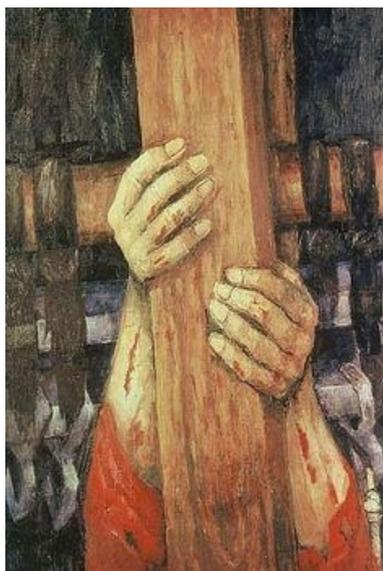


XAVERIAN JUBILEE YEAR

VIA CRUCIS
WITH THE TEXTS FROM THE XAVERIAN FAMILY



Kinshasa-Yaoundé 2021

Frs. Mbula Gilbert and Turco Faustino, who put together the texts of this Stations of the Cross, give thanks to all those who have helped them to find these beautiful pages of the theology of the cross in the Xaverian mission. Sorry for presenting only a few facets of a rich history that the Xaverian Family celebrates in this Jubilee year of 100 years since the Letter Testament of the Founder, Guido Maria Conforti and 125 years since the Foundation of the Institute.

Cover page: Painting by Father Sieger Köder (1925-2015).

The experience of the cross and the nights of the pandemic

The nights of the pandemic caused by Covid-19 drag us day by day into an arduous journey of uncertainty and difficulty that seems to relentlessly remind us of the reality of the cross. Let us therefore remain hopeful during Lent season and be the light at the end of the tunnel.

When we think of the mysteries of Christ in relation to the testimonies of our confreres who had willingly sacrificed their lives by witnessing for Christ, the nights of the pandemic cannot dictate our end, rather mark the beginning of a new dawn.

Let's pray

God of Mercy, send your Spirit to help us follow Christ's way of the cross, share with him the suffering of the world, and rejoice in his victory over evil. Teach us humility to follow Christ's footsteps. Teach us brotherhood which knows how to trust the Giver of life. Make us grow in the path of perfect charity, through Jesus, Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

NB. Each station provides a reading of the Word of God, a commentary, a testimony and, possibly, a refrain for the participation of the Assembly.

1st station: Jesus is condemned to death

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

“Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” So, Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished. (Lk 23,20.24-25).

Jesus is aware of his condemnation and knows that the way of the cross is the way through which he has to tread to save humanity. The missionary also knows that he cannot proclaim Christ without speaking of the cross. And even more, he cannot be a missionary without carrying his cross and identifying himself with Christ.

To follow Christ is to identify with him. The testimony of Madinelli

Joseph Madinelli, a young Xaverian deacon, succumbed to cancer in 1987 at the age of 31. He was aware that his cancer “condemned” him to death. A few weeks before his death, he shared his testimony which reminds us of the assurance of Christ before his condemnation: “I gave my life to God and allowed Him to use it as He willed. I felt serene and peaceful even in the most difficult times of chemotherapy, feeling extreme closeness to God while being purified by my physical suffering. However, I am only human to feel unsure if I would still make it the next day. I remembered that what’s important is the present time and in realizing this, to love without regret and to share without holding anything back. It was committing the best version of myself to Jesus, to the Church and to our poor and humble congregation. I would give my life out of love for the mission in China even if I knew I would never be able to leave the borders of Italy. I would offer my life for China. Regardless of who I am and what I could offer, I want to give everything to follow Christ.”

2nd station: Jesus receives his cross

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

“Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds^[1] you have been healed.” (1P 2,24)

Christ takes his Cross. The missionary does, too. Before his departure to China for his mission, Fr. Caio Rastelli earnestly and constantly prepared himself. He was in Parma as a formator of the young and future missionaries, one of whom testified about the way Fr. Rastelli welcomed the cross.

The missionary welcomes the Cross to carry it with Christ. The testimony about Father Rastelli.

