



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS AT THE COLOSSEUM

Good Friday, 13 April 1979 1. When we make the Way of the Cross from one station to the next, in spirit we are always at the spot where *this journey had its "historical" place*: where it took place along the streets of Jerusalem, from the Praetorium of Pilate to the hill of Golgotha, or Calvary, outside the city walls. And so today too we have been, in spirit in the City of the "Great King", who, as a sign of his kingship chose the crown of thorns instead of a royal crown, and the cross instead of a throne. Was not Pilate right when—as he showed Christ to the people who were awaiting his condemnation in front of the Praetorium "so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover" (Jn 18:28)—he did not say "Here is the king" but "Here is the man" (Jn 19:5)? And in this way Pilate revealed the programme of Christ's kingdom, which is to be free from the attributes of earthly power in order to reveal the thoughts of many hearts (cf. Lk 2:35) and to bring near to them the Truth and Love that come from God. "Mine is not a kingdom of this world...

I was born for this, I came into the world for this:

to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:36-57). This witness has remained at the corners of the streets of Jerusalem, at the windings of the Way of the Cross—where Christ walked, where he fell three times, where he accepted Simon of Cyrene's help and Veronica's veil, where he spoke to some women who were weeping for him. We still desire this witness today. We want to know all its details. We follow the traces of the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem and in many other places on our earth, and every time we seem to repeat to this man condemned to die, to this Man of sorrows: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). 2. As we make the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum in Rome, we are still following the footsteps of Christ, whose cross was planted in the hearts of his martyrs and confessors. They proclaimed the crucified Christ as "the power and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). Together with Christ they took up the cross daily (cf. Lk 9:23), and when it was necessary they died like him on the cross, or died in the arenas of ancient Rome, torn to pieces by the wild animals, burnt alive, tortured. The power and the wisdom of God revealed in the cross were thus more powerfully manifested in human weakness. Not only did they accept suffering and death for Christ, but together with him they also gave themselves to love for their persecutors and enemies: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). For this reason, *upon the ruins of the Colosseum there stands the Cross*. As we look at this cross, the cross of the beginnings of the Church in this capital city and the cross of her history, we should feel and express a particularly deep *solidarity* with all our brothers and sisters in the faith, who in our own time too *are subjected to persecution and discrimination* in various parts of the world. We think especially of those who are condemned, in a certain sense, to "civil death" by denial of their right to live according to their own faith, their own rite, their own religious conditions. As we look at the cross in the Colosseum we ask Christ that they—like those who once

suffered martyrdom here—may not lack the power of the Spirit, which is needed by the confessors and martyrs of our own times. As we look at the cross in the Colosseum we feel an ever deeper union with them, and even stronger solidarity. Just as Christ *has a special place in our hearts* through his Passion, so do they. We have the duty to speak about this passion of his modern confessors, and to bear witness to them before the conscience of all humanity, which proclaims the cause of man as the main purpose of all progress. How can one reconcile these claims with the damage done to so many people, who—gazing at the cross of Christ—confess God and proclaim his Love? 3. Jesus Christ, we are about to conclude this holy day of Good Friday at the foot of your cross. Just as once in Jerusalem at the foot of the cross there stood your Mother, John, Mary Magdalen and other women, so do we stand here. We are deeply moved by the importance of the moment. We cannot find the words to express all that our hearts feel. This evening, when—after you had been taken down from the cross they laid you in a tomb at the foot of Calvary—we wish to ask you *to stay with us through your cross*: you, who through the cross took leave of us. We ask you to stay with the Church; to stay with humanity; not to be dismayed if many, perhaps, pass by your cross with indifference, if some go away from it, and others do not reach it. And yet, perhaps, never so much as today has man had need of this power and this wisdom that you yourself are, you alone: through your cross! So stay with us in this deep mystery of your death, in which you revealed how much "God loved the world" (Jn 3:16). Stay with us and draw us to yourself (cf. Jn 13:32), you who fell beneath this cross. Stay with us through your Mother, to whom, from the cross, you specially entrusted every human being (cf. Jn 19:27). Stay with us! *Stat Crux, dum volvitur orbis!* Yes, "the Cross stands high upon the world as it goes round!" ©

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