

Insights in Liturgy

The Way Of the Cross

By Thomas J. Driscoll

One of the more familiar exercises of Christian piety is the Stations of the Cross. As practiced today, this devotion centers on 14 artistic representations of the sufferings of Christ in His way to Calvary. Each station is a halting place at which the person engages in contemplation and prayer. As such, the Way of the Cross is a devotional exercise. It is not part of the official liturgy of the Church (Eucharist, Sacraments and Liturgy of the Hours).

St. Jerome tells us that pilgrimages to the Holy Land, to visit the holy places hallowed by Christ's sufferings, began in the earliest centuries of Christianity. Devotion to the Passion of Christ, widespread in the 12th and 13th centuries, was promoted by many veterans of the crusades. These soldiers erected tableaux at home representing the various places they had visited in the Holy Land. This devotion became known as the Little Jerusalem.

The first coherently related stations built outside Palestine were at the Church of San Stefano in Bologna in the 5th century. The idea of a series of shrines commemorating places and events in the Passion became fairly popular by the 15th century. When the Franciscans took over custody of the holy places in 1342, they saw it as part of their mission to promote devotion to these places and to the Passion of Christ. This, as the practice became more common, found expression in the Stations of the Cross. In

the 18th century, St. Leonard of Port Maurice promoted the devotion so enthusiastically and successfully, that he became known as the "preacher of the Way of the Cross." He is said to have erected more than 572 sets of stations between 1731 and 1751.

Originally, the number and titles of the stations varied considerably. William Wey, an English pilgrim to the Holy Land in 1458, testified to this fact. Wey was first to use the word "station" (stop, standing, halt) in connection with the devotion. In 5th century Bologna there were 5 stops; in Antwerp there were 7. Sometimes there were 20, 30 or more.

The number 14 first appeared in manuals of devotion published during the 16th century in the Low Countries. The determination of this number seems due to the choice of devotional writers rather than the actual practice of pilgrims in Jerusalem, for during the 16th Century, Turkish authorities forbade halting or external acts of veneration at any of the holy places.

The subjects represented by the stations show a similar variation. In earlier series, events and places were commemorated that were only distantly connected with the Via Dolorosa, if at all: e.g. the house of Dives, the pool, the houses of Herod and Simon the Pharisee. The number of falls has varied from one to seven.

The essence of the Way of the Cross is the prayerful walking from station to station, and the prayerful contemplation of the artistic representations. One should not be filled with sympathy or pity or sadness for Jesus.

JESUS IS RISEN! Nor should this be a lesson in self-induced guilt. Rather, the Stations are a reflection on Christ's Death and Resurrection, and an attempt to apply the Paschal Mystery to one's life. We can not forget the Resurrection, nor separate it from Christ's Passion and Death. A resurrectional element should be present in our devotions at each of the Stations.

Stations of the Cross, as in any popular devotion, should express our faith, and not be a means of education. Hence, slides or other audio-visuals, which detract from the procession and meditation on the Passion, are inappropriate. Stations are not a lesson in doctrine.

One should not hesitate to ceremonialize devotions. Non-verbal gestures, vestments, repetition, robust singing, incense, and prayers of praise are in order. Since Vatican II, Stations have suffered from over-verbalization. Some silence would be a good thing. Stations should be done by themselves. The Way of the Cross is a complete devotion. It is not necessary to mix and match stations with Benediction, Penance services, etc.

A variety of roles is important, including: presider, cantor, lector, acolyte, thrifter, and crossbearer. The assembly should be actively involved in participating. Whenever possible, the congregation should walk the stations with the ministers. The environmental focus should be on the stations themselves not on the altar or tabernacle. Hence, candles and spotlights should not draw attention to the sanctuary.

The Way of the Cross offers us an excellent opportunity to reflect upon the Paschal Mystery in our lives. This devotion of the triumphant, Risen Christ who has overcome sin and death.

State Officials Tour Hornell Hospitals

By Martin Toombs
Southern Tier Editor

Hornell — Staff members from the state Office of Health Systems Management (OHSM) toured St. James Mercy and Bethesda hospitals March 12, and discussed the proposed merger of the institutions with the proposers.

John Rodat, OHSM executive deputy director, second in command of the office, headed the team, and answered questions following the tour. Also participating in the tour were the hospital administrators, Sister Rene McNiff of St. James and Carl Luger of Bethesda, and Thomas Weil, the merger consultant.

Several participants characterized the discussions as worthwhile, and mainly concerned with clarification of various details, and not negotiations.

