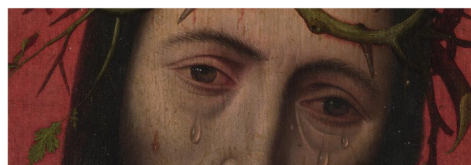


SCRIPTURE & ART



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our new small group series: *Scripture and Art*. In order to expand our normal content and appeal to a broader interest, we will renew our focus on Jesus Christ by exploring how art was influenced by His life and teachings. We can see through their work how the artists may give us a deeper perspective to these scriptural events; in this series, specifically on the events leading up to and during Holy Week.

As we move through each session, one focus will be thinking about how the artists choose to represent Jesus – God who became man. Artists faced many dilemmas when painting Jesus Christ: deciding what He looked like, how His suffering could be shown as not just personal but cosmic (*beyond earth; immeasurably extended in time and space*), how His human and divine nature could both be made clear at the same time. Biblical texts and commentators often solve this kind of problem by indicating the ungraspable nature of God through contradiction: He is both Prince of Peace and the Suffering Servant, King of kings and yet *despised and rejected by men*, Savior and Sacrifice, the sheep and the shepherd – paradoxes resonant and powerful in language, but almost impossible to paint.

These dualities effect how we take in and interpret sacred art. We should take the time to notice what is different in the way Christ is portrayed, perhaps there is some dissonance, disruption or disjunction that unsettles us. This leads us to consider the impossibility of representing the divine, and the difficulty of showing Christ in His humanity; how He is like us, but also very unlike us. This feeling extends to our human comprehension of the mystery of the incarnation. It is something our minds can never fully encompass or understand. This process of seeing Christ in a different perspective, but also realizing the painter's and our own inability to fully grasp Jesus Christ, true God and true man, should leave us with a sense of humility and wonder.

In the hands of the great artists, the different moments and aspects of Christ's life become archetypes of all human experience. The Virgin nursing her son conveys the feelings every mother has for her child. Christ mocked is innocence and goodness beset by violence. In the suffering Christ, we encounter the pain of the world. And Christ risen and appearing to Mary is a universal reaffirmation that love cannot be destroyed by death.

As we explore *Scripture and Art* over the next few sessions, we may see our own lives, feelings and emotions reflected in these portrayals of Christ. Furthermore, we will be humbled and moved to adoration as we explore these moments of Christ's life, death, and resurrection and begin to realize the magnitude and impact of the Divine incarnating into human form. Please allow yourself to have an open mind and heart as you look and discover not only the feelings of the artist, but moreover, a different view of the stories which we believe we know so well.

TEMPTATIONS

Luke 4:1-13

The Temptation in the Wilderness
Briton Rivière
Painted 1898

THE GARDEN

Matthew 26:36-56

The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane
Studio of El Greco
Painted in the 1590s

THE TRIAL

John 18:12-38; Matthew 26:57-68

Christ before the High Priest
Gerrit van Honthorst
Painted in 1617

CROWN OF THORNS

Matthew 27:26-31; Isaiah 53:3-5;
Lamentations 1:12

Christ crowned with Thorns
Jan Mostaert
Painted in around 1516

PIETA

Luke 2:25-35; Psalm 22:1-19; John 19:31-38

The Laufacher Pieta
Tilman Riemenschneider
Sculpted around 1520

EASTER MORNING

John 20:1-18

Noli Me Tangere
Fra Angelico
Painted in the mid-1400s

EMMAUS

Luke 24:13-35

The Supper at Emmaus
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio
Painted in 1601

THOMAS

John 20:19-29

Doubting Thomas
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio
Painted in 1602

SCRIPTURE & ART

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SCRIPTURE

READ LUKE 4:1-13

Additional Commentary:

All three temptations invite displays of power. Each engages a different dimension critical to competing conceptions of the Messiah – the material/economic, the political, and the religious. We want God to hold authority in all three of these arenas, but to each of these, Jesus says “No.” *My kingdom is not of this world* (John 18:36).

The details and themes of the temptations link Jesus to the Israelites wandering in the desert. Like the Israelites, Jesus is hungry in the wilderness. He is also tempted to fall down and worship. The setting, the symbolism of the 40 days, Jesus' responses all taken from Deuteronomy, point to the trials of Israel with one critical difference: where they succumbed to their temptations, the Son of God emerges faithful, true, and strengthened in His identity. Again, showing that Jesus Christ is the true man as God intended man to be (Ephesians 4:13, 1 Corinthians 15:22). They also foreshadow the future narrative of Jesus' life on earth. In His ministry, as in His temptations, He moves from the wilderness to the mountain to the temple.

