

Helpers

THREE STATIONS highlight different ways of helping.

The 5th Station, Simon of Cyrene assists Jesus. From the Gospel accounts one gets the impression that Simon was forced into helping Jesus: Matthew says he was 'enlisted' (27:32) while Mark says he was 'constrained' (15:21). Whatever the case, Simon did help Jesus and he continued to help. We know his two sons, Alexander and Rufus were well-known Christians in St Mark's circle. Often we are reluctant to help others; we may be constrained into helping but once involved we help without restraint.

Simon is every Christian. Maybe at first reluctant to get involved, but his heart overcame his hesitation and he continued to serve the Lord. Tradition has it that on becoming a disciple, he eventually became a bishop in Arabia and himself a martyr.

The following station (6th), Veronica wipes the face of Jesus, is part of the oral tradition not found in the New Testament. Her name springs from her dramatic deed: she is alleged to have offered Jesus a towel with which to wipe his face and thus provide a moment of respite in the arduous way of the cross. The tradition recounts how Jesus left an imprint of his face of the towel. This imprint was referred to as a 'true likeness/vera icon' hence her name, 'Veronica'.

Her gesture of assistance to the suffering Christ reveals that each Christian is in fact a likeness of Christ: we are called to be 'veronicas', not only in helping those in need but in revealing the face of Jesus in what we do. It has been said that Christ is in agony till the end of the world – in so far as his

mystical body suffers in all who are suffering. The need for 'veronicas' seems to be greater now than ever before.

The 8th Station, Jesus speaks to the women of

Jerusalem, tells of another way of helping the afflicted: through presence, through tears, through personal support. St Luke gives us the details: *Large numbers of people followed him, and of women too, who mourned and lamented for him. But Jesus turned to them and said "Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children. (Luke 23:27-28).*

Jesus has taught many of these women and their children that those who mourn are blessed. The

Jewish tradition of mourning the dying and the dead is very strong. But Jesus shifts the focus of their mourning away from himself to the very ones who are mourning him. In the light of what is to come these very women will have ever greater cause to mourn and lament. Jesus explains: *For the days will surely come when people will say, "Happy are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne, the breasts that have never suckled!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"; to the hills "Cover us!" For if men use the green wood like this, what will happen when it is dry?*

I love you Jesus, my love, above all things.

I repent with my whole heart of having offended you.

Never permit me to separate myself from you again.

Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you will.



Veronica wipes Jesus' face – a painting by Maud Sumner in St Mary's Cathedral, Cape Town