

THE WAY OF THE CROSS FOR PEACE

Voice of Peace in a World at War

With prayers from the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum – Rome 2023
and texts taken from the speeches of Pope Francis in his visit to Juba (South Sudan) 3-5 february 2023

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are “our peace” (*Eph 2:14*).

Before your Passion, you said: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (*Jn 14:27*). Lord, we need your peace, the peace we are unable to build with our own strength. We need to hear again the words with which, after your resurrection, you strengthened the hearts of the disciples three times: “Peace be with you” (*Jn 20:19.21.26*). Jesus, who embraced the cross for us, look upon our world, thirsting for peace while the blood of your brothers and sisters continues to be shed and the tears of so many mothers who have lost children in war mingle with those of your holy Mother. You also, Lord, wept over Jerusalem for it had not recognized the way of peace (cf. *Lk 19:42*).

Lord Jesus, at your birth the angels in heaven announced: “On earth, peace among those whom he favours” (*Lk 2:14*). Now our prayers rise up to heaven to appeal for “Peace on earth, which humanity throughout the ages has so longed for” (*Pacem in Terris*, 1). Let us pray, beseeching the peace that you have left us and that we are unable to keep. Jesus, you embrace the whole world from the cross: forgive our failings, heal our hearts, grant us your peace.

First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

Then [Pilate] released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified (Mt 27:26).

Barabbas or Jesus? They must choose. This is not like any other choice: it involves deciding where to stand, what position to take in the complex events of life. Peace, which we all desire, is not born of itself; instead, it awaits our decision. Then, as now, we are continually called to choose between Barabbas or Jesus: rebellion or meekness, weapons or witness, human power or the silent strength of the small seed, the power of the world or that of the Spirit. In the Holy Land, it seems that our choice always falls on Barabbas. Violence seems to be our only language. The engine of reciprocal retaliation is continuously fueled by a person’s own pain, which frequently becomes the only criterion for judgement. Justice and forgiveness cannot talk to each other. We live together, without recognizing one another, rejecting each other’s existence, condemning each other, in an endless and increasingly violent vicious circle. In this context, full of hatred and resentment, we too are called to express a judgment and make our decision. And we cannot do this without gazing at the one who was silent and condemned to death: a failure, yet the one on whom our choice has fallen, Jesus. Christ invites us not to use the standard of Pilate and of the crowd, but to recognize the suffering of others, to place justice and forgiveness in dialogue and to desire salvation for everyone, even for thieves, even for Barabbas.

(from the Way of the cross 2023)

Let us pray together, saying: *Enlighten us, Lord Jesus!*

- When we believe we are always right: *Enlighten us, Lord Jesus!*
- When we condemn our brothers and sisters without appeal: *Enlighten us, Lord Jesus!*
- When we close our eyes to injustice: *Enlighten us, Lord Jesus!*
- When we stifle the good around us: *Enlighten us, Lord Jesus!*

Second Station: Jesus takes up his Cross

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

Pope Francis to the authorities of South Sudan

Dear President and Vice-Presidents, in the name of God, of the God to whom we prayed together in Rome, of the God who is gentle and humble in heart (cf. *Mt 11:29*), the God in whom so many people of this beloved country believe, now is the time to say “*No more of this*”, without “ifs” or “buts”. No more bloodshed, no more conflicts, no more violence and mutual recriminations about who is responsible for it, no more leaving your people athirst for peace. No more destruction: it is time to build! Leave the time of war behind and let a time of peace dawn!

Juba, 3rd february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Deliver us, Lord Jesus!*

- From the easy condemnation of our neighbour: *Deliver us, Lord Jesus!*
- From hasty judgments: *Deliver us, Lord Jesus!*
- From criticism and useless words: *Deliver us, Lord Jesus!*
- From destructive gossip: *Deliver us, Lord Jesus!*

Third Station: Jesus falls for the first time

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities (Is 53:4-5).

Pope Francis to the authorities of South Sudan

Behind every form of violence, there is anger and resentment, and behind every form of anger and resentment, there is the unhealed memory of wounds, humiliations and wrongs. It follows that the only way to break free of these is through encounter, the culture of encounter: by accepting others as our brothers and sisters and making room for them, even if it means taking a step backwards. This attitude, which is essential for any peace process, is also indispensable for the cohesive development of society. In the passage from the barbarity of confrontation to a culture of vital encounter, *young people* have a decisive role to play. Consequently, they should be provided with open spaces of encounter for meeting and discussion. May they fearlessly take hold of the future which is theirs! Then too, women, mothers who know how life is generated and safeguarded, need to be increasingly involved in political life and decision-making processes. Women need to be respected, for anyone who commits an act of violence towards a woman commits it towards God, who took flesh from a woman.

