

## On Good Friday, Pope's focus on social justice Gospel

Joshua J. McElwee | Apr. 18, 2014

Rome

The imagery of Good Friday -- when Christians remember Jesus' torture and death by crucifixion -- is potent, full of recollection of each pain suffered by Christ.

Yet added to the imagery this year will be the pain and sufferings of many others, as the meditations to be used by Pope Francis Friday night during a yearly "Way of the Cross" at Rome's ancient Colosseum focus sharply on the plight of many in society who have either largely been left behind or left in pain.

As the pope and expected thousands of pilgrims pray in the candlelit Colosseum, they will pause during each of the traditional 14 stations of the Cross, relating Christ's suffering to, among others: Those left jobless by the economic crisis, unwelcome immigrants globally, children forced into being soldiers, the lonely, prisoners suffering torture, women suffering violence by men, and the elderly.

At the end of the service, when the gathering remembers Christ's followers laying him in his tomb, they will even be told that Jesus' true name is evinced by compassion and forgiveness.

"At last we see our Lord's face," read the meditations for this year's event. "And we know fully his name: mercy and faithfulness."

The "Way of the Cross" is an annual event hosted by the Vatican since 1970 as part of the church's celebration of Holy Week, leading to the Easter Masses Saturday night and Sunday morning at St. Peter's Basilica and Square. It follows the Stations of the Cross represented in Catholic churches around the world, symbolizing Jesus' long and torturous journey to his crucifixion.

At each of the 14 Stations, Catholics traditionally meditate on a part of Jesus' journey, from his falling under the weight of the Cross, to the help given him by passersby, to his death.

The meditations for this year's Vatican ceremony have been published by the Vatican online in several languages, and are titled "The Face of Christ, the Face of Man? [in English](#) [1]. They were written by Archbishop Giancarlo Maria Bregantini, who heads the southern Italian archdiocese of Campobasso-Boiano.

In a Vatican Radio interview [last week](#) [2], Bregantini said the main message he wanted to give in the meditations is "that you never suffer in vain."

"It is very beautiful to say that I suffer with my Lord; the suffering is his kiss, the covenant that I believe with him," said Bregantini, who has become known in Italy for his opposition to the mafia, writing a book on the matter, *We cannot be silent*.

This year's meditations relate Jesus' suffering almost immediately to the suffering of others, with the second station of the Cross -- focusing on the weight of the Cross carried by Jesus -- referring to the "grave social consequences" of the continuing global economic recession.

"The wood of the cross is heavy, for on it Jesus bears the sins of us all," writes Bregantini. "He staggers under that burden, too great for one man alone."

"It is also the burden of all those wrongs which created the economic crisis and its grave social consequences: job insecurity, unemployment, dismissals, an economy that rules rather than serves, financial speculation, suicide among business owners, corruption and usury, the loss of local industry," he continues.

"This is the cross which weighs upon the world of labor, the injustice shouldered by workers. Jesus shoulders it himself and teaches us to reject injustice and to learn, with his help, to build bridges of solidarity and of hope, lest we be like sheep who have lost our way amid this crisis."

Highlighting the focus on workers, the Vatican said in a briefing early afternoon Friday that Cross would be carried to the second station inside the Colosseum by a group of laborers. Likewise, highlighting the focus on other social justice topics, the Cross will also be carried at different stations by migrants, homeless, families, prisoners, women, children, and the elderly.

In the third station, where Jesus falls for the first time, Bregantini relates the fall of Christ to the plight of migrants.

"With the inner strength which comes to him from the Father, Jesus also helps us to accept the failings of others; to show mercy to the fallen and concern for those who are wavering," writes the archbishop.

"And he gives us the strength not to shut the door to those who knock and ask us for asylum, dignity and a homeland. In the awareness of our own weakness, we will embrace the vulnerability of immigrants, and help them to find security and hope."

In the seventh station, where Jesus falls for the second time, Bregantini relates that fall to prisoners around the world suffering inhumane conditions.

"In [Jesus] we glimpse the bitter experience of those locked in prisons of every sort, with all their inhumane contradictions," writes

Bregantini. "Confined and surrounded, 'pushed hard' and 'falling.'"

"Prisons today continue to be set apart, overlooked, rejected by society," he states. "Marked by bureaucratic nightmares and justice delayed. Punishment is doubled by overcrowding: an aggravated penalty, an unjust affliction, one which consumes flesh and bone."

"Some -- too many! -- do not survive," the archbishop laments.

In the eight station, where Jesus meets a group of women who cry at his agony, Bregantini says Christians should "weep for those men who vent on women all their pent-up violence" and for women "enslaved by fear and exploitation."

"But it is not enough to beat our breast and to feel compassion," he states. "Jesus demands more. Women need to be given reassurance ... they need to be cherished as an inviolable gift for all humanity."

At the eleventh station, which represents Jesus' crucifixion, Bregantini relates the crucifixion specifically to the suffering of the elderly around the world.

"Today many of our brothers and sisters, like Jesus, are nailed to a bed of pain, at hospital, in homes for the elderly, in our families," he states. "It is a time of hardship, with bitter days of solitude and even despair."

"Sickness does not ask permission," he states. "It always comes unannounced. At times it upsets us, it narrows our horizons, it tests our hope. It is a bitter gall. Only if we find at our side someone able to listen to us, to remain close to us, to sit at our bedside? can sickness become a great school of wisdom, an encounter with God, who is ever patient."

Friday's "Way of the Cross" is to begin at 9:15 PM in Rome, 3:15 on the U.S. East Coast. Pope Francis will celebrate the Easter Vigil Mass at 8:30 PM at the Vatican Saturday and the Sunday Easter Mass at 10:15 AM in St. Peter's Square on Sunday. Video of most Easter events are made available by the Vatican Television Center [here](#)[3].

Following Sunday's Mass, Francis will deliver the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, a special blessing given only at Easter and Christmas. The Vatican said on Friday Francis' blessing and message for the world is expected to be short, with the ceremony surrounding the event only to take around 30 minutes in total.

[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* national correspondent. His email address is [jmcelwee@ncronline.org](mailto:jmcelwee@ncronline.org) [4]. Follow him on Twitter: [@joshjmac](https://twitter.com/joshjmac) [5].]

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