

## Walking the Way of the Cross in Africa Today

---

### 1 Jesus is Condemned

#### Jesus is unjustly victimized even today

Lord, when the Jews came to throw stones at you,

you courageously asked them,

"I have done so many good works, for which of these do you condemn me."

That was then, when time was not yet.

Now you just surrender without a word for it is time.

You stand there like just another man condemned to a cruel death.

*Ecce Homo!*

You are falsely accused of blasphemy and treason.

You are a victim of bad religion and unjust politics.

Religion and state, the guardians of the human person, have now made you their victim.

*Ecce Homo!*

Lord,

I think of the victims of bad religion and bad politics in Africa.

The political prisoners, those threatened, tortured, killed.

The thousands of voices that are muffled by the cruel hand of politics.

The prisoners of a fear-centered religion, the witch-hunted,  
those abused by religious leaders.

The thousands of hearts that dare not call you "Abba."

*Ecce Homo Africanus!*

I know, your suffering is only a symbol of our suffering.

Help me be the voice of the voiceless.

Give me the courage to speak against legalistic religion and lawless politics.

## 2 Jesus Takes up his Cross

### Jesus is "necklaced" even today

Lord,

You take up the cross. They lay it on you.

It is Heavy. Your body aches, wanting to put it away.

It is Shameful. Your heart throbs, wanting to do something.

It is Absurd. Your mind is confused, wanting to find a reason.

You are a victim of the mob.

"Crucify him!"

There is no escape. They won't let you go.

You are a "scapegoat" for their inability to put things right.

The structure of sin that they live in gives them no opportunity to taste justice except through victimizing the innocent one like you.

You are now like sheep led to the slaughter.

"Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."

The guilt of the mob is now thrown on you:

"Crucify Him!"

"Necklace Him! *Choma!* Burn him! *Mwizi!* Thief!

They beat him with their clubs, hag him with their *rungus*.

They chorus, "Crucify him!" Choma! Choma!

They throw a tyre around his neck, pour petrol, and a sparkling matchstick is enough.

He tries to run away... but the fire engulfs him more.

He throws himself down in desperation.

His hands can't remove the fire.

His internal organs begin to burst.

He lies there charred to death.

His face defaced, yet we see a cry for justice!

His limbs stuck numb, yet we see a motion for repentance!

His fist clenched, asking powerfully, 'why'?

"Why have you done this to me?"

Did he snatch a watch, or grab a purse; or did he pick a pocket?

Did *he* or was it someone else?

We never know. We never will know. We never bothered to know.

We are victims of our own guilt that we know not how to handle.

This charred defaced body is our scapegoat.

He carries our sins! At least it seems so!

Lord,

Teach me deal with my guilt.  
Teach me not to join the mob to shout, "Crucify Him!"  
Teach me handle this structure of sin that I live within,  
Help me examine how my personal sins contribute to this dragon of social sin.

### 3 Jesus Falls the First Time

#### Jesus fails even today

Lord,  
You fail. You falter. You fall.  
It is too much to take.  
The staring faces. The accusing fingers. The scorning laughs.  
You are young and energetic, yet you are weak and helpless.  
You have a goal, yet it seems distant and blurred.  
You have a mission, yet the vision is foggy.  
The weakness caused by lack of support from the people you had trusted.  
The blur caused by the apparent lack of encouraging results.  
The fog caused by the dust of the crowds around.  
You fall!  
But you know life must go on.  
Miles to go and promises to keep.  
A vision to live by, and a mission to achieve.  
You go on.

Lord,  
I think of the millions of young people in Africa who are fallen.  
They have nothing that will draw them on.  
Failed in exams; couldn't produce the required results.  
"I am good for nothing", they say.  
Betrayed by trust; exploited by relationships.  
"I don't believe in anyone, no more."  
Lack of opportunities; bogged down by challenges.  
"I have no future."  
Unemployment. Competition. Mediocrity.  
"What is the use?"  
Pulled down by traditions. Pushed around by bureaucracy.  
Young people fall, Lord.

We need to take up the cross and follow you.  
Suffering does have a meaning in our lives.  
You don't count our successes Lord.  
You watch our faithfulness.  
It is so important to be on the Way.