One day, I walked into my formator’s office, Fr. Rastelli. As he was reading the Sacred Scriptures, he uttered the following verse loudly: *“If these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?”* (Lc 23,31). Then, he added: “This is a serious matter, my dear. We have to work for the Lord, we have to sacrifice ourselves for Him and carry his Cross; otherwise, our mission doesn’t make sense. To carry the Cross is to constantly revive in us this great desire for salvation.” Two years after his arrival in China which was in the midst of a political rebellion that time, Father Caio Rastelli died after a short period of illness. He carried the Cross of Christ with a constant desire for total self-giving which gave him great strength, confidence and inner serenity.

3rd Station: Jesus falls for the First time.

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

“Surely, he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” (Is 53, 4-5).

Jesus who takes his cross and falls; is exhausted and continues to experience poverty, a situation of life which leads to what is essential. The missionary goes through the same experience of poverty so that what is essential may powerfully manifest in his life.

Life of sobriety for a credible ecclesial testimony. The testimony of Fr. Luigi Carrara

"Even if Fizi (Uvira, D. R. Congo) is largely dominated by non-Christians, we feel welcomed by the Christian minority. I don't do much and activities are limited as it's difficult to actually do good. Yes, we need to build structures for the community's development but I have the impression that Christ, who loves the poor, invites us to go deeper. Otherwise, the evangelization remains at the surface level. We can take the risk of coming here with important means, forgetting the Gospel and abandoning the Cross at the edge of the road. The people consider us rich because we have everything we need, and somehow, it's really true. However, we should bring our life style closer to that of the people and above all, be the embodiment of what we have come to preach here: that is, to be holy, to seek only what is necessary for our life, the salvation in Jesus Christ" (Luigi Carrara, letter to his parents, Fizi 23.06.1963).

4th station: Jesus meets his mother

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

“Then, Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed, so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Lk 2: 34-35).

The meeting between Jesus and his mother along the way of the cross expresses a communion of hearts which doesn't cease because of life's events, even the most atrocious. This relationship is very strong and loaded with great love. A young theology student talks about this communion of love to his older sister. Let's listen to this reflection written Jean Didonè, who died a martyr in Congo in 1964.

Love makes lovers alike. Testimony of Fr. Giovanni Didonè.

The more we grow in love with Jesus, the more we are inclined to imitate him. The Christ we want to imitate today is the suffering Christ, suffused with blood on the ignominious cross. If we persist in growing in his love, we would understand the need to be in eternal union with Him. Obviously, we shall not be on the cross with him forever, for one day, we will be transformed in His likeness and in his Glory, resembling Him in every way. Isn't that beautiful? My heart is filled with joy thinking about it, but I would really like to engrave this conviction in me. Isn't Jesus the way? And if we take this path, in the company of our heavenly Mother, will we not meet the Cross? Let us ask the Lord for the grace to be able to endure suffering with patience. And when will these crosses reach us? Well, may our Heavenly Mother help us to offer ourselves to Jesus, to his merciful love, in expiation for our sins, for the sins of the whole world, for the salvation of all mankind” (Didonè Giovanni, Letter to his sister, Piacenza on 10.12.1956)

5th station: Simon of Cyrene carries the cross

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

“They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.” (Mk 15,21).

Simon is invited to help Jesus. Did he know Jesus? The missionary meets non-Christians who support him and seek to know Jesus. Brother Faccin, the first Xaverian martyr in Africa, bears witness to the help non-Christians extend to the missionary while the Church offers to help them follow Christ.

The mission: a story of mutual aid and discovery of the gift. Testimony of Brother Faccin.

“On Holy Saturday evening, at Baraka Church, I saw with my own eyes how one helps another to love Christ. We were only a hundred people, a minority compared to the population. It reminds me of the early Christians in pagan Rome, who prayed in the catacombs to end Satan's Kingdom on earth. I saw how our lay people followed the Stations of the Cross: the reader also carried the big cross, in turn, on his shoulders, like Jesus. I prayed for them, so that their hearts may remain united in prayer and love of Christ who died for us on the Cross so that he keeps them in his grace. I saw our catechumens again that we previously met and examined in remote BECs for them to take the next step. Those of the first year of catechumenate received the medal, those of the second the Crucifix, those of the third were entered in the list of admitted to baptism. I saw some people crying because they couldn't pass the examination. And many others who rejoiced in baptism receiving the Eucharist with a very special love. These meetings renew my faith and our love for Christ” (cf. *Vittorio Faccin, Letter to parents 06.24.1960 and 07.24.1960*).

