

A Children's Way of the Cross



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Jesus in the World

I Jesus is condemned to death.

Jesus is told he has to die though he did nothing wrong. Millions of children throughout the world, in countries like India, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia and the United States are condemned to live in poverty ... through no choice of their own. They are born into a family that has little food, little clothing, poor housing and much sickness. Theirs is a life of suffering and early death.

- What do you think it is like to be poor?

Dear God of the Condemned,

Help me to realize all of the blessings I have been given - food, shelter, clothing. Let me be thankful for them. Let me also never forget those children who do not have these things.

II Jesus takes his cross.

Jesus accepts his cross with open arms and is led away. Today many children have to go some place where they don't want to go. They are refugees because of famine, earthquake or war in Rwanda, Bosnia, Thailand or Guatemala. It is a life without a comfortable home, on the move, uncertain where tomorrow will find them.

- What must it feel like to be a refugee?

Dear God of Refugees,

Sometimes I have to do things that I don't like or don't want to do. It is a part of life. Let me not be so concerned about my comfort and be mindful of children who have no home.

III Jesus falls the first time.

Jesus falls to the ground. The weight of the cross is too much for him to carry. Yet he gets up and continues to walk the road to his death. Each day the poor struggle to live. They work hard to change their situation, yet the days remain the same. The poor continue on even though they do not know how they will make it or may feel disappointed.

- **Have you ever felt disappointed or like you could not achieve a goal you wanted?**

Dear God of Courage,

Disappointment is hard to handle. Help me to remember how you tried, fell and got up again. Let me not forget the courage you showed.

IV Jesus meets his mother.

Jesus turned to Mary, his mother throughout his life and especially in this time of suffering. She was there to comfort and support him; however, many children are alone in the world. They have been abandoned by their parents or orphaned because of a flood or earthquake or violence. They miss the warmth of a mother or father.

- **Can you remember the last time you went to your mother or father for support and love?**

Dear God of Tenderness,

Help me to tell my family that I appreciate them, by my words and my actions. For the children without parents, I ask that they may have someone who cares for them with tenderness.

V Simon of Cyrene takes Jesus' cross.

Jesus is helped along the way by Simon of Cyrene who carries his cross. Simon was not from Jesus' country. He was a stranger, yet he did not hesitate to help Jesus in his time of need. Similarly, missionaries walk with needy children and their families. They help them carry their cross. Missionaries do this because they love God and others. Like Simon, we can be missionaries right here and help those in need.

- **When in the last week did you help someone who needed you?**

Dear God, both our Mother and Father,

You teach us that no one is a stranger. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Help me to live, aware of all the members of my family.

VI Veronica wipes Jesus' face.

Imagine how sad Veronica must have been to see her friend Jesus suffering and in so much pain. It must have hurt her a lot. To ease his pain, she reached out and wiped Jesus' face with a cloth. Many children live in pain today. They are hungry because they have not eaten in days. They are cold and shivering and sick because they had no house to sleep in.

- **Does your heart care about others like Veronica's did?**

Dear God of the Hurting,

Help me to notice the pain and hurt of my friends. Show me how I can reach out to others.

VII Jesus falls the second time.

Jesus tries to walk but falls down again. The people who live poverty try to overcome it. When they can find a job, they work long days to earn money to buy food; but food is expensive. Their children are hungry. In rural areas, they try to grow food to feed their families but often there is no rain. They try and try again.

- **Has someone in your family ever lost his or her job? How did he or she feel?**

Dear Caring God,

Life can be an uphill struggle. We all fall at times.

When I make a mistake, help me to admit it, get up and try again.

VIII Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem.

Along the road, Jesus stopped and spoke to the women of Jerusalem. He told them not to cry for him, rather to cry for the world that they lived in. The poor of our world cry out to us to look at the unfair pain in our world ... so many people dying without food, so many people living like animals crowded in small rooms, so many people without work or a fair salary to live humanly.

- **Have I heard the poor crying out to me? Have I felt the pain of others?**

Dear God of Tears,

Your heart is saddened to see so many suffering people in the world. Give me ears to hear the cry of the poor; a heart to feel their pain and hands to reach out to them.