Juba, 3rd february 202

Let us pray together, saying: *Raise us up, Lord Jesus!*

- From our laziness: *Raise us up, Lord Jesus!*
- From our falls: *Raise us up, Lord Jesus!*
- From our sadness: *Raise us up, Lord Jesus!*
- From thinking that helping others is not up to us: *Raise us up, Lord Jesus!*

Fourth Station: Jesus meets his Mother

Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against – and a sword will pierce through your own soul also – that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2:34-35).

Pope Francis to Religious and Pastors

Our first duty is not to be a Church that is perfectly organized – any company can do this – but a Church that, in the name of Christ, stands in the midst of people’s troubled lives, a Church that is willing to dirty its hands for people. We must never exercise our ministry by chasing after religious or social prestige – the ugliness of careerism – but rather by walking in the midst of and alongside our people, learning to listen and to dialogue, cooperating as ministers with one another and with the laity. Let me repeat this important word: *together*. Let us never forget it: *together*. Bishops and priests, priests and deacons, pastors and seminarians, ordained ministers and religious – always showing respect for the marvelous specificity of religious life. Let us make every effort to banish the temptation to individualism, to partisan interests. How sad it is when the Church’s pastors are incapable of communion, when they fail to cooperate, and even ignore one another! Let us cultivate mutual respect, closeness and practical cooperation. If we fail to do this ourselves, how can we preach it to others?

Juba, 4th february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Grant that we may recognize you, Lord Jesus!*

- In the disfigured faces of those who suffer: *Grant that we may recognize you, Lord Jesus!*
- In those who are small and poor: *Grant that we may recognize you, Lord Jesus!*
- In those who cry out for an act of love: *Grant that we may recognize you, Lord Jesus!*
- In those persecuted for the sake of justice: *Grant that we may recognize you, Lord Jesus!*

Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus (Lk 23:26).

Pope Francis to Religious and Pastors

To be prophets, companions and intercessors, to show with our life the mystery of God’s closeness to his people, can cost us our lives. Many priests and religious – as Sister Regina told us of her own sisters – have been victims of violence and attacks in which they lost their lives. In a very real way, they offered their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Their closeness to their brothers and sisters is a marvellous testimony that they bequeath to us, a legacy that invites us to carry forward their mission. Let us think of Saint Daniele Comboni, who with his missionary brothers carried out a great work of evangelization in this land. He used to say that a missionary must be ready to do anything for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. We need courageous and generous souls ready to suffer and die for Africa.

Juba, 4th february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Forgive us, Lord Jesus!*

- When we disdained you in the unfortunate: *Forgive us, Lord Jesus!*
- When we ignored you in those who need help: *Forgive us, Lord Jesus!*
- When we abandoned you in the defenceless: *Forgive us, Lord Jesus!*
- When we did not serve you in those who suffer: *Forgive us, Lord Jesus!*

Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me (Mt 25:34-36).

Pope Francis to Religious and Pastors

I would like to thank you, then, for everything that you do amid so many trials and tribulations. Thank you, on behalf of the entire Church, for your dedication, your courage, your sacrifices and your patience. Thank you! Dear brothers and sisters, I pray that you will always be generous pastors and witnesses, armed only with prayer and love; pastors and witnesses allowing yourselves, in meekness, to be constantly surprised by God's grace; and that you may become a means of salvation for others, pastors and prophets of closeness who accompany the people, intercessors with uplifted arms

Juba, 4th february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Grant us your gaze, Lord Jesus!*

- That we may love those who are unloved: *Grant us your gaze, Lord Jesus!*
- That we may help those who have lost their way: *Grant us your gaze, Lord Jesus!*
- That we may take care of those who suffer violence: *Grant us your gaze, Lord Jesus!*
- That we may welcome those who repent of evil: *Grant us your gaze, Lord Jesus!*

Seventh Station: Jesus falls for the second time

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:37-40).

Pope Francis meeting with displaced people

Joseph, you asked a crucial question: “Why do we have to suffer in a camp for displaced persons?” Why...? Why do so many children and young people like you end up here, rather than studying in school or playing in a nice open place? You answered your own question, when you said that it is “because of the ongoing conflicts in the country”. Due to the devastation caused by human violence, as well as that caused by the floods, millions of our brothers and sisters like you, including many mothers with children, have had to leave their lands and abandon their villages and their homes. Sadly, in this war-torn country, being a displaced person or a refugee has become a common and collective experience.

