

Children write meditations for Pope's Way of the Cross

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Pope Francis presides over the Via Crucis – or Way of the Cross – ceremony in St. Peter's Square empty of the faithful following Italy's ban on gatherings to contain coronavirus contagion, at the Vatican, Friday, April 10, 2020. (Credit: Vatican News via AP.)

ROME – In a passage of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Taking this to heart, this year the Vatican has asked children to write the meditations for the Way of the Cross led by Pope Francis on Good Friday.

Children from a Roman parish, a group of Scouts, and young people from two family shelters penned this year's meditations. Francis will lead the Way of the Cross from an empty St. Peter's Square, instead of Rome's Colosseum, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Italy will be in a full lock-down from Holy Thursday through Easter Monday.

“Dear Jesus,” the meditations begin. “You know that we children also have crosses, that they are neither lighter nor heavier than those of the grownups, but that they are true crosses, that we also feel heavy at night. And only You know them and take them seriously.”

The list of crosses included by the children is long, and includes things many adults wouldn't think to pray for: From being afraid of the dark and loneliness, to wetting the bed, stuttering, and hearing parents arguing.

There are also some of the more “traditional” crosses associated with the Good Friday Via Crucis: Poverty, hunger, betrayal, exploitation, and war.

“Dear good Jesus: You have been a child like me, you have also played and perhaps you have fallen and hurt yourself; you have also gone to school and perhaps got some of your homework wrong; you have also had a mom and a dad and you know that sometimes I don't really want to obey when they tell me to do my homework, take out the trash, make the bed and tidy up the room; you too have gone to catechism and pray and you know that I am not always very happy when I go,” the meditations continue.

With the innocence that only children can convey, the meditations give concrete, “small” examples of daily challenges, from bullying to

overcoming shyness; from fraternal correction to becoming more humble.

Understandably, one of the meditations — the ninth station, where Jesus falls for the third time — is focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, and the “loneliness” of the past year: From the ban on visiting grandparents to the suspension of most sports and youth activities.

“I often feel alone,” writes the author of the meditation. “The school too is closed. I used to go reluctantly sometimes, but now I just want to go back to class to see my classmates and the teachers.”

“The sadness of loneliness sometimes becomes unbearable, we feel ‘abandoned’ by everyone, unable to smile again. Like Jesus, we find ourselves fallen to the ground,” an unnamed girl writes.

Another child recounts what happened the last time he saw his grandfather: “Some men who looked like astronauts got out of the ambulance, dressed in gowns, gloves, masks and a visor, they took the grandfather who had been breathing difficulties for a few days. That was the last time I saw my grandfather. He died a few days later, in the hospital, I imagine suffering too because of the loneliness.”

The meditations are divided into 14 stations, each including a passage of the Gospel, a short reflection, an intention and a prayer. They often pose questions that are hard to answer, even for most adults.

For instance, a child asks if it’s possible to forgive the wrongs against children committed by organized crime: “How is it possible to commit such terrible actions? Is it fair to forgive something like that? And I, would I be able to do it?”

“Jesus, dying on the cross, has given us all salvation,” continues the meditation from the twelfth station. “He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners who have the humility and courage to convert.”