IX Jesus falls the third time.

Again Jesus falls under the weight of his suffering. It is a painful road to walk. A life of poverty is difficult. Camilo wants to be a teacher. Maria wants to be a doctor. Their dreams fall to the ground when they know that they must work from sunrise to sunset to help their parents be able to feed them. They do not have many chances to change their path.

- **What dreams do you have for your future? Do they include helping others?**

Dear God of Dreams,

You inspire us with dreams and hopes for our future. Strengthen me to work hard to use the gifts you have given me.

X Jesus is stripped of his garments.

Don't you think Jesus was embarrassed when the soldiers stripped the clothes off his body? He must have felt humiliated. Children of poverty most often are partly naked or dressed in rags. Their parents cannot afford to buy them clothes. They have no shoes or jackets when it is cold. Their shirts and pants have holes.

- **Can you imagine what it is like to have only a few clothes to wear?**

Dear God of Kindness,

Our dignity as persons does not come from the outside, like clothing, but from the inside. Don't let me worry about fads or hand-me-downs. Clothe me with your kindness.

XI Jesus is nailed to the cross.

Jesus' hands and feet were nailed to the cross because people were afraid of him. Often when people do not understand someone else, they become afraid. Sometimes they even call them names. We put "nails" in another's heart by using hurtful names because someone has a different skin color, eats different foods, has different customs, practices a different religion, is tall or fat, or even because the person is a boy or a girl.

- **Did I call someone a hurtful name this week? Why did I do it? How did it make them feel?**

Dear Forgiving God,

Created in your image, we are all beautiful and special children in your eyes. Forgive me for saying hurtful words to others. Help me to look for the goodness in each person.

XII Jesus dies on the cross.

Jesus' love for us is so great that he died on the cross in order to give us new life. By sharing in the lives and suffering of the poor, we are also brought to new life. When we are one with them, our hearts are opened and changed. We learn what is really important in life—caring, faith, love, kindness, hope and joy. Material things like toys and clothes become less important.

- **Do you know or appreciate God's love for you?**

Dear Loving God,

Help me to know your love in my life. Let me take time to feel your love. Open me to receive the gifts of the poor.

XIII Jesus taken down from the cross.

After watching him die, Jesus' friends and family lovingly took him down off the cross. They felt sad as they mourned the loss of Jesus, their good friend. The poor of the world often die early deaths. How sad it is that so many caring, loving people needlessly die. Death, however, is not the end. It is just the beginning of a new life with God. There is life beyond this world.

- **Have you experienced the death of someone close to you? A member of your family or a friend? How did you feel?**

Dear God of those who Mourn,

Death is a part of our experience as humans. Help me to remember the sadness I felt when someone died and to feel the same sadness for my brothers and sisters who are dying in other parts of the world.

XIV Jesus placed in the tomb.

When the disciples placed Jesus in the tomb, they buried along with him their hopes for a new world. Jesus was gone. Often, in difficult or painful situations, we bury our feelings deep within ourselves.

- **Have you ever prayed to God in a bad situation and felt God's loving presence?**

Dear God of Hope,

The poor show us not to despair in difficult situations. Give me the courage to express my feelings of sadness, hurt or joy.

XV He is Risen!

Jesus is risen! His new life is a promise of new life for all of us and our world. Imagine a world without poverty, without hatred of others, without suffering and pain. All people, women and men, different races or religions would be respected as true daughters and sons of God. The thought of such a world is exciting and hope-filled.

- What would a world be like without hatred, poverty and fighting?

Dear God of peace,

A world full of peace can begin today. Help me to be peaceful in my actions with my schoolmates and family. May I see goodness in the world and smile because I know your love and strength.

Action Steps

1. Tell your mother and father you love them.
2. Say something nice to someone. Avoid calling others names.
3. Do a task at home without complaining.
4. Give money to the poor instead of buying ice cream, soda and candy or playing video games.
5. Pray for someone who is sick or in trouble.
6. Do not waste food. Be grateful for it. Think of those who are hungry.
7. Read a story or book about the poor, refugees, or other cultures.



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