

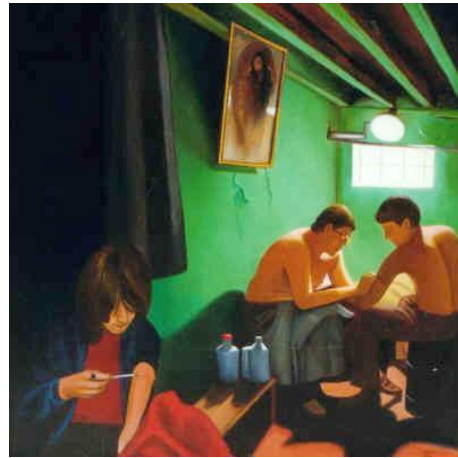


## **DIRECTED READING #15** **PRAYING THE *VIA CRUCIS* OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Introduction**

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The spirituality of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart begins at the foot of the cross. André Coindre was a member of the Society of the Cross. In one of his sermons he quotes Saint Augustine: “The cross is a school where Jesus teaches, a pulpit where he announces all the truths of salvation.” In his own eloquent way and with a cross in his hands he preaches to those gathered in a parish mission, “The cross will preach to you instead of me and will reveal that salvation is your only and necessary treasure. A lance pierced this Heart, and this wound was meant to touch your own heart.”



This *Via Crucis* enables us to continue the contemplation of the mystery of the Cross which was the center of André Coindre’s short life. If meditating on Jesus pierced on the cross was his starting point, contemplating the suffering of young people was a frequent stopping point on André Coindre’s path. The compassion he felt for Jesus became transformed into compassion for young victims of chaotic social changes. Coindre’s heart made the jump between the abandonment Jesus felt and that felt by the little girls of St. Nizier, between Jesus’ incarceration and that of the boys in the prisons of Roanne and St. Joseph’s, between Jesus’ failure and the colossal failure of village schools in 19<sup>th</sup> century France.

In the traditional Way of the Cross, Jesus turns to the women he meets along the road lamenting him and says, “Do not weep for me, but for yourselves and your children.” (Luke 23:27-31) Even in the midst of his own suffering, Jesus continues to feel compassion for the children of Jerusalem. He transcends his pain to turn the women’s gaze from himself to their children. He likewise invites us to turn from our devotion of empathy for him into a moment of prayerful union with him in his apostolic mission, especially in alleviating the spiritual and material suffering of young people. We are called to serve the suffering Christ in them.

In truth, then, these stations of the *Via Crucis* present to us the face of Christ in the face of young victims. In reflecting on each of them, we are reflecting on Jesus who continues to suffer in the young poor without hope. Hans Urs van Balthasar says it best: “In my distant brother is not just the image, but the reality of the love of God suffering for him. Like a mirror, his human face reflects the face of God, simultaneously in a faithful and a

distorted way. Human features are the most beautiful calligraphy of God's Word, written on the parchment of the human countenance.”

- adapted from a text by Brother Bernard Couvillion, S.C.

Through this reading, the participant will:

- pray for a deeper empathy with the spiritual and material suffering of young people who are poor and without hope;
- examine their personal and institutional response to the plight of suffering young people they serve;
- pray for a more generous personal and institutional response to the spiritual and material suffering of young people who are poor and without hope.

## **Reading**

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Brother William Boyles has masterfully crafted a prayer service using the fourteen stations of the *Via Crucis*. Each station contains pictures of the original paintings depicting the spiritual or material suffering of young people complete with prayers, scriptural passages, and with reflections by Brother Bernard Couvillion, our Superior General, and by Alberto Bertuzzi, the painter. During this directed reading, we invite you to reflect on just *one* of these fourteen “stations.” All fourteen stations follow and include some of the texts and all of the photographs.

The stations are titled as follows:

- Station I – Condemned to Death (Child Labor)
- Station II – Given the Cross (Materialism)
- Station III – First Fall (Dropped Out of School)
- Station IV – His Mother (Abortion)
- Station V – Simon of Cyrene (Help!)
- Station VI – Veronica's Veil (Image of Christ)
- Station VII – Second Fall (Landmines)
- Station VIII – The Women (Abandoned)
- Station IX – Third Fall (Boys in Prison)
- Station X – Stripped (Innocence Abused)
- Station XI – Nailed to the Cross (Drugs)
- Station XII – Death (Execution)
- Station XIII – Removed from the Cross (Attempted Suicide)
- Station XIV – Buried (Lamentation)

### **Suggestions for Journal Reflection**

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1. Pope Paul VI, in a closing message of Vatican II, addressed the Church in these words: “In the countenance of every human being – especially when tears and suffering make it most transparent – we can and we must recognize the face of Christ.” Name one or two instances in which you were touched by the spiritual and material suffering of young people. Can you name the young person(s)? How did you respond? What caused you to notice his/her plight? How did this instance sensitize you to the plight of the larger population of youth who may be suffering in similar ways?
2. How did the photograph of the *Via Crucis* station you prayed move you? Imagine Jesus speaking to you through the young person(s) in this painting. What does Jesus say to you? What do you want to say to him?
3. How does the station you prayed challenge you in your ministry as leader in the school and mentor in the charism?

### **Prayer**

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*Lord Jesus,*

*Your love knows no bounds.*

*Even in the midst of your own suffering and pain  
You invited us to turn our gaze and our concern  
to the plight of the most vulnerable of our world  
– especially to the plight of young people.*

*As we contemplate your passion on the road to Calvary,  
lead us to contemplate your continued suffering in the passion of the  
young today.*

*You were condemned to death, guilty only of unconditional love.*

*Help us to protect the innocence of children and to treat all young people  
with dignity as your brothers and sisters.*

*You were made to carry a cross and fell beneath its weight.*

*Help us to lighten the burden of those young people who are weighed  
down by addictions and materialism as well as those others who labor  
unjustly and who struggle for daily survival.*

*You were made to walk the path to Calvary alone*

*Help us to alleviate the loneliness and isolation that adolescents  
experience by our affirmation, acceptance, presence, and concern.*

*You were nailed to a cross and pierced to the heart out of love for us.*

*Help us to witness the power of Your love to those who are pierced by  
tattoo needles and crucified by the comments and accusations of others.*

*We ask this of You, who willingly suffered and died to set us free.*

*In the power of Your name, we pray. Amen.*