#### 4 Jesus Meets his Mother

##### Mothers are made to be strong even today

Lord Jesus,  
When you went to your home village about three ago, you remember what they said?  
"This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary...!" (*Mark 6:3*)  
You were son of a woman.  
You didn't know your father!  
It was so offensive to you... in your culture, as it is in my culture.  
But this woman is strong.  
Mothers are made to be strong.  
She has always stood by you.  
Even when your relatives thought you were out of your mind.  
Your men friends are nowhere to be seen.  
Perhaps they are lost in the crowd... for sure, John is somewhere there.  
But this woman, your mother, Mary, stands by you.  
She walks with you. She feels with you.  
She is strong.

Mothers are made to be strong, Lord.  
That single mother down the street, her husband just disappeared one day.  
But she... She raises her three kids with courage.  
She is strong Lord.  
The other woman in our village,  
The first son of that family is not her son,  
He was born before they were married,  
Yet she knows no difference.  
She looks after all of them so well.  
She is strong Lord.  
*Mama Fulani*, she has seven children.  
The other day *Baba Fulani* came home with two more children.

He was given at the funeral. Their parents had died of AIDS.  
But *Mama Fulani* is happy to have them.  
She is strong Lord.  
Lord I thank you for my own mother, who is strong too.  
Lord I thank you for your mother, who is now mine too.  
And she is ever strong, Lord.

## 5 Jesus is Helped by Simon of Cyrene

### There are Simons who reach out even today

Lord,  
As you walk the narrow streets of Jerusalem  
The strong just stand and watch; it is the weak who reach out and offer a helping hand.  
Simon of Cyrene, a weak commoner. A nobody.

*A mwananchi! A mlalahoi!*

He reaches out. He helps.

Small help, significant nonetheless.  
Out of nowhere he comes, yet you know he is there.  
A bystander. A wayfarer. A nobody. He helps.

As you stagger along the dusty roads of Africa, Lord  
The strong just stand and watch; it is the weak who reach out and help.  
The worker needs a loan to take the dying child to the hospital,  
The boss cannot give it to him.  
But his poor colleagues can pull together a *harambee*.  
As the helpless widow sits and mourns  
Her brothers-in-law want to covet all her property.  
But her poor neighbors, stand around her to guard, and sit with her to comfort.

The rich man comes to the church on Sunday, drops his offerings and walks away.  
The poor woman comes to the church over the week, she is there cleaning & mopping.  
Yes Lord,  
The strong just stand and watch; it is the weak who reach out and help.  
Forgive me Lord, for often acting strong, for standing and watching!

## **6 Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus**

### **Veronicas dares to stand up even today**

Lord,  
Everyone knows that you went around doing good.  
Yet no one dares to act. They stand part of the crowd.  
No! There is someone who does dare out. One, to be precise.  
Veronica, she stands apart.

She believes in the power of one.

She believes it is better to light a candle than to curse darkness.

She knows she can make the difference.  
She wipes your face; she dares to stand up and be seen.

I think of the Veronicas of Africa.  
Those people who believe in the power of one.  
Big people like Nyerere, Mandela and Tutu.  
People not so big like Johnson Ngosi -- the 11 year old who died of HIV.  
And just ordinary people...  
Like the women who quietly keep fulfilling their daily duties  
making a difference in their homes - caring mothers, faithful wives.  
Like the young individuals who daily struggle to stand by values of virginity and secondary  
virginity - courageous young people standing against the current.

Like the thousands living positively with HIV,  
and like a score of thousands of others who keep wiping the face of the Jesus with HIV.  
Africa needs more people like Veronica, Lord.  
Oh, but it is not she.  
It is me. Africa needs me.  
Yes, let me keep lighting candles.

## **7 Jesus Falls the Second Time**

### **Jesus is pushed to the ground even today**

Again you fall, Lord.  
You are weak, the crowd is swelling, the street is narrow, the soldiers lose control...  
The onlookers push on to you, you stagger and fall.  
You fall this time bulldozed by the jostling crowd.  
After all this eventually you rise, and continue your steps.  
They do not know what they do.