Rodat pointed out that the proposal officially is described as preliminary, and therefore his office has made no decisions concerning its disposition.

Weil listed topics on which the officials sought clarification.

They asked about the need for the proposed kidney dialysis stations, Weil recounted.

And referring to the proposal for 20 acute care alcoholism beds, they were told that the state has been reimbursing alcoholism care at the lower health-related rate. Weil noted that if funding for the beds can be approved only at the lower payment level, the hospitals will need to re-examine their proposal.

Weil reported that the staff also were concerned with the number of persons now in the hospitals who are there for lack of nursing home beds. They noted, Weil said, the state's interest in more nursing home beds in the area, and "they'd like that in the application if they can get it."

The state staff also asked for more precise calculations of the merged operation's staffing needs, Weil said, and for figures as to what capital expenses would be necessary in the two hospitals if they remained separate.

Answering questions later, Rodat said that the trip was to help him understand the proposal.

Regarding the request for assurances about the merged hospital's future reimbursement rates, Rodat noted that regulations exist that exempt merged facilities from some guidelines during a three-year transition period. But the overall rate, he explained, would depend on the comparison of the merged hospital with other hospitals of its size in the state.

Rodat described approval as a "political" process which could include negotiations after a formal proposal is made.

He called the need for nursing home beds in the area an "extremely important issue." An "application" to meet that need would be very favorably received" by the state, he said, although he did not know if that need is perceived as so great that its not being dealt with by the merger proposal could harm the merger's chance of approval.

Asked what the response of his office and his superior,

Richard Berman, would be to a letter campaign opposing the merger, Rodat noted that as a "practical matter," it was difficult for the office to respond to such a campaign in light of its statewide responsibilities. Such public concern rightfully is the responsibility of the local Health Systems Agency, he said; "as a practical matter, they're better at addressing those issues than we are."

He added that the OHSM's legal authority gives it three criteria upon which to judge such proposals: competence and confidence, need, and financial viability. He stated that if an application met those criteria and was denied, the agency could be sued for overstepping its authority.

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State Divorced, Separated To Convene in Lake Placid

The third annual New York State Conference for Separated and Divorced Catholics will be May 2, 3, 4 in Lake Placid.

Three speakers will be featured during the conference, which also will include several workshops and liturgical celebrations.

Keynoting the weekend Friday evening will be Sister Paula Ripple, executive director of the North American Conference of Separated and Divorced Catholics (NACSDC). Her talk is titled "See I will not forget you... I have carved

you on the palm of my hand."

Addressing those attending Saturday morning will be Father James Young, CSP, NACSDC chaplain. He will speak on "Building a New Christian Life After Divorce."

And Sunday morning, participants will hear Father Euclid Marier on "Loneliness—Urban and Rural."

The featured liturgy will be Saturday evening, and was planned by the host Ogdensburg diocese. Bishop Stanislaus Brzana will be the principal celebrant and homilist.

Ecumenical Luncheon To Benefit Poor

A luncheon to raise money for the Williamson Community Center and the William Warfield Scholarship Fund is scheduled for Tuesday, March 25 at 11:30 a.m. Women from 16 Protestant churches and four Catholic churches are sponsoring the luncheon, which will be at St. Rita's Church in West Webster.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will speak on "Christian Women in Today's Society."

The Williamson Community Center helps destitute migrants and the poor. Two years ago the William Warfield Scholarship Fund was established to help black students go to college.

Those interested may purchase tickets from Kay Tichacek, 265-9354; Roni Robinson, 671-5544; or Tessa Martin, 872-5000. Babysitting will be available for a small charge. The deadline for reservations is March 23.

Also making a presentation at the conference will be the state's delegates to the NACSDC, Robert Cobbett of Webster and Ann Tobash of Elmira.

Workshops will include discussions of friendship, children of divorce, annulments, sexual awareness, a male perspective, and workshops for those ministering to the divorced and separated. The workshops are being led by persons known for their work in the field, including Rochester diocesan Sister Kathleen Kircher, director of Ministry to the Divorced and Separated, and Father Thomas Bales of Aquinas Institute.

Registration fees include housing and meals during the convention; there is an additional \$5 charge for registrations received after April 1. Further information and registration materials may be obtained from local divorced Catholic groups, from the diocesan Family Life Office, from Mary Ann Rivoli, (716)663-0268 or Ann Tobash (607)732-2918.

A chartered bus to the conference will be leaving from St. John Fisher College, and those interested in registering for the bus can contact Ms. Rivoli.

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