



The Holy See

VIA CRUCIS

REMARKS OF THE HOLY FATHER AT THE END OF THE WAY OF THE CROSS AT THE COLOSSEUM

Good Friday, 13 April 2001

After the Holy Father had completed the last Station, he spoke extemporaneously, saying:

Ecce lignum crucis, in qua salus mundi pependit! Venite adoremus!

Today this confession was made in St Peter's Basilica for the first time in the third millennium. On this very day, Good Friday, the same overwhelming truth has been proclaimed on all the continents, in all the countries of the world: *Ecce lignum crucis!*

Christ's Church confesses this divine and human reality: *Crux, ave Crux! Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi, quia per sanctam crucem tuam redemisti mundum.*

The Church has confessed this for the past two millennia. Today for the first time she has confessed it throughout the world and here in Rome with this Via Crucis around the Colosseum. Let us carry this truth into the third millennium. Let us profess that through his Cross, the Son of God, in accepting this humiliation, a punishment intended for slaves, opened to humanity the way to glorification. Therefore we kneel in adoration today.

Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi, qui per sanctam crucem tuam redemisti mundum. May this truth, confessed today in St Peter's Basilica and here at the Roman Colosseum, be for us the light and strength of this period which we inaugurated a few months ago.

Ave Crux, ave Crux of the Roman Colosseum!

Ave on the threshold of the third millennium!

Ave down through all the years and centuries of this new era that is opening before us!

Praised be Jesus Christ!

1. *“Christ became obedient unto death, even death on a cross”* (cf. *Phil 2:8*).

We have just concluded the *Via Crucis* which, every year, sees us gathered on the evening of Good Friday in this place, filled with intense Christian memories. We have followed the steps of the Innocent One, unjustly condemned, keeping our eyes on his adorable face: a face offended by human malice but full of the light of love and forgiveness.

Truly distressing are the dramatic events involving Jesus of Nazareth! In order to restore fullness of life to man, the Son of God humbled himself in the most abject way. But from his Death, freely chosen, life springs forth. Scripture says: *oblatus est quia ipse voluit* – he gave himself up because he so wished. His is an extraordinary testimony of love, fruit of an obedience without compare, carried to the point of the total giving of himself.

2. *“Obedient unto death, even death on a cross”*.

How can we take our eyes away from Jesus as he dies on the Cross? His battered face disturbs us. The Prophet says: *“He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised”* (*Is 53:2-3*).

On that face are concentrated the dark shadows of every suffering, every injustice, every violence inflicted on human beings throughout the course of history. But now, before the Cross, our everyday sorrows, and even death itself, appear clothed in the majesty of Christ abandoned and dying.

The face of the bleeding and crucified Messiah, reveals that, for the sake of love, God has allowed himself to become involved in the tormented chronicles of mankind. Ours is no longer a solitary suffering, because he has paid the price for us with his blood, shed to the last drop. He has entered into our suffering and broken through the barrier of our distraught tears.

In his death, all human life acquires meaning and value, as does death itself. From the Cross, Christ appeals to the personal freedom of men and women in every period of history and calls each one to follow him on the path of complete abandonment into the hands of God. He even

makes us rediscover the mysterious fruitfulness of pain.

3. *“Lift up the light of your face on us, O Lord” (Ps 4:7).*

As our gathering comes to a close, let us continue to meditate on the mystery of this Face, which countless artists down the centuries have used their every talent to portray.

If only people would let themselves be moved by its unmistakable features! On that Holy Face they would find the appropriate answers to all the questions and doubts that afflict the human heart. From the contemplation of the loving Face of the Son of God made man it is possible to draw the strength to overcome the hours of darkness and tears. From Calvary a divine peace inundates the earth as we await the glory of Easter.

O Virgin Mary, you who stood courageously under the Cross and received in your arms the lifeless body of Jesus, help us to understand that our suffering is a precious sharing in the Passion of your Divine Son, who for love of us “became obedient unto death, even death on a cross”. Guide our steps to follow his indelible footprints, which will lead us to the wonder and joy of his Resurrection.