Even today Lord,  
The crowds bulldoze individuals to the ground.  
If I do better than they, then they wouldn't let me be! Jealousy.  
I must be using some magic charm, they say!  
If they have more problems than me, they will have to find a reason.  
Often the reason is me.  
Since I am so quiet, I am a witch!  
Brutally they hunt me down, Lord.  
Scarcity mentality: if I had more they fear they would have less.  
If I succeeded they are afraid they wouldn't.  
Vicious competitions and cancerous comparisons.  
Lord,  
Help me believe in abundance mentality.  
There is enough for every one.  
Life is an all-you-want buffet.  
After all I need to rise up, and continue my steps.  
They do not know what they do.

## 8 Women of Jerusalem Cry for Jesus

### Women cry even today

Lord,  
As you falter on, up the hill, in childish little steps  
The women recognize you. They cry.  
Some of them know you as the friend of their children.  
Others have been cured by you, of small and big infirmities.  
Still others see you as the teacher of their young men.  
They know in their hearts that you don't deserve to die.  
Yet what can they say, except to stand and cry.

I think of the woman who wets her pillow crying  
For her husband has not turned up home tonight  
Is he lying in the gutter dead drunk?  
Or is he sharing someone else' bed?  
Men know what they do.  
She cannot speak, she can only cry!

I think of the woman who sits in the dark corner of her house mourning  
For her son has not returned from work.  
Is he caught by the undisciplined police, and imprisoned without trial?  
Or has he been attacked by some thugs on the city streets?  
She knows not what goes on out there.  
She cannot speak, she can only cry!

I think of the woman who sits quietly sobbing, unable to eat tonight  
For her young daughter isn't back from school tonight.  
Have some gangsters abducted her?  
Or has she just decided to go and stay with her boyfriend?  
She has come up age; the bird has grown wings.  
The mother, she cannot speak, she can only cry!

I think of yet another woman who tonight tosses up and down in bed.  
For her young son -her only boy- is not seen around for three days now.  
Has he run away to the city to find work, or to be a street-kid?  
Or has he been picked up by the rebels to be a child-soldier?  
There is little she can do. Nothing at all.  
She cannot speak, she can only cry!

## **9 Jesus Falls the Third Time**

### **Jesus falls and rises even today**

Lord,  
You are really tired, thirsty and exhausted.  
The sun is boiling and the road is dusty.  
The uphill journey is too trying.  
Your knees jerk and your body aches.  
You give up.  
You fall yet another time. The third time.  
You faint, just for a moment!  
But you fight the temptation to give up.  
You start again.

Lord,  
I give up so easily at the face of temptation.  
I fall in sin.  
Often I justify myself.  
"It is because of the environment."  
"Oh, everyone does this way."  
"After all, only once! Just once."  
"It is Okay...!"  
I am so quick to absolve myself.  
Lord,  
Help me fight the temptation to give up in sin.  
Help me start again.

## **10 Jesus is Stripped of his Clothes**

## **Jesus' body is disgraced even today**

Lord,  
You stand naked. Stark naked!  
Only sympathetic artists put a loincloth around you.  
Otherwise you stand stark naked.  
As the women shy away their faces  
The men giggle curiously at your manhood.  
Sorry Lord!

The human body is sacred, Lord.  
Our African cultures have taught us this.  
The way we respect privacy of the body of others:  
When one goes for needs, when one bathes, when a woman gives birth.  
The way we celebrate our bodies:  
When we eat, sing, dance and participate in sports.  
The way we revere the dead body:  
He or She -the dead body- is still human.  
Yet today we stand watching you naked.

We watch the black body broken away.  
The splintered ebony.  
The mangled body of the black slave,  
The exploited body of the colonized Black,  
And the paraded black beauty in the post-modern fashion shows.  
How some of our young women dress in sheer imitation, subtly exposing their privacy.  
How some others sell their bodies for small favours and big.  
How our men -- young & not so young -- feast on the helplessness of the feminine physique.  
Yes, today we stand watching you naked.  
Lord, I am sorry.

## **11 Jesus is Nailed to the Cross**

### **Jesus can't save himself even today**

Lord,

They nail you onto the cross.

You hang up there in physical pain: "I thirst!"

It is once again a moment of spiritual crisis for you:

"My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?"