QUESTIONS

1. The 40 days of Lent signify the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. Lent is a time of *reflection* and *repentance*. How will you remain focused on these things for the next few weeks? What steps will you take to struggle against the temptation to let it pass by without meaning?
2. Discuss the similarities and differences between Jesus' time in the wilderness and the Israelites.
3. What do Jesus' replies teach us about how we can fight temptations?
4. Discuss how you visualize what you have just heard in the Bible reading. What picture forms in your mind?

[illegible]

ART

Please watch the corresponding video on the piece of artwork named below. *(Facilitators can download an additional guide including the commentary and artwork from the video.)*

The Temptation in the Wilderness

Briton Riviere · 1898

QUESTIONS

- 1. What struck you about the work of art?
- 2. How is it different from what you visualized? How is it similar?
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- 4. What new realization or deeper perspective has this discussion brought to your understanding of Jesus Christ?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

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Lined area for student responses to questions and reflection.

SCRIPTURE & ART THE GARDEN

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SCRIPTURE

READ **MATTHEW 26:36-56**

Additional Commentary:

Matthew says *He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed*. Mark uses even stronger verbs to describe the feelings that assault Jesus: *horror and dismay came over Him*. The book of Hebrews also recounts this event with vivid words: *when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death* (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus says to His disciples, *I am deeply grieved, even to death* (v. 38). The Gospel writers portray Jesus with unflinching honesty in these dark moments in the garden.

Jesus prays: *O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will* (v. 39). On its simplest level the cup is a metaphor for death. Earlier Jesus asked the sons of Zebedee, *"Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"* (20:21-22). There the cup clearly refers to death; their deaths along with His. In the garden, there is likely a deeper, more disturbing aspect to the image. The prophets of Israel had often used the metaphor of a cup to symbolize the judgement and wrath of God (Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 25:15-28). It is the drinking of this cup, symbol of the awesome judgement of God on the full range of human sinfulness, that fills Jesus with such intense anguish. Nevertheless, He submits fully and freely to the will of God – *not as I will, but as You will*. As Jesus had taught His disciples, so He now prays His own "Lord's Prayer" – *Your will be done*.

Jesus goes two more times to pray. As He faced a threefold temptation by the devil in the wilderness, so now in the garden He faces a threefold inner struggle in fully submitting to the cup, *even unto death*. We can perhaps see a similarity in Jesus' struggle with His human fear and vulnerability, and the disciples struggle with their human weakness in trying to stave off sleep. Jesus' reminder to them, *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak* – seems a fitting reflection on both.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the emotions and words that describe Jesus' prayer. What do these descriptions tell you about Jesus? What can we learn from Jesus' prayer here in the garden?
2. Discuss the symbolism of "the cup" that Jesus prays about.
3. Discuss Jesus' words and reactions to His arrest (v.47-56).
4. Discuss how you visualize what you have just heard in the Bible reading. What picture forms in your mind?

[illegible]

ART

Please watch the corresponding video on the piece of artwork named below. *(Facilitators can download an additional guide including the commentary and artwork from the video.)*

The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane

Studio of El Greco · 1590s

QUESTIONS

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[illegible]

SCRIPTURE & ART THE TRIAL

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SCRIPTURE

READ JOHN 18:12-38

Additional Commentary:

The high priest's line of questioning reflects the categories of the false prophet in Deuteronomy 13:2-6; 18:20: one who leads others astray and falsely presumes to speak in God's name (teaching). Jesus answers boldly, summing up His ministry in speech characteristic of God in Second Isaiah (Isaiah 45:18-19, 48:16). The high priest seems to fade into the background, his authority diminished; not having anything to say. Jesus, in both His presence and demeanor commands respect; He has resolve in His purpose. Jesus is the true high priest, the authentic conduit of God's revelation, the new mediator between God and humanity (1 John 2:1-2).

READ **MATTHEW 26:57–68**

Additional Commentary:

We may see a bit of ourselves in Caiaphas as he questions Jesus. How often do we resist the newness that God brings continually through Jesus Christ, and instead cling to lifeless but familiar traditions? Are we too invested in old understandings to see the transformative truth that stands before us in Jesus Christ? We should be careful to so quickly judge the high priest, when we ourselves might be on his side of the table, rather than standing with Jesus. The way of Jesus is so challenging that it causes even His fiercest supporters – like Peter – to hide safely in the shadows. A life committed to transformation is one connected with struggle. If there is nothing in our understanding of Jesus that stretches us, or requires us to surrender an old pattern of thinking or living for new ones – then our view of Jesus is incomplete.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Jesus' responses to His questioning by the high priests and Pilate.
2. How could we be like Caiaphas? How could we be like Pilate - *washing our hands of responsibility* (Matthew 27:24)? How could we be like Peter?
3. What is ironic about the questions asked of Jesus or even about these men putting Him on trial?
4. Discuss how you visualize what you have just heard in the Bible reading. What picture forms in your mind?

