

Number 8 of the 14 Stations of the Cross was damaged some years ago. When Father John Eldringhoff was pastor here, he happened into a religious goods store in Kansas City and saw one lonely station of the cross, small, but otherwise matching the style of the ones in church; looking closer, he realized it was station number 8. He bought it and fixed it on the wall where it has served us well. Recently, though, Denny O'Connor and Bert O'Connor arranged for Laura DeAngelis to make a replacement station in memory of Virginia O'Connor. After much hard work the new station now hangs on the wall. I will bless it next Saturday night and will lead the celebration of the Stations of the Cross after mass.

Two years ago we suspended a new cross above the altar and moved our image of the risen Christ back over the exit to remind us of our hope in the resurrection as we leave. We also rotated the stations, moving number 1 by the door, so that the Fourteenth Station, the burial of Jesus, would lead into our image of the risen Christ, in order to conclude the story.

Stations of the Cross got started centuries ago from people who could not make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and walk in the footsteps of Jesus. They set up this devotional exercise at home to get some sense of the same journey. The 14 stations we know now have been in place for almost 300 years. However, Pope John Paul II used a different set of 14 stations that were all taken from the bible, including Jesus in the Garden of Olives, Jesus betrayed by Judas, and Jesus denied by Peter. Many people regard the resurrection as a kind of 15<sup>th</sup> station, but the appeal of the stations has always been around the suffering of Jesus.

Everybody suffers, and it is comforting that Jesus knew what this was like. Today's first reading also says that God understands human suffering. When Moses saw the burning bush, the chosen people were slaves in Egypt. God told Moses, "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey." God has acted with compassion throughout history. Just as God understood the sufferings of Israel in Egypt, so Christ understands our sufferings because of what he endured. To walk the Stations of the Cross is not simply to lament how inhumanly we can treat one another, but to take comfort that whenever we are treated poorly, God understands.

Still, this compassionate God created some tension for Moses. God asked Moses to end the suffering, to lead Israel out of slavery. Moses wanted to decline: he couldn't speak well, and people wouldn't believe that God had appeared to him. No excuses, God tells him. Just go. Whenever we suffer, it comforts us that God understands. But it discomforts whenever God asks us to end it. Sometimes we use our suffering as an excuse not to help someone else, but God may want us to become leaders in spite of the suffering we endure. God understands our suffering, but God also understands our abilities.