And they? They add insult to injury:

"He saved others, why can't he save himself?"

They make you a laughing-stock.

They seem to justify themselves.

After all, they have given you an opportunity to prove yourself.

"Why can't he save himself?"

Yet it is a moment of reconciliation for you:

"Forgive them father... You will be with me in paradise... It is consummated!"

"Why can't Africa save itself?", they cry, the victimizers.

Slave trade and colonialism. Racism and discrimination. Exploitation and domination.

Africa has been on the wrong side of human history.

Having robbed the black person of their self-worth,

They cry out, "Why can't Africa save itself?"

Deprived of generations of young work-force,

Bereft of its natural resources,

Exposed to alien forms of politics,

Dominated in the new game of economics and

Scandalized by new styles of social life,

The continent still hangs on the cross.

Yet as they enjoy the spoil they cry out: why can't Africa save itself?

They won't give justice, they doll out aid!

They won't repent, they furnish reasons!

They justify themselves: why can't Africa save itself?

They console their conscience.

Yet Lord,

Africa needs reconciliation. It needs healing.

Lord, let Africa experience peace flowing out of truth & reconciliation.

Let Africa be a paradise of true happiness.

## **12 Jesus Dies**

### **Jesus dies unjustly even today**

Lord,  
As human you die.  
I know your death is at the centre of Salvation history.  
Yet in human history your death was an unjust death.  
A pre-mature death, an unnecessary death, an imposed death.  
It was an undeserving death sentence.

Today,  
You are one of those mangled to death in road carnage,  
because of drunken drivers,  
because of cars that are not roadworthy,  
because of corrupt law enforcers,  
because of un-maintained roads.  
You are one of those allowed to die today in the hospitals  
Due of lack of basic medicine  
Due to the want of qualified doctors  
Due to the neglect of irresponsible medical personnel  
Due to inadequate health policies  
Due to the selfish wrangling of the extended family.  
In Africa, people go the hospital often to die.  
You are one of those killed in inhuman violence,  
Because of your political ideologies  
Because a wayside thug wanted the better of you  
Lord, you die today in the wombs of mothers!  
Lord, you die today uncared for, neglected and rejected by your kin  
Because you have HIV.  
Lord may you rest in peace.  
Lord may they rest in peace.

### **13 Jesus is Laid in the Arms of his Mother**

#### **Jesus is helpless even today**

Lord,  
You went around doing good.

You helped so many people in your lifetime.  
Now you lay helpless. Dead!  
At least for a while!  
Your loving mother affectionately cuddles you,  
As if to comfort you, but in fact she comforts herself.  
For she is helpless too.

Lord,  
I think of the helpless in Africa.  
The children, that grow up by themselves, often not found where the action is!  
The street-children, the dirt on the city streets!  
The women, the beast for work and the blanket to keep their men warm!  
The single-mothers, the target of women's scorn and men's fun!  
The poor, whose voice is muffled and their rights denied.  
The people living with HIV, targets of stigma and judgment.

Lord,  
Who will cuddle them?  
Who will comfort them but me?

#### **14. Jesus is Buried**

##### **Jesus is buried even today, but...**

The last station, Lord. You are buried.  
But this is not the end.  
Your burial is only symbolic.  
It is like a corn falling on the soil.  
Soon there will be life. New life. A hundred fold.  
Your burial is a silent event of hope.  
Festivities will soon follow.

This is the good news for Africa, Lord.  
The continent that is featured only with bad news,  
So badly needs this good news.  
The just will be vindicated.  
Your Father is still in control.  
Amidst the confusion and the contradictions of human history God is in control.

Amidst the dark events of human frailty, He is still the master.  
Today's victims will be soon vindicated. They will be tomorrow's heroes.  
We see this puzzling history in frames, but He plans in whole.  
Lord, I know

God still loves the world.  
There will be a New Heaven and a New Earth.  
Amen! Alleluia!

Rev. Sahaya G. Selvam sdb  
Don Bosco College,  
P.O. Box 8955  
Moshi, Tanzania

[dbcdean@elct.org](mailto:dbcdean@elct.org)  
[selvamsdb@hotmail.com](mailto:selvamsdb@hotmail.com)