

Artistic Adornment to South Perth Church

Erection of Stations of the Cross

THE OPUS—SECTILE STATIONS

LAST Sunday evening the Holy Name Society, and a fine attendance of parishioners, made the Way of the Cross for the first time with the newly erected Stations of the Cross, the generous gift to the parish of Mr. and Mrs. T. D. Murphy, and Miss Dorothy McCarthy. A memorial tablet in the same design commemorates the gift.

The Stations are made from a patented raw material known as opus-sectile mosaic. It has been manufactured for the special purpose of Church decorations. Opus-sectile are glass tiles in any colours, with the surface treated so as to obviate glare. The surface is smooth to make cleaning easy.

The tiles are eight inches square. They are cut out according to the design of the stations. Each separate piece is coloured and fired according to the pattern selected. To secure the desired effect some tiles are fired many times, and all of them are so treated that the colours are everlasting, neither sun nor rain can fade or diminish the hues so burned into the tile. These Stations will never need touching up or renewal as the whole tile is saturated with the colour.

The Stations are over an inch thick, and are built on a framework of glass. They are very heavy and required much care in setting them into their niches. Mr. E. le B. Henderson supervised the erection, while the designer, Mr. Mathieson, came over from Melbourne to add his experience and advice. As now set the Stations project a quarter of an inch from the church walls, creating a cameo effect, which is much better than if they were flush with the walls as originally intended.

The Stations blend excellently with the wall colouring and add the finishing touch to the devotional interior of St. Columba's Church. The wooden crosses are just right, with a narrow space separating them from the Stations. On forenoons the seven on the Epistle side are burnished with gold, and the Gospel side are bathed in the full glow of the afternoon sun. At night they stand out remarkably effectively, the light delineating the figures, adding depth and distance to the scene.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE FOURTEEN STATIONS

1st: Jesus is Condemned to Death.

The dull gold background is a decided advance over the bright gold mosaic, which dazzles one and detracts the eye from the figures. The red robe of Christ is a very distinctive colour: it is a heavy, velvety material. Pilate sits on a marble throne highly ornamented. The spaciousness of his court is presented admirably. A Roman victor lays the hand of authority on Christ's shoulder. A delightful page boy holds the bowl in which Pilate washes his hands. Dominating the picture is the face of Christ, an expression of sadness of the weakness of His Judge, and the hardness of heart of the people, combined with a look of complete resignation.

A very pleasing feature of each of the 14 stations is the many coloured scroll on which the title is written, broken effectively in the centre by the window, a black letter on a gold square.

2nd: Jesus is Made to Bear His Cross.

With outstretched welcoming arms Christ accepts the Cross, which two men raise with difficulty to present to Him. Behind them a third man sees that all is right in the box of tools.

The road to Calvary now appears, and along it one may travel through each station until the hill of Calvary is reached. As it winds its way up the hill it grows narrower and rougher, and more difficult for Christ, weighed down with the heavy Cross. Note particularly the beautiful halo which crowns the Sacred Head.

3rd: Jesus Falls the First Time.

The terrible weight of the Cross crushed Christ to the ground within a few moments. His shoulders are hunched with pain as He saves Himself from being panned under the Cross with His hand on the road. A Roman soldier raises aloft his stick, and one can feel the impact on the Head of Christ portrayed by the power and strength of that upraised arm. Another soldier saves Christ from being flattened to the ground by holding the arms of the Cross.

4th: Jesus meets His Afflicted Mother.

A touching scene, emphasised by the indifference and callousness in the face and attitude of the solitary soldier, plodding stolidly on to get his work done. There is an interplay of joy and sorrow on the face of Christ—joy to see His beloved Mother even under such distressing circumstances and sorrow that she also must walk His bitter road. Mary, in a deep blue cloak, is a pathetic figure of a mother broken-hearted by the pain and anguish in her Son's face. St. John stands afar off, holding up his hands in an eloquent protest that he is so powerless to help those he loves so deeply.

5th: Simon Helps Jesus to Carry His Cross.

Jesus shows the terrible strain that has been laid upon Him, suffering and pain of mind and body proclaim to all that the words of Isaiah are being fulfilled. Simon takes the cross and although he is fresh, the weight is already beginning to tell as he stumbles along. One of the high priests is in the background applauding Simon, for Simon's help is necessary lest Christ should die on the way and rob His enemies of the satisfaction of seeing Him die on the Cross.

A little boy with a tiny spade leads the processions, as he looks back on Christ with eyes of relief that someone has come to help Him with that heavy load.

