

Jesus and the Holy Women

1.

For Holy Saturday the Ukrainian artist, Roxolana Luczakowsky groups four huddled mourners, each leaning on another for comfort and support. It is sundown of Good Friday and the Sabbath begins for them -- a day of wounded silence and, this year, inconceivable memories. Forgive them, he had said in his dying breath. Forgiveness may heal, but was it too soon for them-- numbed, emptied out, speechless? How can they forgive such atrocities? Who can forgive such brutality done to an innocent and compassionate person? Forgiveness for most of us, takes time. Holocaust survivor and author, Ellie Wiesel, complemented and thanked the German Bundestag in a speech to the lawmakers in 1999. You have given us extended benefits, made restitution for our lost businesses and helped us more than any other European country. But you have not yet asked the Jewish people for our forgiveness. The next generation is beginning a new healing as small groups of Jewish and German children now meet and plan for a better future together. The artist herself, Roxolana Luczakowsky Armstrong may have processed her own forgiveness as she and her family were forced to escape to the U.S. from a Soviet persecution after World War II. Catholic scholar, activist, writer and artist Roxolana painted her image of refugees in grief and prayer, beginning another Shabbat Shalom (that is, in peace).

2.

In *The Emptied Cross*, an unnamed graphic artist delivers another sunset, closing Friday's cruelties. The migrant worker-prayer at Station Thirteen reads: Your mutilated body is taken down from the cross and placed in the arms of your mother. Jesus, I know what a mutilated body is. I have held in my arms the body of a friend who was assaulted and killed when we tried to come to the United States. What can we do? We have to have faith that death is not in vain and believe in the resurrection. Jesus, mutilated, mocked and sadistically tormented by soldiers and others, teach us to forgive those in this society who mutilate our hope, our dreams and our bodies.

3.

Two Marys sit outside the tomb in view of Calvary -- the grieving mother and friend say nothing. The poignancy and thoughtful simplicity of French artist, James Tissot's watercolor leaves me speechless. The vivid realism of James Tissot's religious paintings is steeped in details from his first-hand archeological knowledge of the Holy Land's landscapes, customs and clothes. Exiled from France for political reasons, he turned his back on the ever popular Impressionist and continued to paint life-like watercolor depictions of biblical events, over 300 on just the last three days of Holy Week alone!!

4

In the Tomb An eloquent silence - this Jesus seems thoroughly alone, although tradition has him visiting all our ancestors, back to our first parents -- preparing them to be released in his Resurrection. For Canadian artist, Michael O'Brien his stark painting reflects the heavens and the earth. Darkness had covered the earth, as Jesus' death cry echoed across Calvary, penetrating to the heavens and the depths of hell. It is as if all light has been extinguished -- though it is only eclipsed. The beauty in creation is an expression of the beauty of the One who created it. It is language—incarnate words from our Father in Heaven, given and redeemed through the Son, by the fire of the Holy Spirit. If there are things in Nature, or in the Arts, that bring us to our knees in reverence and awe, how much more will be our encounter with the hidden face of God in the light of eternity! Born of "wonder" is a reverent awe before a mystery—a mystery which somehow speaks to our souls, telling us that this, here and now, is a moment of discovery, an unveiling in supra-rational modes of the true meaning of my life.

5.

Pieta of Jesus and Mary With Nicodemus, Joseph of Aramethea and the Holy Women. Artist of first image in this collage, Catholic artist Roxolana Luczakowsky Armstrong includes in her Pieta -- paints all who followed Jesus to the end and beyond. These figures huddle in grief and service, models for those whose special ministry it is to listen to and care for the dying, and for those who wash, anoint and prepare the body for burial, another silent ministry. These are precious gifts to us hidden in the Mystery of the Incarnation. The 14th century mystic, Mechtilde of Magdeburg wrote of God's silence as an Eloquent Absence: forever nameless; forever unconceived; forever unrepresented; forever unknown; yet forever felt in the soul.

6.

Preparing for Burial Inspired by 16th century Flemish painter Petrus Christus, New York artist, Gweneth Leech painted Jesus' dead body in foreground about to be wrapped for burial. Mary, his mother reaches out to gently touch his shoulder as if were asleep. This gesture is based on the photo of another mother grieving her dead child from Beslan in Russia. Other figures were inspired by American parents grieving the loss of their son in an Iraqi prison, and a family claiming the remains of their daughter, the victim of a car bomb. Behind is the open mouth of the tomb with the wheel of stone waiting to be rolled into place. For one senior American officer and military chaplain serving in Iraq, his assessment was "for someone to place Christ walking to the cross in the context of Abu Ghraib and the street violence in Iraq is healing in a way I didn't think I'd ever know."