6th station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

“Come, my heart says, “seek his face!

Your face, LORD, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me.

***Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.***

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,

O God of my salvation!

(Ps 27,8-9).

Veronica makes a gesture that speaks louder than words. It confirms a relationship that goes beyond the categories of carnal love. Mother Celestina Bottego once wrote about this passionate relationship that engulfs all of existence.

The maternal tenderness that gives life. Testimony of Mother Bottego, Foundress of the Xaverian sisters.

“I am comforted by the thought of Jesus, who comes before us crucified, crowned with thorns, and covered with shame to assure us of His sacrificial love. He expects a generous response from us to experience our own nailing on the cross as we commit our sincere and joyful love.

Hopefully everything will serve to rot my "Self" and prepare me to let Love reign in me. It is necessary that I suffer for the souls the Lord has entrusted to me without letting them know anything about it. The Lord knows everything and allows everything for my purification and for the Work of our Institute. I can only do much as I am powerless, but I want to offer this proof of love "(Venerable Celestina Bottego, *Pensieri*, Parma 04.09.1969).

7th station: Jesus falls a second time

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

“I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me. The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death” (Ps 117,13.18).

Jesus falls and gets up. The rising of Jesus symbolizes resilience. In pastoral care with the prisoners, the missionary contemplates the force of life which animates those who want to rise from their falls. A group of prisoners from Bukavu (D.R. Congo) testified about the work of Sister Maria De Oliveira, a Brazilian Xaverian, who prematurely passed away in 2019 due to cancer.

The rising of Jesus, the icon of prisoners. Testimony on sister Maria De Oliveira

“Sister Maria leaves us and precedes us in the Kingdom of God, showing us the great love of God and His infinite mercy. She used to pray with us and listen to us in our difficulties. With her team, she helped us in learning trades such as knitting, sewing, making soap, etc. At the end of class, she used to teach us songs and tell us about her family and her nation, Brazil. We felt like we were in the same family. Her colleagues told us that she faced her illness with great humility, serenity and trust abandoned in the Lord. Sister Maria comforted us because she succeeded in showing us the beauty of giving her life to the Lord with love and gratuity” (A group of prisoners from Bukavu).

8th Station: Jesus comforts the women of Jerusalem

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

"When they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn" (Zachariah 12,10).

The women in tears. A century ago, Monsignor Luigi Calza, a Xavierian missionary in China, told the story of a young girl, Ines Lo and how she met Jesus in the way of Calvary from her disease.

Christ meets a sick girl. Testimony of Bishop Calza

Ines Lo was baptized at the age of sixteen by Father Leonard Armelloni, a Xaverian missionary. Her parents were devout Christians, of exemplary conduct, and had passed on to their daughter's heart the precious seeds of faith and virtue.

After her baptism, Ines had given herself to cultivating all the Christian virtues and had felt the desire to become a nun. She was welcomed to the Congregation of St. Joseph, which had just been founded. The girl's good qualities and beautiful virtues raised a good hope of success in the new Congregation. Unfortunately, at some point, the symptoms of tuberculosis have started manifesting so Ines returned to her family with the hope of regaining health by breathing fresh air in her native town Ruzhou.

Unfortunately, her health continued to deteriorate until it worsened to bone tuberculosis. The little Ines was in excruciating pain. She spoke enthusiastically of the hope of dying soon to go to heaven to Father Herménégild, who gave her the last communion.

Her faith and desire to go to heaven would often set her eyes at the crucifix hanging on the wall: the Chinese call it Ku-xiang (苦像),

which literally translates "the image of the pain." The thought of Jesus' sufferings gave her the strength to resist.

To the missionary who asked her, "Ines, do you suffer a lot? she answered, glancing at the Crucifix, and said, "Bu teng (不疼), I don't feel any pain." She kept a total lucidity of mind until her last moment, never complaining in her excruciating pain.

