

POPE FRANCIS REFLECTION AT THE “WAY OF THE CROSS”

Dear Young Friends,

We have come here today to accompany Jesus on his journey of sorrow and love, the Way of the Cross, which is one of the most intense moments of World Youth Day. At the end of the Holy Year of Redemption, Blessed John Paul II chose to entrust the Cross to you, young people, asking you “to carry it throughout the world as a symbol of Christ’s love for humanity, and announce to everyone that only in the death and resurrection of Christ can we find salvation and redemption” (Address to Young People, 22 April 1984). Since then, the World Youth Day Cross has travelled to every continent and through a variety of human situations. It is, as it were, almost “steeped” in the life experiences of the countless young people who have seen it and carried it. No one can approach and touch the Cross of Jesus without leaving something of himself or herself there, and without bringing something of the Cross of Jesus into his or her own life. I have three questions that I hope will echo in your hearts this evening as you walk beside Jesus: What have you left on the Cross, dear young people of Brazil, during these two years that it has been crisscrossing your great country? What has the Cross of Jesus left for you, in each one of you? Finally, what does this Cross teach us?

1. According to an ancient Roman tradition, while fleeing the city during the persecutions of Nero, Saint Peter saw Jesus who was travelling in the opposite direction, that is, toward the city, and asked him in amazement: “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus’ response was: “I am going to Rome to be crucified again.” At that moment, Peter understood that he had to follow the Lord with courage, to the very end. But he also realized that he would never be alone on the journey; Jesus, who had loved him even unto death on the Cross, would always be with him. Jesus, with his Cross, walks with us and takes upon himself our fears, our problems, and our sufferings, even those which are deepest and most painful. With the Cross, Jesus unites himself to the silence of the victims of violence, those who can no longer cry out, especially the innocent and the defenceless; with the Cross, he is united to families in trouble, those who mourn the loss of their children, or who suffer when they see them fall victim to false paradises, such as that offered by drugs. On the Cross, Jesus is united with every person who suffers from hunger in a world where tons of food are thrown out each day; on the Cross, Jesus is united with those who are persecuted for their religion, for their beliefs or simply for the colour of their skin; on the Cross, Jesus is united with so many young people who have lost faith in political institutions, because they see in them only selfishness and corruption; he unites himself with those young people who have lost faith in the Church, or even in God because of the counter-witness of Christians and ministers of the Gospel. The Cross of Christ bears the suffering and the sin of mankind, including our own. Jesus accepts all this with open arms, bearing on his shoulders our crosses and saying to us: “Have courage! You do not carry your cross alone! I carry it with you. I have overcome death and I have come to give you hope, to give you life” (cf. Jn 3:16).

2. And so we can answer the second question: What has the Cross given to those who have gazed upon it or touched it? What has it left in each one of us? It gives us a treasure that no one else can give: the certainty of the unshakable love which God has for us. A love so great that it enters into our sin and forgives it, enters into our suffering and gives us the strength to bear it. It is a love which enters into death to conquer it and to save us. The Cross of Christ contains all the love of God, his immeasurable mercy.

This is a love in which we can place all our trust, in which we can believe. Dear young people, let us entrust ourselves to Jesus, let us give ourselves over entirely to him (cf. *Lumen Fidei*, 16)! Only in Christ crucified and risen can we find salvation and redemption. With him, evil, suffering, and death do not have the last word, because he gives us hope and life: he has transformed the Cross from an instrument of hate, defeat and death into a sign of love, victory and life.

The first name given to Brazil was “The Land of the Holy Cross”. The Cross of Christ was planted five centuries ago not only on the shores of this country, but also in the history, the hearts and the lives of the people of Brazil and elsewhere. The suffering Christ is keenly felt here, as one of us who shares our journey even to the end. There is no cross, big or small, in our life which the Lord does not share with us.

3. But the Cross of Christ invites us also to allow ourselves to be smitten by his love, teaching us always to always look upon others with mercy and tenderness, especially those who suffer, who are in need of help, who need a word or a concrete action which requires us to step outside ourselves to meet them and to extend a hand to them. How many people were with Jesus on the way to Calvary: Pilate, Simon of Cyrene, Mary, the women.... Sometimes we can be like Pilate, who did not have the courage to go against the tide to save Jesus’ life, and instead washed his hands. Dear friends, the Cross of Christ teaches us to be like Simon of Cyrene, who helped Jesus to carry that heavy wood; it teaches us to be like Mary and the other women, who were not afraid to accompany Jesus all the way to the end, with love and tenderness. And you? Who are you like? Like Pilate? Like Simon? Like Mary?

Dear friends, let us bring to Christ’s Cross our joys, our sufferings and our failures. There we will find a Heart that is open to us and understands us, forgives us, loves us and calls us to bear this love in our lives, to love each person, each brother and sister, with the same love. Amen!