly, especially those who live alone, and the sick, the treasures of the Church, who unite their sufferings to your own.

Jesus, may this prayer of intercession embrace our brothers and sisters who in so many parts of the world are suffering persecution on account of your name; those who experience the trauma of war, and all those who look to you for the strength to bear their heavy crosses.

Jesus, by your cross, you have made us one. Bring believers into deeper communion, help us to grow in fraternity and forbearance, to cooperate with one another and to journey together. Grant lasting peace to your Church throughout the world.

Jesus, just judge who will one day call me by name, free me from hasty judgment, gossip, and violent and offensive words.

Jesus, in the hour of your death, you said: "It is finished". I have not yet finished the course of my life, yet I continue to trust in you, for you are my hope, the hope of the Church and the hope of our world.

Jesus, let me say one last word to you, and to say it over and over again: Thank you! Thank you, my Lord and my God!

[00551-EN.01] [Original text: Italian]