[illegible]

ART

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Christ before the High Priest

Gerrit van Honthorst · 1617

QUESTIONS

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CROWN OF THORNS

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SCRIPTURE

READ **MATTHEW 27:26–31;**
ISAIAH 53:3–5; LAMENTATIONS 1:12

Additional Commentary:

The body and blood of Jesus, given for you. We hear this phrase in every divine service. How often do we stop to think about what it really means? What does it mean to give your body and blood?

The Suffering Servant written of in Isaiah foreshadows the torture and death of Jesus Christ. Let's take a closer look at these verses, starting with verse 3: *He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*

The word *despised* is used twice in verse three, which emphasizes that the Servant was not only misunderstood, but was even detested and looked at with contempt. And in hiding their faces, far from following Him, they shunned Him. The word *esteem* in this verse is actually an accounting word, a reckoning of value. The last line of verse 3 drives home the point that when appraised by the people who saw Him, the Servant had no value in their eyes; therefore, His suffering was without worth.

Verses 4 and 5 explain the previous verses; they tell us why the Servant suffered – for the sins of mankind. Let's start with verse 4: *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.* Yes, the Servant was a *Man of sorrows*, but they were not His own – they were ours. Another meaning for the word *smitten* is *struck down, humiliated*. This line exposes that those who saw His suffering assumed that it was from God and therefore rightfully deserved.

The next verse, however, reveals the truth: *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.* The Servant suffered for *our* sin – His sacrifice was a substitute for *our* punishment, and through His pain and wounds *our* alienation from God was healed and restored. At some moment this week, read these verses again and take the time to see the rawness and pain that the author so poetically expresses. The words give a picture of real and horrible suffering that should not be lost on us.

QUESTIONS

1. How do the verses in Isaiah foreshadow the verses from Matthew?
2. Discuss what the verses in Isaiah mean, using the commentary to guide you. How could recalling these words during Holy Communion impact your celebration of Jesus' body and blood? What does it mean that Jesus gave *His body and blood for you*?
3. *Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow.* Is there any sorrow like that of Jesus' suffering and death? Why is His death different?
4. Discuss how you visualize what you have just heard in the Bible reading. What picture forms in your mind?

[illegible]

ART

Please watch the corresponding video on the piece of artwork named below. (*Facilitators can download an additional guide including the commentary and artwork from the video.*)

Christ crowned with Thorns

Jan Mostaert · around 1516

QUESTIONS

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SCRIPTURE & ART PIETA

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SCRIPTURE

READ **LUKE 2:25-35; PSALM 22:1-19; JOHN 19:31-38**

Additional Commentary:

Jesus answered every one of Satan's temptations with passages from Deuteronomy. As He was carrying the cross, He cited the prophet Hosea, and as He was dying on the cross, He quoted both Psalm 22 and Psalm 31. In this set of verses, which take us through a spectrum of human emotions, we find layers of foreshadowing; feelings of abandonment, the agony of crucifixion, a pierced side, a mother's sorrow.

She wept uncontrollable tears; she looked at the wounds in His hands and side, now one, now the other; she gazed at His face and head and saw the marks of the thorns, the tearing of His beard, His face filthy with spit and blood, His shorn head; and she could not cease from weeping and looking at Him... "My Son, I hold you in my lap dead... You abandoned Yourself for love of mankind, whom You wished to redeem. Hard and exceedingly painful is this redemption, in which I rejoice for the sake of the salvation of man."

An excerpt from *Meditations on the Life of Christ*
by a 13th century Franciscan writer

QUESTIONS

1. How does Psalm 22 foreshadow John 19? How do both point back to Luke 2?
2. Why do you think Jesus quoted Scripture in difficult moments of His life? What can we learn from that?
3. How does the excerpt from *Meditations on the Life of Christ* expand your understanding of *the sword that pierced Mary's soul*?
4. Discuss how you visualize what you have just heard in the Bible reading. What picture forms in your mind?

ART

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The Laufacher Pieta

Tilman Riemenschneider · around the 1520s

QUESTIONS

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Lined area for student responses to questions and reflection.

EASTER MORNING

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SCRIPTURE

READ JOHN 20:1-18

Additional Commentary:

To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear His voice; and He calls His own sheep by name... (John 10:3). Just as Jesus called Lazarus by name to bring him out from his tomb, so here, Jesus calls Mary by name to bring her out of her grief.

In all the Gospel accounts, women are the closest witnesses to both Christ's crucifixion *and* resurrection (Matthew 27:56 and 28:1, Mark 15:40 and 16:1, Luke 23:49 and 24:10). While the other gospels have accounts of multiple women going to the tomb, the experience of Mary Magdalene meeting Jesus at the tomb is unique to the book of John.