At the time of the Anointing of the sick, she spontaneously opened her weak hands, and then, with a faint voice, repeated: "Sheng Mu Maliya (聖母瑪麗亞) - Holy Mother Mary." Afterwards, she closed her eyes and slept peacefully in the Lord in March of 1919."

9th station: Jesus falls a third time

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. » (Rm 8.35.37)

In the context of war, Father Aldo Marchiol, a year before he was killed in Burundi, gave his testimony about the exigency of welcoming the Good News of Christ.

To know how to cry to be saved. Testimony of Fr. Marchiol.

"Our brothers and sisters here in Burundi need a word of justice and love in this social situation imbued with hatred, vengeance, revenge, and injustice. They need a word of hope in their material and, above all, spiritual misery. In this climate of slavery and war, they need a higher ideal: the ideal of the dignity of God's children. They need people who live in and who are ready to bear witness to the Gospel. The problem of the ethnic groups of the people in this country has never been politically resolved, and Christianity has not yet resolved it completely. Injustice, violence, and massacres perpetrated by one ethnic group against another have always been the cause of further violence and escalation of more violence. The ethnic group in power has tried to promote its own ideology in all areas of public and religious life and has always used its own army consisting of elements of its own ethnic group, to subdue others. This situation of hatred has sometimes been difficult for the Church to denounce injustices and to bear witness to the Gospel and Missionary Work" (Father Aldo Marchiol, 19.11.1994).

10th station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

"And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lot then they sat down there and kept watch over him." (Mt 27,33-36).

Jesus is stripped of his clothes. He is unfairly deprived of his rights. Father Ottorino Maule recounts the suffering of protestant Christians persecuted and deprived of freedom of gathering in Burundi. Father Maule was killed in Buyengero in 1995.

Religious persecution. Testimony of Fr. Ottorino Maule

"Last night we learned of the new law prohibiting the gathering of a Protestant Church, the Pentecostal Church of Sweden because its leaders are accused of being the main culprits of the year's troubles. I just spoke with a Protestant catechist who is used to visiting from time to time. Many Protestants had to flee because they were accused of instigating ethnic hatred. Many pastors and catechists have died, and there is now a new law banning their church. These poor people will definitely suffer further anxieties because of their faith. We hope that the religious authorities can condemn these abuses against human rights. But those who want to protect people and their rights are unjustly accused of influencing people politically. Does speaking for justice and equality mean that they are doing politics against the government? Is the Gospel not interested in all aspects of human existence? Sometimes morale also goes away: it's our cross! Dear friends, ask the blessing of Heaven on all of us so that we might live in happiness of Christ." (Father Ottorino Maule, Minago-Burundi, 02.07.1973).

11th station: Jesus is crucified.

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

“It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the Jews. They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. (Mk 15,25-27). Now beside the cross of Jesus stood His mother, His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.” (Jn 19,25)

In the Ministry of Reconciliation, the Xaverian Father Uccelli, felt the living presence of the Lord and no venture seemed to him impossible. He even tried to convert a bandit leader in China.

The salvation reserved for the wrongdoer, hung on the cross near Jesus. Story of the venerable Father Pietro Uccelli.

About eight days before his death, Fr. Uccelli said, “The chief of bandits came to me in tattered clothes and told me a little of his life. It was really a way of the cross, caused by continuous fears, instability and endless inconvenience. He was a baptized Christian, and practiced his faith before he decided to go another way. Seeing him in such a miserable state, I used all my strength and zeal to have him leave the wrong way he was undertaking. What he promised me seemed sincere, but just outside my office, he seemed to live the way he did before. A week later, I was told that he was killed. May the Lord have mercy on his soul and repeat the miracle he did to the Good Thief who was crucified with him at the hill of Golgotha”.

12th station: Jesus dies on the cross

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

“It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.” (Lk 23,44-46).

Jesus dies. The missionary remembers the death of Christ encountered on the paths of the world. Hence, Father Modesto Todeschi remembers Catina Gubert, a lay missionary associated with the Xavierians in Burundi, killed in Buyengero in 1995.

The silence of God for a great mission. Memories about Catina.

