IX° International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking 2023

Pilgrimage for Human Dignity against Human Trafficking

Introduction to the prayer service

*The theme this year was prepared by a team of young people. They invite us to **journey in dignity**, to walk and be pilgrim of human dignity, against any form of exploitation and human trafficking. This text can be prayed while walking, or in a closed space if there isn't the possibility of walking. If you have the opportunity, choose a route and identify four stations, that will enable the meditation on this conversion from the darkness of exploitation to the light of the dignity of every person. This is the spiritual journey we are called to undertake this year, to celebrate the IX International Day of Prayer and Awareness against human trafficking.*

In all religious traditions, pilgrimages have a special spiritual and sacred importance. From the rite of the Passover in Jewish tradition to the pilgrimage to Mecca, as the fifth pillar of Islam (Hajj), from the Mahabodhi Temple in India, where Buddha attained enlightenment, to the Sacred Uluru Mountain in Australia, from the pilgrimage to Christian sites in Jerusalem, to Our Lady of Fatima, Catholic site where Mary appeared. All spiritual traditions recognize the purifying act of walking and reaching a sacred place, to be cleansed and born anew. As "faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved",[1] this prayer is "an invitation to reconciliation and fraternity among all believers, indeed among believers and non-believers, and among all people of good will".[2] Together we can promote human dignity for every human being, and prevent any form of exploitation and human trafficking.

N.B: You can find in this document images representing each station. They can be distributed to each participant, or printed in big format for each. These pictures are also available in .png format in the Documents section on the website https://preghieracontrotratta.org/?lang=en

[1] A DOCUMENT ON HUMAN FRATERNITY FOR WORLD PEACE AND LIVING TOGETHER, His Holiness Pope Francis and The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, February 4th, 2019, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html
[2] Ibid.

Itinerant Prayer (Pilgrimage)

(Each participant is welcomed in the place where the prayer starts and receives a small candle. The Guide welcomes all participants and explains how the prayer will be led. The prayer starts in silence and in the dark.)

Rite of Introduction

Guide: Dear sisters and brothers, welcome to this pilgrimage leading our humanity from the darkness of human trafficking to the light of human dignity. We walk together, undertaking this spiritual journey in the presence of God. We are all pilgrims and migrants on this land.

Journeying in dignity against human trafficking is the theme for the IX International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking. More and more people are joining forces around February 8th on St. Bakhita Day to pray and to raise awareness on this "open wound on the body of Christ, on the body of all humanity"[3] (Pope Francis). This Day is celebrated in memory of Saint Bakhita, a young South Sudanese woman, rescued by slavery, who is now the patron saint of all those who suffer from the violence of human trafficking.

The journey from the darkness of exploitation and trafficking to the light of human dignity and freedom is our journey, an important journey for each one of us. We set out, like millions of migrants fleeing their homelands in search of peace, security, a piece of land to farm, work, or quality education. We walk with our migrant sisters and brothers, of all peoples and religions. We walk with them, feeling in our feet the vulnerabilities that make it so easy for them to fall into the dark web of exploitation and trafficking.

We walk with them and for them, while we commit ourselves to the horizon of human dignity, for each and every person, leaving no one behind. Dignity and freedom are a path, a slow and long-term journey that accompanies the person once he or she emerges from the violence of human trafficking.

Reader: Let us journey together with migrant people, as pilgrims of human dignity, pilgrims of hope. Let us all walk together: young people, adults, and children, women and men, and people of different religious traditions, different cultures, and generations. This pilgrimage allows us to encounter God, ourselves, and others, whom we recognize as our brothers and sisters. Let us start our journey keeping in our hearts the words of the prophet Micah, reminding us what is essential in the spiritual journey (Micah 6:8): "only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with [our] God."

[3] VIDEO MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 8th INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER AND AWARENESS AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING, February 8th, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2022/documents/20220208_videomessaggio-contro-trattapersone.html

(While the guide reads, a person will light a candle and stay in the front of the group.)

Guide: Let us move together toward the darkness with the light of hope. This is a path to overcome individualism, which isolates and closes us in the self-centeredness of the ego. A path that opens us to the other, discovering the strength of "us." Let us walk together. We can say it all together:

Everyone: Let us walk together.

(Start walking towards the 1st station, the person with the lit candle is in the front of the group. You can choose to leave from a dark place, with little light, or a place symbolizing exploitation.)

1st Station: Encountering people marked by the painful reality of exploitation and human trafficking

(Image representing the first station. While walking to the first station, you may stay in silence or sing a song.)

