

Dalia Klajumienė

The Expression of the Way of the Cross in the Former Churchyard of the Bernardine Ensemble in Tytuvėnai

Part of the Lithuanian St. Casimir's Province, the Tytuvėnai Bernardine (Friars Minor Observants) convent was established in 1614 and operated till 1864, when it was closed down because of its disobedience to the tsarist Russian authorities. Through the efforts of the Bishop of Samogitia Motiejus Valančius and local residents, the convent ensemble was preserved by transferring it under the auspices of the parish. Till our days, Tytuvėnai remains a special centre of religious attraction because of the painting of the Mother of God in the high altar of the church, famous for its miracles, the stations of the Way of the Cross set up in the arcades of the churchyard fence, and the Chapel of the Holy Stairs built in the centre of the churchyard.

In the Western church, the history of the cult of the Way of the Cross, quite distinct and rich in various transformations, began in the 11th century. The number of the Stations of the Cross, or "Christ's falls", fluctuated for a long time. In religious literature, their number varied from 7 to 32. In 1726, by his bull *Inter plurimum* Pope Benedict XIII granted a general indulgence for the pilgrims who passed the Way of the Cross, and in 1731, Pope Clemens XII by his breve *Exponi nobis* and Pope Benedict XIV by his breve *Cum tanta* granted the Franciscan and Bernardine friars the right to erect or supervise the erection of the Stations of the Cross in all churches and chapels from 1741. Since then, parochial churches, before the erection of the Stations of the Cross, were also obliged to receive permission from the nearest Franciscan/Bernardine convent. Besides, in 1730, a cycle of obligatory fourteen stations, which exists till our days, was confirmed. Along with these obligatory episodes of Christ's passions, which depicted the action from the moment when the Redeemer was condemned to death, till His death and burial, additional episodes often emerged. In more developed cycles, most frequently created in monastery environment, in addition to the fourteen obligatory stations, the history of Christ's arrest was told in great detail, drawing inspiration from the Gospels. The latter plots were not strictly prescribed, thus the number of the stations and the choice of the plots was determined by the competence and pious aims of the compiler of the iconographic program.

It was not before the 18th century that separate galleries dedicated to the Way of the Cross began to be established in Bernardine convents in Poland and Lithuania. The first examples date back to the 1730s: in Krakow, the Way of the Cross was erected ca. 1733, and in Vilnius – in the first half of the 18th century (destroyed during a fire in 1749). It is not clear when the first Way of the Cross was erected in Tytuvėnai. Most probably it happened in the first half of the 18th century as well. In 1754, upon his visit in Tytuvėnai, Bishop Antanas Domininkas Tiškevičius mentioned that there was the Way of the Holy Cross with abundant arches forming a passage in front of the church. It confirms that the present Way of the Cross, laid out extensively in the churchyard, is not the first. One can only guess that the former gallery was originally wooden, and later, in the second half of the 18th century, was rebuilt of brick.

The Stations of the Cross of the ensemble of the Bernardine convent in Tytuvėnai that have survived till our days were created in the last quarter of the 18th century, when a square churchyard with arcades was built at the church. Strict and alongside harmonious arrangement of the Stations of the Cross in the arcade galleries of the churchyard fence, and the Chapel of the Holy Stairs in the centre of the churchyard makes this ensemble uncommon and exceptional in the context of other Bernardine churches in Lithuania. The ensemble of 39 Stations of the Cross consists of 14 gypsum high-reliefs, which depict 14 obligatory stations, and 25 compositions painted on the wall, which reflect the course of Christ's trial at Pilate's court or, in other words, the history of Christ's condemnation to death. The stations painted in *al secco* technique are greatly deteriorated, but the surviving guide to the "Calvary" of Tytuvėnai published in 1781 allows us to reconstruct their plots.