Catina deeply loved the people and the land of Burundi. She was a woman fascinated by the great ideals she firmly believed in. Enthusiastic, tenacious and generous, she never looked tired. She was distinguished by her big heart that extended help and favors to people in unlimited terms. A Burundian proverb says: *Do it well and you will find it on the path that is waiting for you, but if you do it bad, it will follow you* (Ukora iciza ukagisanga imbere, wakora inabi ikaguherekeza). What heavenly rewards Catina has been reaping in the glorious presence of God!!! She often asked God: "Why, Lord, did you allow such a war? How come you don't intervene? Why are these poor innocent people dying? ». She suffered so much from the injustices of this war that she, herself became a hapless victim. The executioner who entered the community at Buyengero in 1995 had the two fathers and Catina kneel down. The latter, alone, received two bullets. The bullet pumped into her heart punctured the small cross that Catina wore around the neck. This punctured cross is the symbol of her whole life, heart to heart with Christ who died on the cross and who fully manifests his mission of love.

13th station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

“Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid.” (Lk 23.50-53)

Saint Francis Xavier arrived in Japan on August 15, 1549. An old Jesuit, Father Nemeshegi, told the Xaverians that Christianity had survived in Japan because the early missionaries, being not so good at learning the language, asked the first Japanese Christians to pray the way of the Cross and to recite the Rosary.

Where there are crosses, Mary is present. Testimony of Father Nemeshegi.

In this way, the missionaries prepared their faithful to face one of the most atrocious persecutions in history, which lasted over two centuries in Japan: the habit of meditating on passion and death of Jesus enabled these Christians to face martyrdom. Concerning the Rosary, they had to give up the images of the Virgin Mary because these signs were reasons for the regime to kill the Christians. So, they invented a solution: they took the statue of Kannon, the popular Buddhist goddess of mercy. With some modifications in clothing and ornament (by camouflaging the crosses), they Christianized these statues. In front of Maria-Kannon they recited daily the rosary and the prayers. Then they laid these statues before the Buddhist altar without rousing suspicion. Under these cover-ups, the Japanese Christians kept their faith from generation to generation, without the support of any priest. This story shows that where there are difficulties, persecutions and crosses, Maria is always present! In fact, she was there when her son was dying on the cross.

14th station: Jesus is laid in the tomb

V / We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,

R / *Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

"They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with spices in linen cloths, following the Jewish burial custom. At the place where he had been crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been buried. Since it was the Jewish day of preparation, and the tomb was near at hand, they laid Jesus there." (Jn 19, 40-42)

All life is born from death. All happiness comes from sacrifice. All true joy comes from the cross. Saint Conforti exhorted his missionaries to seek comfort in the cross of Christ.

The cross, our comfort. Conforti's speech to his missionaries before their departure for China in 1904

"May this crucifix, placed on your breast, comfort you; it is he who must be your happiness, your only good; learn from him who shed his blood to the last drop for the redemption of men, to sacrifice yourself for your brothers.

May divine grace, which will never fail you, comfort you, this grace which makes human frailty invincible and which makes us repeat in the midst of the most significant trials *I overflow with joy in all my distresses* (2Co 7,4). (...)

If you are not going to experience the martyrdom of blood, you will not miss that of self-sacrifice, sacrifice, and suffering; this is uninterrupted martyrdom and more demanding than martyrdom properly so-called.

May finally comfort you the hope of this eternal reward which surpasses all desire and which will be for the apostle a hundredfold of the reward reserved for the good and faithful servant: *You will receive the hundredfold, and you will possess eternal life* (Mt 19,29). The Lord will count your steps, will collect the drops of your sweat to change them into precious pearls" (Conforti, 2nd *Speech sent on mission*, Parma on January 18, 1904).

Let's pray

Lord, God our Father,
I thank you because I understood
that without the cross, no one can be happy
and because
in every experience of life,
good or bad,
we are learning
that there is always a lot to be happy about.
I am happy even if I too have my cross;
happy of this cross you have given me.
I thank you with all my heart.
Through Jesus, Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.

(Prayer from: Amato Dagnino, *My Words Are Spirit and Life*, p. 184)