Reader:

I am walking.
I am walking in the night.
Darkness surrounds me, I do not see anything.
I feel alone.
I stumble, my hands get hurt on the rocks I try to climb.
I hear screams.
I stop, I can't take it anymore.
I am tired.
I crouch down and close my eyes. I can't stand the screams, the cold, the fatigue.
More than anything, I can't stand the thick darkness that surrounds me.
I am a prisoner, stuck in this room where strangers abuse me.
I can't get out, bound by the chains of trafficking and exploitation.

(Moment of silence.)

Guide: Victims of trafficking may be forced into sexual exploitation, child, early and forced marriages, or labor exploitation in various industries such as domestic service, agriculture, hospitality, mining, manufacturing, construction, or fishing. Trafficking in persons may also involve organ trafficking, begging, and the recruitment of children and youth for armed conflict.

Human trafficking involves exploitation and the restriction of personal freedom and the exercise of power over the victim through actual or threatened violence or punishment. Human trafficking deprives people of their dignity, of their agency in their own lives, and of the right to live safely and freely.

In our journey in dignity, let us walk together to come near and approach the pain of the victims of human trafficking. Let us now listen to a testimony, to encounter our brothers and sisters marked by the painful reality of exploitation and human trafficking.

Reader:

(You can use the following story or another one that fits best your context.)

"I am Lakshmi. When I was younger, I lived in a rural area where many families live in poverty. From there, a place I considered my home, I was taken against my will by a person from the nearby village for domestic work. In reality, I found myself, after a few days, forced into sexual exploitation. Every other week, those people took me in a different place. This

continued until I was found in a nearby village in a deplorable situation and returned home. After I escaped this hell, I came into contact with some sisters who were able to care for me. But the horror did not end. One day, the sisters visited my house and found me completed isolated and abandoned : my hands were pinned to my chest, I could not talk, eat, and I had fallen into a depression as my brothers physically abused me, repeatedly beating me up.

The next day, the sisters came back and managed to give me a bath, but my hands were still there, pinned to my chest without me telling them to go there. I think this was my body's way of trying to protect me."

Guide: Like Lakshmi, thousands of people are suffering from abuse and exploitation. Many of our brothers and sisters fall victims to human trafficking. We pray that each person in pain and suffering will be able to meet God in their heart, experiencing the unconditional love of God. We pray that each person in pain and suffering will be able to meet someone on her/his journey, showing the love of God to them with a gesture of care and freedom.

Let us pray for Fatou, held prisoner in a hidden room in a big city of a very rich country, where many strangers people abuse her every day.

Let us pray for little José, forced to beg and steal in the streets in order to have a piece of bread to eat at night.

Let us pray for Meera, coerced into marrying a foreigner who is much older than her, because of the poverty of her family.

Let us pray for Adil, working a minimum of 12 hours a day to build buildings without receiving any pay.

God of mercy, open our eyes and help us to recognize the processes that lead millions of people, especially young people, to exploitation and human trafficking. Support us in keeping our eyes open to the suffering of our brothers and sisters, let us walk together. Together:

Everyone: Let us walk together.

(A second candle is lit. Walk towards the 2nd station in silence or accompanied by a song. In front of the people walking, there are now two people with candles.)

2nd Station: Building bridges between victims and survivors of human trafficking and people committed to end human trafficking

(Image representing the second station.)

Reader:

How long will I be trapped in this room?
How long has it been? How much longer will it be?
One minute, one day, one decade?
Time no longer means anything to me.
I cry to God, asking for help.
Suddenly, I feel warmth in my heart. It surprises me.
I have not felt this way before.
It is a soft little light that emerges from deep within me. It has always been there, secret and hidden in the depths of my being.
Now it grows within me, slowly kindling a reassuring fire.
I stand up and I start walking again.
I want to find new life.
I realize I am not alone; someone is walking by my side.
I reach out and we join hands.
We walk in silence; I no longer feel abandoned.
Someone else reaches out and takes my other hand. We are here for one another.
We journey forward, step by step.
Together.

Guide: We are all pilgrims in this land.

Each one of us can promote gestures of care and human dignity, gestures for building bridges and opening paths of dialogue.

You can be that hand, reaching out to victims of human trafficking, survivors, migrants, asylum seekers, stateless persons, women, girls, men, and children in situations of extreme poverty, and all other groups at risk.

You can be the feet walking together with young people dreaming of a better life.

You can be the voice whispering hope to our humanity.

Any selfless act can be a step on the path toward human dignity.

Let us listen to the Word of God, as the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus encounter the Risen Jesus, who makes our hearts burn within us and who leads us to new life. Welcome the Holy Spirit speaking to you in the depths of your heart.

(Another text, illustrating the idea of walking together, can be chosen to replace this Scripture.)