When Jesus repeats the angels' question: *Woman, why are you weeping?*, with great irony she asks Him where Jesus' body is (she asks the living Jesus to give back the dead one). The scene is charged with emotion, drama, and paradox as Mary's increasingly agonized search for Jesus' body results in her recognition when He speaks her name. Jesus responds to Mary's grasp by saying, *Do not cling to Me*.

There can be no clinging to what was. *It is Easter morning – everything is new.*

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the different reactions of Peter, "the other" disciple, and Mary to the empty tomb.
2. Why do you think Mary didn't recognize Jesus until He called her by name? Discuss how she may have felt in that moment.
3. What is the significance of Jesus saying: *Do not cling to Me*. What deeper meaning could these words have at this point in the life of Jesus Christ? What deeper meaning could these words have for His disciples?
4. Discuss how you visualize what you have just heard in the Bible reading. What picture forms in your mind?

ART

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Noli Me Tangere

Fra Angelico · mid-1400s

QUESTIONS

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[illegible]

SCRIPTURE & ART EMMAUS

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SCRIPTURE

READ LUKE 24:13-35

Additional Commentary:

On the third day after the crucifixion, two of Jesus's disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. On the road they met the resurrected Christ, but failed to recognize Him. He questioned them about what had happened, and explained that Christ had to suffer in order to enter into His kingdom. That evening He joined them for supper and ... *He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight* (Luke 24: 30–31).

The disciples make a journey all disciples are called to travel: from knowledge to encounter, from information to transformation.

QUESTIONS

1. Based on the biblical account, what were the two disciples struggling with as they walked to Emmaus? How did the disguised Jesus bring light to the subject?
2. Why do you think they knew Him *in the breaking of the bread*?
3. Have you ever had an experience where your heart burned in encountering Christ? (In a divine service, in discussion, in reading the Bible, etc.) Share your experience.
4. Discuss how you visualize what you have just heard in the Bible reading. What picture forms in your mind?

[illegible]

ART

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The Supper at Emmaus

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio · 1601

QUESTIONS

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NOTE:

As we look at the painting, from our seat near the basket of fruit, we are afforded a glimpse of another clue about the identity of the mysterious traveler: **the partial shadow of a fish**. The symbolism of the fish is a visual pun based on an acrostic. The first letters of the Greek phrase, *Jesus Christ/Son of God/Savior*, formed the Greek word for fish, *ichthys*. But there are many additional reasons why the fish became an enduring symbol of Christ. Its native element, water, recalls the waters of baptism necessary for salvation. By following Christ, the disciples became fishers of men (Mark 1:17, Luke 5:10).

In the fish, the initials of a declaration of faith became a word, the word a sign, the sign an image that recalls entire texts, giving rise to a host of allegorical interpretations.

[illegible]

SCRIPTURE & ART THOMAS

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SCRIPTURE

READ JOHN 20:19-29

Additional Commentary:

As we journey through Jesus' many encounters with His disciples after His resurrection, we see a common theme. Mary is so consumed by grief and loss that she does not recognize Him until He calls her name. After his denial of Christ, Peter needs to be brought back into relationship with Jesus by the sea. Thomas is not persuaded by the testimony of others and cannot recognize Christ until he touches His wounds. Each has a potential barrier to faith, and in each instance the Risen Lord gives each one His attention to heal their faithlessness.

Perhaps the story is not so much about Thomas at all, but rather *the incredible approachability of God*. Jesus Christ allowed Thomas to satisfy his personal doubts in allowing him to touch His wounds. Jesus invited him to experience something uniquely intimate and Thomas was instantly changed because of it. His response, *My Lord and my God*, expresses the deeply personal way he interpreted this encounter with Christ; a profession unheard before, truthfully declaring that *Jesus Christ is God!*

QUESTIONS

1. What do we learn from the various encounters of the disciples with the Risen Christ?
2. Through this series, what have you learned about *the incredible approachability of God*? What have you learned about Jesus' humanity? What have you learned about His divinity?
3. In chiding Thomas, how are Jesus' words, *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*, a message for us?
4. Discuss how you visualize what you have just heard in the Bible reading. What picture forms in your mind?

[illegible]

ART

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Doubting Thomas

also known as **The Incredulity of Saint Thomas**
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio · 1602

QUESTIONS

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4. What new realization or deeper perspective has this discussion brought to your understanding of Jesus Christ?
5. What challenged you about this series? What did you enjoy?

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[illegible]

RESOURCES

Video commentaries taken in part from:

Finaldi, Gabriele. *The Image of Christ*. London: National Gallery Company Limited, 2000.

Hall, Marcia. *The Sacred Image in the Age of Art*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011.

Reddaway, Chloe. *Strangeness and Recognition: Mystery and Familiarity in Renaissance Paintings of Christ*. