



# The Holy See

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WAY OF THE CROSS AT THE COLOSSEUM

## *WORDS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II*

Good Friday, 18 April 2003

"Ecce lignum crucis in quo salus mundi pependit... Venite adoremus". ("This is the wood of the cross on which hung the Saviour of the world... Come let us worship"). We heard these words in today's liturgy: this is the wood of the cross.

These are the key words of Good Friday. Yesterday, Holy Thursday, the first day of the "Sacred Triduum" we heard, "Hoc est corpus meum quod pro vobis tradetur". "This is my body which will be given up for you".

Today we see how these words of yesterday, Holy Thursday, were realized: this is Golgotha, this is the Body of Christ on the Cross. "Ecce lignum Crucis in quo salus mundi pependit".

Mystery of the faith! Man could not imagine this mystery, this reality. God alone could reveal it. Man does not have the possibility of giving life after death. The death of death. In the human order, death is the last word. The subsequent word, the word of the Resurrection, is a word that comes only from God, and this is why we celebrate this "Sacred Triduum" with such profound feeling.

Today we pray to Christ, taken down from the Cross and layed in the tomb. His tomb is sealed.

And tomorrow in all the world, in all the cosmos, in all of us, there will be a deep silence. The silence of expectation. "Ecce lignum crucis in quo salus mundi pependit". This Wood of death, the Wood that led to the death of the Son of God, paves the way to the following day: Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Sunday will be Easter! And we will hear the words of the liturgy. Today we heard: "Ecce lignum crucis in quo salus mundi pependit". Salus mundi! (Saviour of the world!).

On the Cross! And the day after tomorrow we will sing: "Surrexit de sepulchro... qui pro nobis pependit in legno". ("The Lord is risen from the tomb... who for our sake hung on the cross"). This is the depth, the divine simplicity of this Easter Triduum.

I hope that we will all live this Triduum as deeply as possible. As we are every year, we are gathered here around the Colosseum. It is a symbol. This Colosseum is a symbol. Above all it speaks to us of times past, of that great Roman Empire that has collapsed. It speaks to us of those Christian martyrs who have given witness here with their life and their death. It is hard to find another place where the Mystery of the Cross speaks more eloquently than it speaks here, in front of this Colosseum.

"Ecce lignum crucis in quo salus mundi pependit". Salus mundi!

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that all of you will live this "Sacred Triduum" - Thursday, Friday, Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil and then Easter - ever more deeply and also that you will witness to it. Praised be Jesus Christ!