

## **History/Evolution of the Stations, from 4th Century Jerusalem to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church**

This ancient custom of retracing the steps of Christ to Calvary probably began in the weeks following Jesus' Death and Resurrection. The Stations of the Cross originated in pilgrimage to Jerusalem and a desire to reproduce the *Via Dolorosa*.

The devotion originated in the late 4th century when pilgrims flocked to the Holy Land from all parts of the world to visit the land of Jesus. Heading the list of places they visited was the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which had been built by the Emperor Constantine in 335 AD atop Calvary and the tomb of Jesus.

— Processions of pilgrims to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher were common. Egeria, a woman from Gaul who traveled to the Holy Land in the 4th century, recalls in her diary how she joined Christians from all parts of the Roman world walking westward on Holy Thursday from the garden of Gethsemane to the church of the Holy Sepulcher, where they celebrated Jesus' death and resurrection.

### **The Via Dolorosa**

Over the years, the route of pilgrim processions -- beginning at the ruins of the Fortress Antonia and ending at the church of the Holy Sepulcher -- was accepted as the way that Jesus went to his death. It was known as the "*Via Dolorosa*," the "*Sorrowful Way*;" Today, it winds through the crowded areas of Jerusalem's Old City, and pilgrims still travel it in prayer.

At the end of the 17th century, the erection of stations in churches became more popular. In 1686, Pope Innocent XI, realizing that few people could travel to the Holy Land due to the Moslem oppression, granted the right to erect stations in all of their churches and that the same indulgences would be given to the Franciscans and those affiliated with them for practicing the devotion as if on an actual pilgrimage. Pope Benedict XIII extended these indulgences to all of the faithful in 1726.

Five years later, Pope Clement XII permitted stations to be created in all churches and fixed the number at 14. In 1742, Pope Benedict XIV exhorted all priests to enrich their churches with the Way of the Cross, which must include 14 crosses and are usually accompanied with pictures or images of each particular station. The popularity of the devotion was also encouraged by preachers like St. Leonard Casanova (1676-1751) of Porto Maurizio, Italy, who reportedly erected over 600 sets of stations throughout Italy.

To date, there are 14 traditional stations. Because of the intrinsic relationship between the passion and death of our Lord with His resurrection, several of the devotional booklets now include a 15th station, which commemorates the Resurrection.

The continued importance of the stations in the devotional life of Catholics is attested by both Pope Paul VI, who approved a Gospel-based version of the stations in 1975, and Pope John Paul II, who has also written his own version.

According to Wikipedia, on Good Friday 1991. Pope John Paul II (now St. John Paul II) introduced a new form of devotion, called the Scriptural Way of the Cross which is also published by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI approved this set of stations for meditation and public celebration. It follows:

*The Scriptural Way of the Cross*

1. Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane;
2. Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested;
3. Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin;
4. Jesus is denied by Peter 3 times;
5. Jesus is judged by Pilate;
6. Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns;
7. Jesus takes up his cross;
8. Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross;
9. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem;
10. Jesus is crucified;
11. Jesus promises his kingdom to the repentant thief;
12. Jesus entrusts Mary and John to each other;
13. Jesus dies on the cross; and
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Compiled by N. Lamour, M.Ed., MTS – Taken from various Web links including: Rev. William Saunders, "How Did the Stations of the Cross Begin?" Arlington Catholic Herald and Victor Hoagland, C.P. , The Stations of the Cross, The Passionists, and Wikipedia