

Jesus and Veronica

1. The Holy Veil of Veronica imprinted by blood and sweat with the Real Face of Jesus has held significance among early Christians since the second century. However, in this contemporary painting by Brother Mickey McGrath, a kindhearted Veronica offers and envelopes Jesus in her apron. She is a motherly figure, openly affectionate, as if comforting her child in a fulsome and unconditional love. Ironically, according to early legends, she is returning a favor as many believed in and celebrated her as the same woman that Jesus cured of a blood disorder by touching Christ's hem. American artist Brother Mickey McGrath, O.S.F. is also a writer and speaker who loves exploring the relationship between art and faith -- the healing power of art, and its ability to lead us to light and grace. In the works he produces for chapels, books and pamphlets, he lives by a motto of his order founded by St. Francis de Sales: Be who you are and be that perfectly well.

2. Veronica and The Face of Jesus. The intimacy of her action in the face of real danger is captured visually by California artist Randy Dixon and her audaciousness is celebrated in a Benedictine prayer: Showing himself in the hands of Veronica \ giving this woman \ the trace of his face
God shows his nearness in the face of the stranger. God takes off his mask \ but in doing so adopts another; \ for once we have looked
on the face of God \ never, never again \ can we miss the stranger among us. Bay area artist, Randy Dixon's sketches for a stations of the cross may be found in the Newman Center, Holy Spirit parish in Berkeley and St. Mary's Church in Lakeport, CA.

3. Station Six by American artist Gwyneth Leech is again set in the devastating context of the Iraqi War, where she continues to mix ethnicities from East and West, using photos of Muslims, Christian and Jews, the innocent bystanders and grieving families as her models for the stations. In Station 6, she depicts Veronica is an Arab woman offering solace to a African Jewish Jesus. And behind them both is a reference to American grief, in the flames, smoke and skeletal remains of burning buildings -- a reference to the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Leech uses it to show compassion as on that day, many strangers stepped out to help people they never knew. One viewer commented: "I've always thought it so gutsy of Veronica to step forward in those days when Jesus was so unpopular. She stood out and gave what she had, her veil -- all the greater symbol here among the strict customs of an Arab Muslim community. These Stations were commissioned by a human-rights-minded parish in Connecticut who suggested the Iraqi War as the setting for their stations and defended Leeches paintings against an irate and frightened public.

4.
Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus "when women dare to show compassion on the dying." This loving woman in India, another Veronica, is herself a truly potent Icon for meditation. As do all the Maryknoll poster-stations, this image urging us to Love -- as I have... Walk with the sick, the mentally different, the condemned, the dying and those on death row. And love the unwanted, unwashed, ungrateful, grieving, disturbed and utterly annoying. Love the little ones and yourself as I have loved.

5.
In Station VI painted by British artist Sister Mary Lawrence, RSM, we are drawn into the action of Jesus bending toward Veronica -- humbling grateful, accepting her risky gift of compassion. Without a word spoken we see on her face, not apprehension or fear, but a purely unselfish, self-giving Love. There is a reciprocal love: meeting eye to eye - she offers her veil -- all that she has -- and he leaves an image of his face on her mind, heart, body and soul. Blessed are those who see the face of God, and live. Sister Mary Lawrence, RSM was trained in London and a regular, prize-winning exhibitor in New Zealand, Australia, Paris and Rome.

6. Veronica painted by British artist David O'Connell is a bit difficult to decipher. His 1960s style divides images into seemingly incoherent shafts of light, as seen in stained glass windows. His work requires time and effort to make out. But as the brochure printed by his Chichester church encourages, time and prayer spent lingering with each painting will be amply rewarded. The viewer is distanced somewhat from the exchange by seeing the drama from a point above and outside their mutual interaction.. The soft colors and geometric lines, nevertheless invite us to participate in the drama of seeing Jesus' grateful, but agonized face meeting with Veronica, in the very moment she is offering her gift of solace and concern



VERONICA VEIL OF VERONICA