



17. Why Do We Have Stations Of The Cross?

The series of painted plaques along the walls of the North and South Aisles in St Mary's Church were given anonymously after the Second World War. They were made by the Sisters of the Church and are considered to be good of their kind.

The plaques are representations of the fourteen traditional 'Stations of the Cross'.

These are:

1. Jesus is condemned to death;
2. The cross is laid upon him;
3. Jesus falls for the first time;
4. Jesus meets his mother;
5. Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry the cross;
6. Veronica wipes Jesus' face;
7. Jesus falls for the second time;
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem;
9. Jesus falls for the third time;
10. Jesus is stripped of his garments;
11. Jesus is crucified;
12. Jesus dies on the cross;
13. His body is taken down from the cross;
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb.

The number and subject-matter of the Stations of the cross were fixed by Pope Clement XII in 1731. Before then, they varied widely. They probably originate in the 'Way of the Cross' or Via Dolorosa followed by pilgrims to Jerusalem, though travellers' accounts do not begin to mention regular 'Stations' or stopping-places on the way until about the twelfth century.

Once the Franciscans had taken over the guardianship of Catholic holy places in Jerusalem, following of the Way of the Cross became a devotion in itself, with prescribed halting-places and prayers. From the 15th century onwards representations of the Stations began to be set up in Catholic churches and monasteries in Europe, and in the 17th century these became very popular.

At St Mary's our Stations of the Cross are used as an aid to meditation at a service during Holy Week, though of course anyone is may do so privately at any time. It is a happy coincidence that our series of Stations ends at the Resurrection Altar.