Juba, 4th february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Make us strong, Lord Jesus!*

- In time of trial: *Make us strong, Lord Jesus!*
- In the effort to build bridges of fraternity: *Make us strong, Lord Jesus!*
- In carrying our cross: *Make us strong, Lord Jesus!*
- In bearing witness to the Gospel: *Make us strong, Lord Jesus!*

Eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him (Lk 23:27).

Pope Francis meeting with displaced people

Mothers, women are *the key to transforming the country*. If they receive the proper opportunities, through their industriousness and their natural gift of protecting life, they will have the ability to change the face of South Sudan, to give it a peaceful and cohesive development! I ask you, I ask all the people of these lands, to ensure that women are protected, respected, valued and honoured. Please, protect, respect, appreciate and honour every woman, every girl, young woman, mother and grandmother. Otherwise, there will be no future.

Juba, 4th february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Convert us, Lord Jesus!*

From trafficking in weapons without qualms of conscience: *Convert us, Lord Jesus!*

From allocating money for armaments instead of for food: *Convert us, Lord Jesus!*

From the slavery of money that gives rise to war and injustice: *Convert us, Lord Jesus!*

That spears may be turned into pruning hooks: *Convert us, Lord Jesus!*

Ninth Station: Jesus falls for the third time

Truly, truly, I say to 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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life (Jn 12:24-25).

Pope Francis meeting with displaced people

The future cannot lie in refugee camps. As you said, Johnson, there is a need for all children like yourself to have the opportunity to go to school – and to have a field to play football! There is a need for you to grow as an open society, for different groups to mingle and to form a single people by embracing the challenges of integration, even learning the languages spoken throughout the country and not just those in your particular ethnic group. This means embracing the marvellous risk of knowing and accepting those who are different, discovering the beauty of a reconciled fraternity and experiencing the thrilling challenge of freely shaping your own future along with that of the entire community. It is absolutely essential to avoid ostracizing groups and ghettoizing human beings. To meet all these challenges, however, *there is a need for peace*. And for the help of many, indeed of everyone.

Juba, 4th february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*

- From the fear of being unloved: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*
- From the fear of being misunderstood: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*
- From the fear of being forgotten: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*
- From the fear of failure: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his clothes

[The soldiers] crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. This was to fulfil the Scripture, “They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” (Mk 15:24; Jn 19:24).

Pope Francis meeting with displaced people

Brothers and sisters, once more I look out at you. I see your eyes, weary but bright, eyes that have not lost hope. I see your mouths, which have not lost the strength to pray and to sing. I see you with empty hands but hearts full of faith. You bear the burden of a painful past, yet you never stop dreaming of a better future. In our meeting today, we would like to give wings to your hope. We hope and believe that now, even in the camps for displaced persons, where sadly you are forced to live due to the situation in your country, a new seed can sprout, as from the dry and barren soil: a new seed that will bear rich fruit.

Juba, 4th february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Purify us, Lord Jesus!*

- From resentment and bitterness: *Purify us, Lord Jesus!*
- From violent words and reactions: *Purify us, Lord Jesus!*
- From attitudes that create division: *Purify us, Lord Jesus!*
- From seeking to look good by humiliating others: *Purify us, Lord Jesus!*

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads, and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!" (Mk 15:27-30).

Pope Francis meeting with displaced people

That is what I want to tell you: that you are the seed of a new South Sudan, a seed for the fertile and lush growth of this country. You, from all your different ethnic groups, you who have suffered and are still suffering, you who do not want to respond to evil with more evil. You, who choose fraternity and forgiveness, are even now cultivating a better tomorrow. A tomorrow that is being born today, wherever you find yourselves, from your ability to cooperate, to weave webs of communion and paths of reconciliation with those who, while different from you in terms of ethnicity and origin, are your neighbours.

Juba, 4th february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*

- From the inability to dialogue: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*
- From distrust and suspicion: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*
- From impatience and haste: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*
- From being closed in on ourselves and from isolation: *Heal us, Lord Jesus!*

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies forgiving those who crucified him

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do". It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last (Lk 23:34.44-46).

Dear friends, those who would call themselves Christians must choose which side to take. Those who choose Christ choose peace, always; those who unleash war and violence betray the Lord and deny his Gospel. What Jesus teaches us is clear: we are to love everyone, since everyone is loved as a child of our common Father in heaven. The love of Christians is not only for those close to us, but for everyone, for in Jesus each person is our neighbour, our brother or sister – even our enemies (cf. Mt 5: 38-48). How much more true is this of those who are members of the same people, albeit belonging to different ethnic groups.

