

LIFE & WELLBEING HISTORY



July 9, 1944: The statue of the Redeemer being carried through Victory Street, Senglea, towards Porto Salvo church on its arrival from Paola.



April 7, 1974: At the Independence Arena, Floriana.



April 8, 1998: Dockyard workers following the statue of the Redeemer as it passes by the building known as 'the Factory'.

Senglea's statue of Jesus the Redeemer in pilgrimages outside the city



FABIAN MANGION

alongside the statue of Jesus the Redeemer. The pilgrimage, which started from Senglea's parish church, passed through the towns of Cospicua and Vittoriosa. In Vittoriosa, the statue was taken into the church dedicated to the Annunciation where prayers were recited. Then, the pilgrimage returned to Senglea following the same route.

At the onset of World War II, it was obvious that Senglea was going to be a prime target due to its vicinity to the Dockyard. Following heavy air attacks, especially those that occurred on January 16, 1941, the statues of Maria Bambina and of Jesus the Redeemer were taken for safe keeping to St Helen's collegiate church, Birkirkara. When the war was practically over, on July 9, 1944, the statue of Jesus the Redeemer was brought back to Senglea.

"God heard their prayers and the plague did not breach the walls of Senglea. These processions have been held ever since"

At first, the statue was privately transported to the church of Christ the King, Paola. Three days of prayers and special services were held there as an act of thanksgiving. The statue was then carried in pilgrimage to Senglea. Since Senglea's parish church had been badly damaged, the pilgrimage ended at the church of Our Lady of Porto Salvo which, at the time, served as a temporary parish church until the main church was rebuilt. When, in October 1947, the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix was again in use, the statue was transported to its rightful place there.

In 1968, the statue of Jesus the Redeemer started being carried in procession along the streets of Senglea every year on the fourth Friday of Lent. Since 1980, this procession began taking the form of a diocesan pilgrimage, normally led by the Archbishop.

More recently and on eight occasions to date, the statue of Jesus the Redeemer has been taken out of Senglea on various pilgrimages.

On Palm Sunday, April 7, 1974, the statue was taken to the Independence Arena in Floriana. There, thousands of Maltese gathered to pray the Way of the Cross with meditations written by Fr Peter Serracino Inglott. This gathering, led by Archbishop Michael Gonzi, was part of the diocesan celebrations held in preparation for the Jubilee Year of 1975 convoked by Pope Paul VI.

In 1982, Pope John Paul II declared 1983 a Holy Year in commemoration of the 1,950th anniversary of the Year of Redemption – the year Jesus died. As part of the spiritual preparations for this special year, on October 2, 1982, a pilgrimage with the statue of Jesus the Redeemer was held by the three Cottonera parishes – Senglea, Vittoriosa and Cospicua.

During that same Holy Year, on March 20, 1983, the statue was taken to Valletta. The pilgrimage started from the parish church of Our Lady of Porto Salvo and ended at St John's Co-Cathedral Square where the Via Crucis was prayed.

Hundreds of Malta Drydocks workers spent their lunch hour on April 8, 1998, in prayer, taking part in the Way of the Cross. After a request made by the Malta Drydocks Council and its subsequent approval by the Curia, the workers carried the statue of the Redeemer during the Via Crucis. The event was organised by the workmen themselves and the prayers were written by the 'yard's deputy chairman Vince Azzopardi.

The procession, led by Archbishop Joseph Mercieca, started from the 'yard's Boat House and ended at the entrance gate, near the monument built in tribute to those workers who died at work. The 14 crosses, and a large decorative one at the 'yard's entrance, were made by the workers. In a short message, Mgr Mercieca described the workers as Malta's backbone, and family men who loved their country and their colleagues.

The evening of June 7, 1999, was an emotional one at St Vincent de Paul residence for the elderly. The National Focal Point, an ad hoc committee set up to commemorate the International Year of Older Persons, in collaboration with the Senglea Chapter, organised a pilgrimage with the statue of the Redeemer. The pilgrimage went around each block where the elderly resided and the devotees contemplated the Stations of the



March 23, 2005: The beginning of the national Via Crucis at St Lawrence Street, Vittoriosa.

Cross by means of thoughts written by Dr Marisa Abela. The ceremony came to an end with a concelebrated Mass led by Archbishop Mercieca in the main square of residence. In his homily, Mgr Mercieca spoke about the need for young people to give more attention to the older generations.

On Easter Sunday, April 23, 2000, there came the news that the statue of the Redeemer would undertake a historic pilgrimage to Gozo. This initiative, linked to the Jubilee Year 2000 and on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the consecration of the shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Qala, was approved by Archbishop Joseph Mercieca and Gozo Bishop Nicholas Cauchi. They both realised that it would provide a good opportunity for people to renew their faith and grow in their love towards Jesus.

The statue, transported to Gozo aboard the Ta' Pinu ferry, was welcomed by huge crowds at Mgarr Harbour on the evening of May 29. The devotees followed the statue up to Qala village and, after sunset, they participated in a vigil at the Sanctuary of the Immaculate Conception. On the morning of May 30, students from all Gozitan primary and secondary schools saluted the Redeemer in Qala's main square, and in the evening Bishop Cauchi presided over a concluding Mass. In his homily, he said that "Christ carrying the

cross is, even for modern human beings, a living programme. Christ wanted to be like man and, in so doing, he wanted to go through the experience of suffering."

A Via Crucis organised by RTK Radio and the Church's Pastoral Secretariat was held on March 23, 2005. On the occasion, the image of Christ the Redeemer was taken to Vittoriosa and, from there, it was carried shoulder-high through the Cottonera marina, back to Senglea. This Via Crucis, led by Archbishop Mercieca, ended with a Eucharistic celebration at the Senglea parish parvis.

Similarly, on April 3, 2007, the above-mentioned two organisations held a national Via Crucis at Mount Carmel Hospital in Attard at which the statue of the Redeemer was carried shoulder-high. This event of prayer was led by Archbishop Paul Cremona, who, together with those present, contemplated the Stations of the Cross using reflections penned by Fr Paul Camilleri.

To this day, thousands of pious devotees visit Senglea Basilica, particularly during Lent and Holy Week, and on the third Sunday after Pentecost such as today, to pray in front of this compelling statue. This devotion radiates to all parts of the Maltese Islands and even to foreign lands where people from Senglea and from other locations in Malta have migrated.

This zeal makes Senglea's church a living, breathing, national sanctuary.



March 20, 1983: The statue of the Redeemer, surrounded by the faithful, at St John's Square, Valletta.



May 29, 2000: "And there followed him a great multitude of the people." (Lk. 23, 27). Pilgrims following the statue on the way from Mgarr Harbour towards Qala.



June 7, 1999: Sick and old people pray to Jesus the Redeemer as his effigy passes by St Vincent de Paul Residence, Luqa.