

Jesus and Pilate

Column 1 (top) - Painted in Kenya, this scene is set in a dry desert landscape where a crowned Pilate stands by the tree of judgment, declaring, "I find no case against this man." Facing Jesus whose head is bent in humility and silence, Pilate appeals to the crowd who continue arguing against him. In this illustration, a gathering of village elders, a feathered warrior and a curious "mob" of villagers dressed in traditional African clothes -- press in on Jesus creating tension, as the texts from Scriptures are read aloud and come alive again for the people of Lodwar, Kenya. However, this is not play-acting, but an increasingly serious and necessary ritual of survival and prayer for this East African village. Recently, the Turkana people had been overlooked by government development programs bringing greater poverty and sickness to an already impoverished people. Among many responses, the local Bishop who understood their enduring spirituality in the face of suffering, gathered a group of villagers to design the Stations of the Cross for the Cathedral -- reflecting Jesus journey from Judgment to his Resurrection in the context of African village life. This tree for example, was picked by consent of the whole village for Pilate's place of Judgment because it was one of ugliest spots in town!! The designers and those acting out the Via Dolorosa stayed close to the traditional story as the people deepen their love of the Gospels -- station by station identifying with Jesus' sufferings.

Column 1 (bottom) - *Christ before Pilate* is similarly traditional in appearance, though painted 500 years earlier as a meditation for the walls of a contemplative monastery. For Italian artist Jacopo Carucci de Pontormo, the scene is set in 16th century Florence. According to religious and art critics, Pontormo is depicting a moment of high significance about to happen. As Pilate is just about to wash his hand of condemning Jesus, the narrative stress invites the viewer to enter and complete the event. The action builds to the climactic question: "Who are you?" This is a compelling question. It resonates with Pilate's terror and growing desperation with the situation and reflects to the praying monk to consider and meditate on his own reply. Who do you say I am? The artist's response to this question was to discover his answer by painting a cycle of Jesus' Passion and Death within the monastery's cloister. His five frescos include: Christ in Gethsemane, Christ Before Pilate, Christ on the Road to Calvary, a Pieta and The Resurrection. Taught by Leonardo da Vinci and praised by Michelangelo, Pontormo's mastery as a draughtsman was appreciated throughout his life, as both realistic and psychologically intense.

Column 2 (top)

The Guilty Hand painted in mixed media by California artist, Kevin Rolly sets the first station in a very crowded intimate space where Jesus stands out as the nearest, largest, bare-chested figure looking straight into our eyes. He is crowned with thorns and given a staff to mock his kingship, while from a balcony above him, silhouette figures shout to drown out Pilate's uncertain, placating words. Pilate, spotlighted to the left, yells his final judgment, raising his guilty hand, "Take Him." Tucked into the lower-left are two women who are perhaps, among those following him to Calvary. An old 2nd Century legend taken from the apocryphal Gospel of Pilate, proclaimed that Veronica attended Jesus' trial and defended Him publicly. This legend persists among Europeans, and Orthodox traditions. For Kevin Rolly, his stations of the cross began not as art, but as an actual journey -- the first journey having been made by Jesus himself on the way to the cross. From the earliest days of Christianity, pilgrims retraced his steps along Jerusalem's "Way of Sorrow." Rolly brings us his own intimate meditations of the Stations whose unusual effects are created, with photographic negatives on which he paints with oils, sometimes before an audience. For him it is not just as an artistic process, but as an act of living worship.

Column 2 (bottom)

Crowned with Thorns American artist Luc Freymanc sketches the chaotic pain within the head and body of Jesus -- humiliated, condemned and alone. Paradoxically, in its own simple, unadorned way it is beautiful -- *A Broken Beauty* -- a Redemptive Incarnation. Freymanc sketched his first pen and ink drawing of Christ, the evening his father died and had it included with his father's obituary. Now, years later, he has produced thousand of depictions of Christ, and draws another almost daily, as his own personal form of visual meditation.

Column 3 (top)

Condemned to Death was painted by Argentine artist, Aldo Perez Esquivel, the 1980 Nobel Prize winner for his work in Global Economics that shifts the focus from exploitation, and profit to center on improving the lives of people. His theme here is Human Rights and the text, Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified. Christ is led from prison watched by the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires -- the mothers of the disappeared. Forbidden by the government to speak of their "Disappeared Children," the women in white bandanas nevertheless, risk life and limb to stand silently in front the government building every Thursday for years, silently holding a photo of a lost son, daughter or spouse. The posters they carry read -- "No more repression: Basta -- Enough!" and plead, "Where is my son?" Those who served the poor or worked to change oppressive structures were "disappeared" by the authorities, that is, without a trial they were summarily dumped alive, into rivers and forests from a helicopter. Esquivel writes, "Jesus himself is also a victim of false accusation, of unfair arrest and torture. He can be experienced in and with those who suffer. For those who have faith the act of turning to the oppressed, of serving the poor, of search for freedom from exploitative structures, this is also and act of love for the suffering Christ. By the same token, Resurrection will be experienced whenever life is defended."

