

## **ORIGINS OF THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS:**

Know the story behind the origins of this Catholic act of devotion that commemorates the passion and death of Jesus Christ. "Stations of the Cross" is a Catholic devotional act in which devotees commemorate the passion and death of Jesus Christ in 14 "stations" or images that depict scenes of His crucifixion and death.

Usually done in churches, devotees walk to each of these stations in the order of Jesus' ordeal – His arrest, trial, suffering, and death. Devotees stop by each station to commemorate the scene it depicts and to offer a short prayer.

### **■ Early conception**

In early Christianity, there were no formal observances of Jesus' passion and death. As the Christian community grew across the world, many of the faithful from foreign lands wished to see the places in Jerusalem where Jesus suffered and died.

The faithful visited places in the city believed to be the sites of the arrest, trial, suffering, and death of Jesus. Eventually, shrines were built on some of these sites.

The idea of the Stations of the Cross was probably conceived in the 5th century, when the Basilica of San Stefano in Bologna, Italy, constructed a series of chapels that represented significant Jerusalem shrines, research shows.

The Basilica is also known as Gerosalemme (Jerusalem) for the chapels inside that represent important Jerusalem Shrines. Since then, medieval churches began reproducing images of the holy places in Jerusalem for those who are unable to make the journey to the Holy Land's shrines.

### **■ Beginnings of the practice**

The Franciscans were tasked as keepers of Holy Land shrines in 1342. They granted indulgences to pilgrims visiting certain shrines in Jerusalem, among them the shrines that mark significant scenes of Jesus' crucifixion and death.

An indulgence is the deliverance from worldly punishment for absolved sins. The

faithful believe that even forgiven sins are punished by God's justice and so they sought remission from punishment.

William Wey, a pilgrim during the 1400s, wrote that Holy Land pilgrims visited and prayed in the shrines in the order of the events of the passion of Christ. He also called the shrines the "stations" of this informal pilgrimage.

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The Muslim Ottoman Empire's domination of the Middle East in the 1500s to 1600s made Holy Land pilgrimages very difficult.

Since only a few can make the Holy Land pilgrimage, Pope Innocent allowed in 1689 the Franciscans to recreate the Stations in their churches through images of the Passion of Christ, complete with the ability to grant indulgences to devotees visiting their church Stations.

This basically created a miniscule Jerusalem pilgrimage in Franciscan churches. The practice of church Station devotions became so popular that by Pope Clement XII's reign in 1731, all churches were allowed to build Stations and grant indulgences to all that hold Station devotions. This gave birth to the practice of the Stations of the Cross.

#### ■ Station numbers and Station scenes

Today, there are 14 Stations of the Cross:

- I. Jesus is condemned to death
- II. The cross is placed upon him
- III. Jesus falls for the first time
- IV. Jesus meets his Blessed Mother
- V. Simon of Cyrene bears Jesus' cross
- VI. Jesus face is wiped by Veronica
- VII. Jesus falls for the second time
- VIII. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
- IX. Jesus falls for the third time
- X. Jesus is stripped of his garments
- XI. Jesus is crucified
- XII. Jesus dies on the cross
- XIII. The body of Jesus is taken from the Cross
- XIV. Jesus is entombed

How Station numbers came to be 14 is shrouded in mystery. It is known, however, that up until the late 1700s, churches varied in the number of stations presented. Different scenes of Jesus' passion were also commemorated.

From the 16th to the 18th century, Station numbers have been as low as 11 to as high as 37.

A theologian, Adrichomius, identified 12 Stations in his 1584 book *Jerusalem, as it Flourished in the Time of Christ*, which matches the first 12 modern Stations. This is believed to be the origin of the current stations since the book was widely published by the church. Pope Clement XII is largely responsible for setting the number of stations to 14.

An alternative to the traditional 14 Stations are the so-called Gospel-based Stations. The Gospel-based Stations came about following doubts cast on the traditional Stations 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9, given their lack of clear basis in scripture.

Also 14 in number, the most widely practiced of these is Pope John Paul II's "Scriptural Stations of the Cross," published in 1991. Pope John Paul's Scriptural Stations consist of the following:

- I. Agony in the Garden
- II. Judas betrays Jesus, Jesus is arrested
- III. Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin
- IV. Jesus is denied by Peter
- V. Jesus is judged by Pilate
- VI. Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns
- VII. Jesus carries his cross
- VIII. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross
- IX. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
- X. Jesus is crucified
- XI. Jesus promises the repentant thief his kingdom
- XII. Jesus entrusts his Blessed Mother to John
- XIII. Jesus dies on the Cross
- XIV. Jesus is entombed