

## ***Via Crucis 2022***

As we began our trek around the streets of Camden for Via Crucis '22, it was not lost on me that the same pitcher and bowl used to wash feet at the Mass of the Lord's Supper the night before was now being used for Pilate to wash his hands of anything to do with the passion and death of Christ. The Christ who the night before took off his garment of distinction as the Master, shed his pride, his superiority, and moral judgment to put on an apron of service (analogy provided by Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI) had no one (Pilate, Annas, Caiaphas, you and me) to testify to the truth and stop what was necessary for our salvation, our freedom. As we processed, doctors and nurses from Cooper Hospital snapped pictures to show others what this day is about. So, too, did people in a local liquor store, and people from high rise buildings. Even motorists impositioned by the passing procession rather than lean on their horns, opted for their cell phone to capture a part of their salvation history. Passerbys saw Jesus fall, thrice, under the weight of our selfishness. We witnessed that wordless, heartfelt encounter between mother and son. I could not have been the only one with tears falling from my eyes. Here was the woman whose pregnancy was scandalous to most and always the will of God for her and her Fiat. Was she thinking how she put him on this path by telling the waiters to "do whatever he tells you" at the Wedding Feast of Cana? Was she thinking how she had to let him go at a young age to others whom he taught, healed, forgave and loved in his three short years of public ministry? In looking into his eyes with understanding, admiration, and love, did he intuit that he must continue on to Calvary? Did those following identify with the reluctance of Simon of Cyrene in helping carry another's cross? As Veronica showed the crowd the imprint of his face with others shouting "milagro" did we question our ability to recognize the face of Christ in others, all others, especially those different from us in race, gender, creed, culture, political affiliation, etc. whom we often demonize? Veronica exhorts us to "escúchenlo." If we did, what separates and divides would dissipate. Examine the gallery of pictures closely. Look at the women accompanying Mary meeting Jesus. Look closely and see one mother accepting an unplanned pregnancy with grace and love, stands in front of a Planned Parenthood building in the background. Make the right turn to process by the county jail. No doubt some inmates were looking out realizing that they were witnessing the freedom in store for them by a man willing to carry a cross to make us whole with our God. How lifeless Jesus looked when he hit the ground the third time. A young boy offers him some water only to have it swatted away by a jeering soldier with others laughing with approval. All throughout these 14 stations, the soldiers were consistently laughing and mocking Jesus, hitting him all the while. Their consistent disrespect reminded me of the many times I fall short in fidelity, turning in on self rather than the will of God for the world. The more they laughed, the more I was reminded of missed opportunities to love God in loving self and others. Yet, I continued on singing with others about "greater than our sins is the love of God." Just before the final turn to the Cathedral, Jesus is stripped of his garments. The soldiers laugh at their actions and this supposed king. How often do we laugh at others whose dignity we strip away because they do not think as we do, worship like us, or love like us? The young daughter of the man playing Jesus opted not to read the section she was supposed to for one of the last stations. Was seeing her father suffering on the cross too much for her? Is it too much for all of us to bear? Or are we like the "bad soldier" who wants Jesus to save himself and them looking out for his best interests? Should we be more like the other seeing how just Jesus is and asking Him to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. As Jesus is laid in the tomb with the cross standing alone, can we look at perhaps the most recognizable symbol in the world and rather than look at it as something to which we contributed, can we look at it as our salvation and freedom? Can we let this sink in to where it overwhelms us with the conviction that we are free to love and to accept one

another regardless? Can we understand why St. Francis de Sales called Calvary the Mount of Lovers? Can this empower us to “Live Jesus” rather than break his heart? With the violence on our streets, with what seems to be a permanent impasse for bipartisan cooperation in politics, and with the very real threat of the war in Ukraine spreading to other nations, if not the world, the cross of victory continues to offer us salvation, freedom and the chance to be one as sisters and brothers in his name.