“That you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12): that is Jesus’ commandment, and it contradicts every “tribal” understanding of religion. “That they may all be one” (Jn 17:21). That is Jesus’ heartfelt prayer to the Father for all of us who believe.

Juba, 4th february 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Teach us, Lord Jesus!*

- To love as you loved us: *Teach us, Lord Jesus!*
- To forgive as you forgave us: *Teach us, Lord Jesus!*
- To take the first step towards reconciliation: *Teach us, Lord Jesus!*
- To do good without demanding recompense: *Teach us, Lord Jesus!*

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... No, through all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Rom 8:35.37).

Pope Francis' homily at Juba

Today I would like to thank you, because you are the salt of the earth in this country. Yet, when you consider its many wounds, the violence that increases the venom of hatred, and the injustice that causes misery and poverty, you may feel small and powerless. Whenever that temptation assails you, try looking at salt and its tiny grains. Salt is a tiny ingredient and, once placed on food, it disappears, it dissolves; yet precisely in that way it seasons the whole dish. In the same way, even though we are tiny and frail, even when our strength seems paltry before the magnitude of our problems and the blind fury of violence, we Christians are able to make a decisive contribution to changing history. Jesus wants us to be like salt: a mere pinch dissolves and gives a different flavour to everything... Let us learn to apply the salt of forgiveness to our wounds; salt burns but it also heals. Even if our hearts bleed for the wrongs we have suffered, let us refuse, once and for all, to repay evil with evil, and we will grow healthy within.

(Juba Mass, 5th february 2023)

Let us pray together, saying: *Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus!*

- Good Shepherd, who gave your life for your flock: *Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus!*
- You, who by dying destroyed death: *Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus!*
- You, who made life pour forth from your pierced heart: *Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus!*
- You, who from the tomb shed light on history: *Have mercy on us, Lord Jesus!*

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is placed in the tomb

After this Joseph of Arimathea... asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him leave. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also... came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' weight. They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices (Jn 19:38-40).

Pepe Francis' homily at Juba

Brothers and sisters, it is clear what Jesus means by asking us to be the light of the world: we, who are his disciples, are called to shine forth like a city set on a hill, like a lamp whose flame may never be extinguished. In other words, before we worry about the darkness surrounding us, before we

hope that the shadows around us will lighten, we are called to radiate light, to give brightness to our cities, our villages and homes, our acquaintances and all our daily activities by our lives and good works. The Lord will give us strength, the strength to be light in him, so that everyone will see our good works, and seeing them, as Jesus reminds us, they will rejoice in God and give him glory. If we live like sons and daughters, brothers and sisters on earth, people will come to know that all of us have a Father in heaven. We are being asked, then, to burn with love, never to let our light be extinguished, never to let the oxygen of charity fade from our lives so that the works of evil can take away the pure air of our witness. This country, so beautiful yet ravaged by violence, needs the light that each one of you has, or better, the light that each one of you is.

Mass at Juba, 5th 2023

Let us pray together, saying: *Preserve us, Lord Jesus!*

- In the hope that does not disappoint: *Preserve us, Lord Jesus!*
- In the light that does not go out: *Preserve us, Lord Jesus!*
- In the forgiveness that renews the heart: *Preserve us, Lord Jesus!*
- In the peace that makes us blessed: *Preserve us, Lord Jesus!*

Concluding Prayer (Fourteen “thank yous”)

Lord Jesus, eternal Word of the Father, you became silent for us. And in the silence that leads us to your tomb, there is still a word that we want to say to you, recalling the journey of the Stations of the Cross we have traveled with you: thank you!

- Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the meekness that overwhelms arrogance.
- Thank you, for the courage with which you embraced the cross.
- Thank you, for the peace that flows from your wounds.
- Thank you, for having given us your holy Mother to be our Mother as well.
- Thank you, for the love shown in the face of betrayal.
- Thank you, for turning tears into smiles.
- Thank you, for having loved everyone without excluding anyone.
- Thank you, for the hope you instill in time of trial.
- Thank you, for the mercy that heals sufferings.
- Thank you, for stripping yourself of everything to enrich us.
- Thank you, for having transformed the cross into the tree of life.
- Thank you, for the forgiveness you offered your executioners.
- Thank you, for having defeated death.
- Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the light you kindled in our nights. In reconciling all divisions, you made us all brothers and sisters, children of the same Father who is in heaven:

Pater noster...