



Stations of the Cross 2014

It is a great privilege to be able to host ArtBelow's Stations of the Cross exhibition at St Marylebone Parish Church through the days of Lent this year (2014).

Ever since Christians have been making pilgrimages to Jerusalem, men and woman have walked in the footsteps of Christ along the Way of the Cross, but it was probably in the mid-Fourteenth Century, after the Franciscans were granted the right and duty of administering the holy places of Jerusalem, that pilgrims began to walk the devotion of the Via Dolorosa.

Today, pilgrims can walk the nine of the Stations of the Cross, that were established by the Franciscans along the Via Dolorosa, as it wends its way from the northwest corner of the Temple Mount to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, within which the remaining five Stations are located.

In 1521, a book called *Geystlich Strass* was printed with illustrations of the Stations in the Holy Land and, about this time, the Franciscans began to build a series of outdoor shrines across Europe to duplicate their counterparts in the Holy Land.

The number of Stations today is usually fourteen, but the number has varied through the centuries, with up to thirty being recorded in some places. These Stations were usually placed, often in small buildings or niches, along the approach to a church. In addition, some Stations were established on wooded hillsides and were destinations in themselves, although the purpose of walking the Stations was always to direct the heart and the mind of the person who walked them towards Christ and the agony of his Passion.

In 1686, Pope Innocent XI granted the Franciscans the right to erect Stations within all their churches, and this right was extended to all other churches in 1731, by Pope Clement XII, provided that a Franciscan friar erected them with the consent of the local bishop. At the same time, the number of Stations was fixed at fourteen. In 1857, the bishops of England were allowed to erect the Stations by themselves, without the intervention of a Franciscan priest, and in 1862 this right was extended to bishops throughout the Church.

Today, Stations of the Cross can be found in most Roman Catholic churches and in many Anglican parish churches too, and a variety of different approaches to the Stations has developed. Perhaps the most widely used method of following in the Way of Cross was developed by Saint Alphonsus Ligouri C.Ss.R, the founder of the Redemptorists, (1696 - 1787), canonised in 1839.

In this method, the individual walks the Way of the Cross with Jesus and his mother Mary. At each Station one kneels and says: We adore you, O Christ and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world, before standing to contemplate the event portrayed by the individual Station. This is followed by prayer, the recitation of the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory be, before a verse of the Stabat Mater (a Thirteenth century hymn detailing the sorrows of Mary) is sung which leads to the next station and so on.

I hope that this exhibition of the reflections of twenty contemporary artists will not only serve to highlight the *Missing Tom Fund* but will lead you on a spiritual journey too, a journey which leads through the agony of the cross to the light and hope and joy of Easter.

The Revd Canon Dr Stephen Evans, Rector of St Marylebone, London, NW1 5LT