



## STATIONS OF THE CROSS

St. John/Isidore

"It is You Jesus, stretched out on the Cross, who gives me strength and are always close to the suffering soul. Creatures will abandon a person in his suffering, but You, O Lord, are faithful..." (St. Faustina)

### Jesus and Simon of Cyrene carry the cross



If you read last week's reflection, you noticed an error I made by associating Veronica with the second station instead of the sixth station. Forgive the mistake.

It is not unusual for most Christians to relate the cross to life challenges. The cross evokes two images in our minds: Christ and suffering. Indeed, the cross reflects both. Jesus painfully died on the cross, and the cross is a symbol of suffering for us who follow him.

Traditionally, the second station of the cross says that Jesus carried the cross. John's gospel describes how Jesus, "carrying the cross by himself," brought it to Golgotha, there to be crucified on it (Jn. 19:17). There is a parallel story in the OT about the sacrifice of Isaac. When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, it was Isaac who carried the bundle of wood for the sacrifices to the top of a mountain in Moriah. However, unlike Jesus, Isaac didn't have to be sacrificed. God made a different offer to Abraham instead (c.f. Gen. 22:1-19).

It is significant for us to observe that the synoptic authors (Matthew, Mark, & Luke) did not state that Jesus carried the cross as John does. The reason was apparent. For, it was the known practice that the person to be killed was the one to bear his own cross. They instead mentioned Simon who helped Jesus carry the cross. We read that "as they went, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross"(Matt. 27:32). The emphasis on Simon's role in carrying Jesus' cross is also where the lesson for us is found.

We don't know the reason the soldiers asked Simon to help Jesus carry his cross. The popular understanding is that they never wanted him to die on the way. Well, what difference would that make for the soldiers who only tried to kill him? Did they have it in mind to fulfill a prophecy? No! But we know that Simon did help the Lord, and that certainly brought some relief to Jesus. Jesus invites his disciples to carry our crosses and follow him. But Simon invites us to support others to take their cross and follow the Lord, especially when these crosses are heavy.

Today, there are crosses of poverty, hunger, illness, homelessness, refugeeism, migration, and imprisonment that some people must bear. These crosses can be more substantial than the ones we must carry. How can we follow Simon's example to assist others in bearing their crosses? Here is something to think about. The seven-corporal works of mercy the Church recommends for us. Practice as many of these as you can: feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned or ransom the captive and bury the dead. As we follow these, we offer relief to those carrying such heavy crosses.