



Father, into your hands I commit my spirit

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. When he had said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44–46)

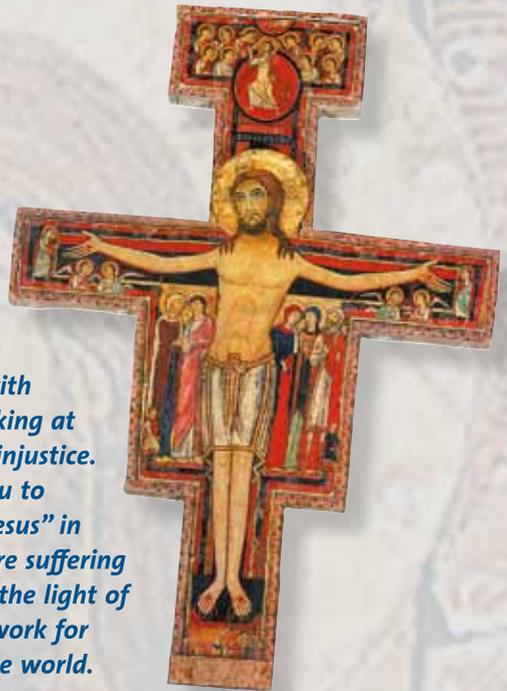
Human rights defenders in Brazil remain at risk and often have difficulty accessing state protection. In 2011, a Franciscan Friar and lawyer were prosecuted in federal court for working to protect the rights of 50 families being evicted from land. The two human rights defenders were ordered to ensure the removal of the 300 people within ten days or to pay a high fine for each day they remained on the land.

God, Jesus put his whole life in your hands. Human rights defenders give their lives to you in serving others. Often they are attacked or threatened, sometimes resulting in death. Let us support them in their commitment for social justice and fulfilling your will. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

***We reflected on the “Seven Last Words of Jesus”
in knowing that God resurrected Jesus. This faith encourages us in our commitment
to bring hope and positive change for our sisters and brothers who still suffer.***



The Seven Last Words of Jesus



Franciscans International, together with Franciscans around the world, is working at the United Nations to raise issues of injustice. During this time of Lent we invite you to reflect on the “Seven Last Words of Jesus” in relation to praying for people who are suffering because of unfair legal structures. In the light of Jesus’ resurrection, together we can work for positive change and bring hope to the world.



Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing

When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Jesus, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. (Luke 23:33–34)

Harmful traditional practices are affecting children in Africa; particularly the ritual of infanticide in Northern Benin. If a baby is labeled a so-called “witch child” then it is killed or ostracised from its community because it is deemed to bring bad luck. Perhaps these people are not aware that this is a human rights violation of innocent children. Despite increasing international pressure, the Government has yet to take strong action on this “taboo” issue.

God, despite his suffering, Jesus was able to forgive his persecutors because they did not know what they were doing. Whilst obeying tradition and thinking they are doing the right thing, people harm others. Let us understand that our acts can only be justified when they are guided by the respect for the dignity of all creatures. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.





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You will be with me in paradise

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us! But the other criminal rebuked him. Don't you fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus answered him, I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:39-43)

Numerous serious violations of human rights are taking place in Ugandan prisons. The Director of Murchison Bay Prison, Kampala, told Franciscans International about different concerns such as the lack of resources, overcrowding and undernourishment. There are also problems with the Ugandan justice system in general including the inhumane sentence times of up to 80-years that some prisoners are serving. The inmates have nothing to lose and nothing to gain – only despair.

God, Jesus gives even the crucified criminal hope. People who are sentenced to inhumane periods of imprisonment like those in Uganda are stripped of any hope. God, we ask for the hope of your Kingdom that already began in Jesus and is still to come in full. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.





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Here is your son, Here is your mother

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, Dear woman, here is your son, and to the disciple, Here is your mother. From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25-27)

Gender discrimination in the Solomon Islands keeps thousands of women and girls living in poverty, exposed to violence, and marginalised. Predominant concerns include sexual abuse and domestic violence. Further, they are highly under-represented in aspects of community-life such as education, employment and property rights.

God, Jesus pointed out the right of women to enjoy a life of dignity. In many cultures and countries women are made to depend on men and do not experience the same rights. Women are often wounded in their dignity. Let us stand up for the dignity and rights of women in our own country and church. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.





My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? – which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? When some of those standing there heard this, they said, He’s calling Elijah. (Matthew 27:46–47)

An estimated 27 million people, especially children, are trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation in the world today. In India, domestic workers are forced to work under slave-like conditions; underpaid, unprotected, and vulnerable to any kind of abuse. Victims of human trafficking in many countries are treated as criminals and therefore have no recourse to justice.

God, under the torture of the cross, Jesus felt abandoned even by you. People trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation, taken from their home, family and friends, feel isolated and desperate. Let us be a voice for the rights of the trafficked persons. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.





5

I am thirsty

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty. A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. (John 19:28–29)

In 2010, the UN recognised the human right to water and sanitation. However, 884 million people in the world still do not have access to safe water. Over 1.4 million children die every year from diarrhoea caused by unclean water and poor sanitation. In addition, the problem is growing as some developed countries like Canada are promoting the privatisation of water. This negatively impacts on the poor because of price increases, higher disconnection rates, and declining water quality and service.

God, Jesus was thirsty whilst dying on the cross. Millions of people are dying because of no access to clean water and sanitation. God help us to respect and share this precious gift, our Sister Water, and promote and enable the human right of access to water and sanitation. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.





6

It is finished

When Jesus had received the drink, he said, It is finished. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

Franciscans were the first to address the mistreatment of the elderly in French public and private institutions as a human rights concern at the UN in 2008 and 2010. They reported cases of care-givers not providing residents with their basic physical, psychological, social and financial needs. Examples included, not changing dirty bed-sheets for several days, shutting a resident in their room for long periods, and feeding a person too quickly. Franciscans will continue to work at the UN to promote the protection of the elderly and the eradication of their mistreatment.

God, after suffering on the cross, the life of Jesus was finished. Human dignity should be respected even when dying. Old and sick people have the right to be treated with dignity even in their last days and hours. Let us respect and ensure their right to a dignified death. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