Reader (Luke 24:13-35):

"Now that very same day, two [disciples] were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

He said to them, 'What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?' They stopped, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.' He asked, 'What things?' They answered, 'All about Jesus of Nazareth, who showed himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them saying, 'It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?'

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognized him at the breaking of bread." [4]

(Moment of silence, possibly with some music.)

Guide: Let us walk together. God is walking with us, with our humanity. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we ask: "stay with us, it is early evening... Warm us with the light of peace, solidarity, care... Come with us." How are your hearts burning within

[4] Luke 24:13-35, The New Jerusalem Bible (link).

you? Share in a small group with your neighbors your thoughts on the following question: "What is fundamental to promoting human dignity?"

(Each participant shares with his/her neighbor or to the community.)

Reader: We pray that each person in a situation of abuse, exploitation, or trafficking finds the strength and courage to stand up and escape.

All together: ***Let us walk together.***

Reader: We pray that the hearts of the traffickers are touched by God and deeply converted so that they change their ways.

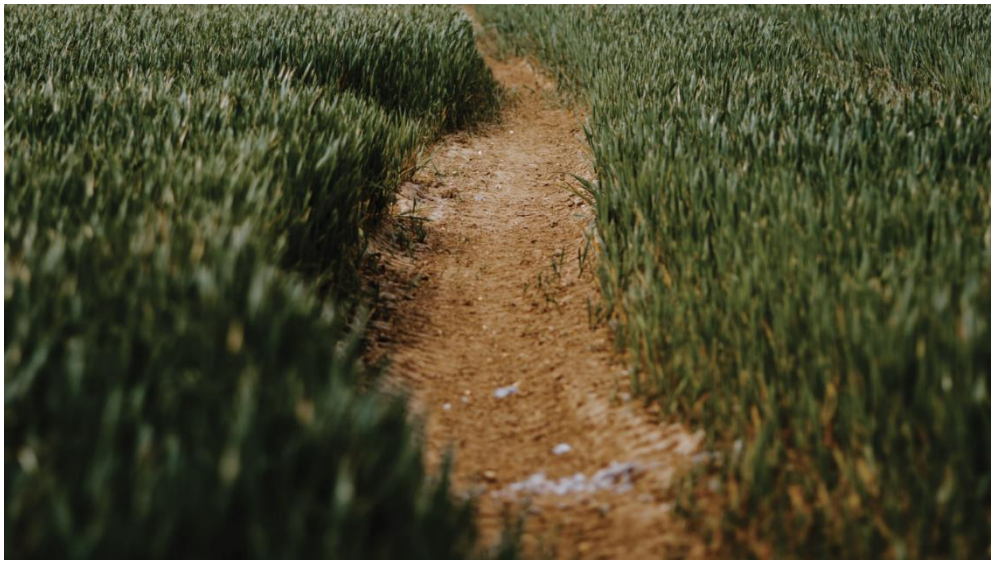
All together: ***Let us walk together.***

Reader: We journey forward with hope, hastening our footsteps to promote anti-trafficking actions that make us rediscover dignity, reawakening the joy of living, and letting ourselves be inspired by young people's creativity and spiritual strength. Let us walk together. Together:

All together: ***Let us walk together.***

(A third candle is lit. Walk towards the 3rd station. In front of the people walking, there are now three people with candles.)

3rd Station: Encountering one another to establish universal fraternity and social friendship



(Image representing the third station.)

Reader:

We are walking.
We walk on the same path; we belong to the same journey.
We unite our wounds, our doubts, our fears.
We carry our hopes, our faith, our joys.
We encourage each other forward.
We walk together through the night.
We walk towards a common goal, to the horizon.
We are one body, united in human dignity.

Guide: We are all pilgrims in this land. As we walk together and encounter one another, let us build bonds of love in the universal family of humanity. Let us welcome four important symbols for our journeying in dignity:

(Here, different objects representing the pilgrim will be brought and deposited in front of the image illustrating the 3rd station. You can ask 4 participants to go one after the other in a procession, to bring the objects offered to the front of the assembly. The first object to be brought forward are sandals, then a walking stick, a light, and water.)

Reader: For people on the move, migrants and pilgrims, sandals are essential to walk over hills and valleys and go forth on the journey. These sandals are a symbol of faith. As we go through life, we must continue to advance, amidst the ups and downs, the joys and struggles. Let us not get stuck in despair and darkness. We ask God to give us faith to continue the journey, even in the dead of night, together.

Together: Teach us to have faith and go forth despite the challenges we face on the road

Reader: For migrants and pilgrims, the walking stick is a sure companion in times of great challenges and difficulties. The walking stick is a symbol of companionship. We are never alone; God is always walking beside us. He shows us the way and He accompanies our every step, to ensure that no one gets lost. He guides us towards fellow travelers, signs of His presence and closeness. We ask God to help us to recognize each person as a fellow traveler and to fully respect and promote each person's inalienable dignity. We ask God to touch the hearts of global governance leaders, to offer more possibilities for individuals to travel through safe channels, also in case of forced displacement.

