

## Jesus and Mary

1. & 3. These two sculptures depict a profound and life-long intimacy between Jesus and Mary. He comforts and supports his Mom, and Mary in turn, embraces her Son and his unthinkable sufferings. The artists are unnamed, but gratefully appreciated. In this collage they frame and extend the significance of the middle image when Mary learned from Simeon that her own heart would be broken with this Child. He is destined for the rise and fall of many -- He will be a stumbling block for many, a sign-rejected. And to His Mother: Your own heart will be broken and your soul pierced with grief. The Sorrowful Mother knew life-long that hers and her Son's love for each other would be the source of their mutual suffering.

2.

*A Sword Shall Pierce Her Heart* by American artist, Daniel Bonnell portrays Mary surrounded by a shimmering golden light - full of grace and yet she bends over this Child as to protect and rescue him from the sorrow she is already suffering for him. Her self-less compassion is like many a mother we've seen, watching her injured child rushed off to an emergency room, or seeing him or her going off to war. The painting is for the artist a reminder that he too must reaffirm his own commitment to compassion and unselfish love of the Gospels daily. He writes: my paintings are helping me work out my salvation -- created from a place of half-doubt, yet willing to risk it all again. Thus, they are rough, bold, often dark and not the perfect representational images found in Cathedrals. My life and my art seek daily to be abandoned to Jesus Christ. For viewers, he adds: my work is completed only by you. My art begs you to remove layer upon layer of meaning, as if each painting yearns to tell you a secret.

4.

Even today in Lodwar, Kenya, where the Turkana people make the Gospel their own by reenacting the Via Dolorosa set in their village. Disregarding any danger to herself, Mary reaches out to follow, comfort and be with her: "condemned" Son. The sufferings of Christ and his Mother are central to Turkana spirituality and prayer. The people suffer much from diseases, sickness, insecurity and hunger and have been left behind in Kenya's struggle for development. So when they saw a Jesus who looked like them suffering and being crucified right there on their familiar streets, they immediately identified closely with him. An American Sister of Notre Dame trained a several young Kenyan artists to paint these stations that would reflect their authentic spirituality in the faces, gestures, clothes and places. The whole village decided that the soldiers would be Kenyan - wearing traditional dress, and not Roman and the settings would include Lodwar's shops and houses in the background, as you can see in this painting. The response of local Christians was enthusiastic. "That's our shop on the corner." as they stared at the stations discussing them excitedly. "These new stations help us remember that Jesus is still present among us." and so the roots of the Gospel sink a little deeper here in Kenya.

5.

*Station Four* by American artist Gwyneth Leech is the Via Dolorosa painted in the devastating setting of the War in Iraq. She used newspaper photos of Arab and Western models, Muslims and Christians to encompass the innocent people who were caught up in war and violence: civilians, refugees, the unjustly accused who had died in detention, the grief-stricken families of hostages and bomb victims. Unlike most images of Mary as a statuesque and peaceful observer, this Mary is a participant as she meets her dying Son; she is as stunned in utter grief as the face of a chador-clad Iraqi mother standing outside Abu Ghraib prison, waiting for news of a missing son. This work was commissioned by a human-rights minded parish in Connecticut who suggested the Iraqi War as the setting for their stations. Leech's vision for these very controversial works is a startling recapitulation Christ's suffering: a metaphor for the suffering and necessity of compassion in today's frightening world of war, violence and terrorism.