6th: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus.

The road widens as Veronica holds aloft for all the noisy mob to see and understand that this is no common malefactor, for look what He has done: He has imprinted His blood-stained face on the towel. The figure of Christ has grown smaller as if the great pressure of the Cross on His body was bending His legs, so that His walk has become a crouch. The perspective here is admirable; a soldier behind the Cross gives the impression of a witness outside the group.

7th: Jesus falls the Second Time.

Christ falls, both hands on the ground, supporting the dead weight of the Cross on His arched shoulder. His face says that His poor body cannot stand much more. The soldiers are getting impatient—there are too many delays on this job, which they want over and done with, and then their dice and fun. See the outstretched arm of the soldier saying to the fallen Christ, "Onward—no more rests—we want to get finished!" A small boy carrying the inscription peers over the Cross, as if he would say something to the broken Man on the ground, but he is afraid to do so.

8th: Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem.

Christ forgets for a moment the strain that is breaking Him, to look with gratitude on this gesture of sympathy from the women of Jerusalem. A mother carrying her child holds her hand to her head in an exquisite picture of grief. Another woman kneels by the wayside, while her grown daughter hides her tears behind the mother's back. Once again the artist introduces the boy carrying the inscription.

9th: Jesus Falls the Third Time.

In His fall Christ lies helpless on the ground, His eyes closed in pain. He cannot go much further. One of the soldiers grabs the cord that is around His waist and tugs at it viciously, "Come on, get up!" Another soldier steadies the cross as it rests on uneven ground.

10th: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments.

One can picture the skin peeling as a soldier grasps the shoulder of Christ with his right hand, and leaning on the cross lying flat on the ground drags the red robe from the torn Body of Christ. Another soldier holds the sleeve and pulls the robe clinging to the open wounds and congealed blood on His scourged back. The face of Christ is contracted with the pain of this inhuman treatment.

11th: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross.

This is a very unusual grouping. Christ is so exhausted that a soldier must support His body while another hammers the nails through the feet. The soldier with the hammer poised to strike is alive with action; a powerful fellow whose strong arms will push that nail through flesh, bone, and sinew until the feet are securely fastened to the wood of the Cross. The other nails lie waiting their turn on the roadway, which has now narrowed down to a path. Bent over the scene is the shielding figure of one of the scribes exulting in his triumph, at last, that the Nazarene is nearly silent for ever. A Roman soldier wearing mail, and holding a spear, looks down on Christ anxiously, wondering whether He will last for the final act of the tragedy.

12th: Jesus Dies Upon the Cross.

It is finished and the peace of death has cleared away the strain in the face of the dead Christ. A join cloth of purple drapes the Body. Mary stands at the right of the Cross, her hands clasped and her head bowed in humble resignation. Mary Magdalene kneels at His feet, her golden tresses flowing down over a rich red coloured dress. St. John still expresses his utter dejection of spirit with hands parted eloquently. The Magdalene holds a cloth under the dripping feet so that that precious Blood may not trickle to the ground. This picture must inspire all who pause to meditate upon his message.

13th: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross.

Mary holds the lifeless broken Body to her, while she supports His outstretched arms with her hands. She gazes sightlessly ahead; the light of her life is extinguished and all seems dark and dreary. The Magdalene cannot control herself as she stands behind, her hands pressed to her face to steady her body rocked with grief. St. John is deeply moved, as he bends down to gaze on the dead Body of the One he loved. In arrangement, colour, background and design this station will hold the attention of all who go the Way of the Cross in this church.

14th: Jesus is Placed in the Sepulchre.

The picture conveys the excitement of the burial by suggesting hurry and movement. The Body of Christ is limp as they lift it into the sepulchre with winding sheets. Mary stands pale and wan as St. John helps Joseph of Arimathea and a friend of his to lay the Body in the tomb. The roadway has disappeared, for it ended at the cross. On the left the crown of thorns hangs suspended on a bush. Before the tomb the wild flowers of Palestine carpet the ground, while a little group of five shamrocks is the artist's concession to a church honouring the name of St. Columba. St. John's face is now free from the questions that lined it on the way to the hill. Joseph of Arimathea looks so kind and considerate—how gently he holds the corner of the sheet. He was one of the few who remembered with gratitude the kindness of Him they crucified. His friend on the other side rests one knee on the wall of the tomb as he guides the Body into the open grave.

PLEASE LEAVE IN
THE CHURCH.