Together: Teach us to be good companions and to leave no one behind

Reader: For migrants and pilgrims, light helps to brighten the way and to walk in the right direction. It can also bring warmth and consolation. Light is a symbol of joy. Joy is most complete when shared with companions. Laughter and happiness are expressions of an inner joy that finds its source in God. We ask God to bring down the inner walls within us and to heal the wounds that prevent us from living our joy to the full. We ask God for fair recruitment and treatment of migrant workers in the labor market, regardless of their legal status, with special attention to women and girls.

Together: Teach us to nurture our joy and to share it with each other

Reader: For migrants and pilgrims, water is essential to replenish our energy and regain strength. Water is a symbol of life and hope. Without water, none of us can live. A full life is one lived in dignity, where each person can fulfill his or her potential toward the building of a more fraternal society. We ask God to guide us in our thoughts and actions, to have an open heart, and to weave bonds of fraternity between us. We ask God for the courage to promote awareness-raising activities aimed at portraying the risks of abuse, violence, and exploitation along migration pathways and in destination countries,

Together: Teach us to promote life and dignity in everything we do

Reader: These symbols are the building blocks of universal fraternity, of the family of humanity in which no one is left behind, no one is forgotten, no one is exploited, and no one is trafficked. Everyone has a voice to be heard and a part to play.

Let us pray together: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Guide: With hope and compassion, let us build a culture of encounter that leads to the conversion of hearts towards more inclusive societies, capable of unmasking stereotypes and protecting the rights of every person. Let us walk together. Together:

Everyone: Let us walk together.

(A fourth candle is lit. Walk towards the 4th station. In front of the people walking, there are now four people with candles.)

4th Station: Acknowledging the space of human dignity (my own and that of each person)

(For this station, there is no picture; instead, use a white canvas or paper, on which each participant will be able to add their contributions with post-its. Write at the top the following question: "In our fight against human trafficking, how do we acknowledge human dignity?")

Reader:

We are walking.
We move forward, one step after the other.
We walk together through the night.
As one body, united in human dignity.
The light of dawn breaks through the darkness.
We are sentinels of a new day.
On the horizon, the sun rises.

Reader: The sun rises. Each and every one of us is endowed with human dignity, which must be recognized and respected. This dignity is experienced when one has freedom, is respected, is not subjected to violence, is not discriminated against, and has what one needs to live. It is the dignity of being together, the joy of sharing and laughing, the joy of journeying towards a common horizon.

Guide: Let us open the space of human dignity together. In our fight against human trafficking, how do we acknowledge human dignity? This white paper represents the space of human dignity that we open together. You will receive post-its and can respond to the question by writing and sticking them on the paper. In our fight against human trafficking, how do we acknowledge human dignity?

(There is a big white canvas/wall/or something else. Each participant can participate via post-its (to be distributed) and explain why they think it is important. After everyone participated, it represents what human dignity is for the participants assembled here.)

(As the Guide is speaking, all candles are lit. Each participant has one lit candle.)

Guide: We pray that our sisters and brothers like Fatou, José, Meera, Adil, and all other victims and survivors of human trafficking can walk forward on new paths of healing, enabling them to live the dignified lives that they deserve, as protagonists in building the universal family of humanity. With an attentive heart to discover the daily paths of thousands of people in search of freedom and dignity, paths of care, inclusion, and empowerment, let us continue to walk together. Together:

Everyone: Let us continue to walk together.

Guide: Our pilgrimage now opens to life, to the commitment to continue walking together for the dignity of every person. Before we conclude, let us pray together:

(You can print the following prayer so that the participants can all say it.)

I commit myself to walking for dignity, every day. To care for and promote my dignity and the dignity of every person.

I commit myself to journeying for freedom, recognizing the inalienable gift of each person.

I commit myself to walking to end human trafficking and all forms of exploitation.

I commit myself, together with my brothers and sisters, to leaving no one behind and giving gestures of care for my neighbor. For only by uniting gestures of good will can we build possible and real paths of freedom and dignity.

Guide: As we grew more aware of the realities of human trafficking, let us move forward in our lives "only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with [our] God" (Micah 6:8). Let us keep the light of human dignity alive in our hearts, and commit ourselves to undo the chains that bind the dignity of our brothers and sisters.

Everyone: Amen

(Sing a song or hymn of your choice & conclude.)

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Thiago de Mello: Faz escuro, mais eu canto, porque a manha vai chegar.

(It's dark, but I sing, because morning will come)
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