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**Apostolic Trip of Pope Francis to Panama for the 34th World Youth Day (23-28 January 2019) –
Via Crucis with young people in Campo Santa María La Antigua (Cinta Costera)**

Via Crucis with young people in Campo Santa María La Antigua (Cinta Costera)

Words of the Holy Father at the beginning of the Via Crucis

Address of the Holy Father

This afternoon, the Holy Father Francis left the apostolic nunciature and transferred by car to Campo Santa María La Antigua (Cinta Costera) for the Via Crucis with the young people.

At 17.30 local time (23.30 in Rome), the rite began with the entry of the Pope and with the cross, symbol of WYD.

After the conclusion of the Via Crucis with the blessing, the Holy Father returned by car to the apostolic nunciature.

The following are the words pronounced by the Holy Father at the beginning of the Via Crucis, his address given at the end of the rite, and the final words:

Words of the Holy Father at the beginning of the Via Crucis

Dear Young People of the world,

To walk with Jesus will always be a grace and a risk: a grace, because he commits us to living in the faith and to knowing him by entering the deepest part of his heart and understanding the power of his word; a risk, because the words, gestures and actions of Jesus stand in contrast to the spirit of the world with its human ambition, with

its cultural designs that discard and are loveless.

There is a certainty that fills this Way of the Cross with hope: Jesus walked it with love. And the Glorious Virgin experienced it too, she who from the beginning of the Church has wanted, by her tenderness, to sustain the way of evangelization.

Address of the Holy Father

Lord, Father of mercy, in this Coastal Beltway, together with so many young people from all over the world, we have accompanied your Son on his Way of the Cross: the way he wanted to walk for us, in order to show us how much you love us and how much you care about our lives.

The way of Jesus leading to Calvary is a way of suffering and solitude that continues in our own time. He walks and suffers in all those faces hurt by the complacent and anesthetizing indifference of our society, a society that consumes and is consumed, that ignores and is ignorant, blind to the pain of our brothers and sisters.

Lord, we too, your friends, have given in to apathy and inaction. All too often, we have ended up going along with the crowd, and this has paralyzed us. It has been hard to see you in our suffering brothers and sisters. We have looked away in order not to see; we have taken refuge in noise in order not to hear; we have covered our mouths in order not to cry out.

The temptation is always the same. It is easier and "it pays" to be friends in triumphs and in glory, in success and applause; it is easier to be around someone who is considered popular and a winner.

How easy it is to fall into a culture of bullying, harassment, intimidation, of cruelty to the weak.

It is not like that for you, Lord: on the cross, you identified yourself with all those who suffer, with all those who feel forgotten.

It is not like that for you, Lord: because you wanted to embrace all those whom we so often consider unworthy of an embrace, a caress, a blessing; or, worse yet, do not even realize that they need it; we ignore them.

It is not like that for you, Lord: on the cross, you unite yourself to the way of the cross of every young person, of every situation, in order to turn it into a way of resurrection.

Father, today your Son's way of the cross continues:

it continues in the muffled cry of children kept from being born and of so many others denied the right to a childhood, a family, an education; of children not able to play, sing or dream...

it continues in women who are mistreated, exploited and abandoned, stripped of their dignity and treated as nothing;

and in the saddened eyes of young people who see their hopes for the future snatched away for lack of education and dignified work;

it continues in the anguish of young faces, our friends, who fall into the snares of unscrupulous people – including people who claim to be serving you, Lord – snares of exploitation, criminal activity, and abuse which feed on their lives.

Your Son's way of the cross continues in all those young people and families who, caught up in a spiral of death as a result of drugs, alcohol, prostitution and human trafficking, are deprived not only of a future but also of a present. Just as they divided your garments, Lord, their dignity is divided and mistreated.

Your Son's way of the cross continues in those young people with downcast faces who have lost the ability to dream, create and shape their future, and have already chosen to "retire" in glum resignation or complacency, one of the narcotics most consumed in our time.

It continues in the quiet and anger-filled pain of those who, instead of solidarity from an opulent society, encounter rejection, sorrow and misery, and are singled out and treated as responsible for all society's ills.

Your Son's passion continues in the despairing solitude of the elderly, whom we have discarded and abandoned.

It continues in the indigenous peoples whom others strip of their lands, their roots and their culture, ignoring and silencing the great wisdom that they have and can bring us.

Father, your Son's way of the cross continues in the plea of our mother earth, profoundly wounded by the pollution of her skies, the barrenness of her fields, the contamination of her waters, trampled underfoot by disregard and a fury of consumption beyond all reason.

It is prolonged in a society that has lost the ability to weep and to be moved by suffering.

Yes, Father, Jesus keeps walking, carrying his cross and suffering in all these faces, while an uncaring world is caught up in comfortable cynicism and in the drama of its own frivolity.

And we, Lord, what are we to do?

How are we to react to Jesus as he suffers, walks, emigrates in the faces of many our friends, or of all those strangers that we have learned to make invisible?

And we, Father of mercy,

do we console and accompany the Lord, helpless and suffering in the poorest and most abandoned of our brothers and sisters?

do we help carry the burden of the cross, like Simon of Cyrene, by being peacemakers, builders of bridges, a leaven of fraternity?

do we have the courage to remain, like Mary, at the foot of the cross?

Let us look to Mary, woman of strength. From her let us learn how to stand beneath the cross with her same determination and courage, without evasions or illusions. She accompanied the suffering of her Son, your Son, Father; she supported him by her gaze and protected him with her heart. She shared his suffering, yet was not overwhelmed by it. She was the woman of strength who uttered her "yes", who supports and accompanies, protects and embraces. She is the great guardian of hope.

We too, Father, want to be a Church that supports and accompanies, that is able to say, "Here I am!" in the lives and amid the crosses of all those Christs who walk by our side.

From Mary we learn how to say "yes" to the patience and perseverance of the many mothers, fathers and grandparents who never cease to support and accompany their children and grandchildren in trouble.

From her we learn how to say “yes” to the stubborn endurance and creativity of those who, undaunted, are ready to start over again in situations where everything appears to be lost, in an effort to create spaces, homes and centres of care that can be an outstretched hand to all those in difficulty.

In Mary, we learn the strength to be able to say “yes” to those who have refused to remain silent in the face of a culture of mistreatment and abuse, disparagement and aggression, and who work to provide opportunities and to create an atmosphere of safety and protection.

In Mary, we learn how to welcome and take in all those abandoned, and forced to leave or lose their land, their roots, their families, their work.

Father, like Mary, we want to be Church, a Church that fosters a culture that welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates; that does not stigmatize, much less indulge in a senseless and irresponsible condemnation of every immigrant as a threat to society.

From her we want to learn to stand beneath the cross, but not with hearts tightly shut, rather with hearts that can accompany, that feel tenderness and devotion, that show mercy and treat others with respect, sensitivity and understanding. We want to be a Church of memory, which appreciates and respects the elderly and gives them their rightful place as guardians of our roots.

Father, like Mary we want to learn what it means to “stand”.

Lord, teach us to stand, at the foot of the cross, at the foot of every cross. Open our eyes and hearts this night, and rescue us from paralysis and uncertainty, from fear and from desperation. Father, teach us to say: Here I stand, alongside your Son, alongside Mary and alongside all those beloved disciples who desire to welcome your Kingdom into their heart. Amen.

After having experienced the Lord’s Passion together with Mary at the foot of the cross, we now go with quiet and peaceful hearts, filled with joy and a great desire to follow Jesus. May Jesus accompany you and Our Lady take care of you. Goodbye!
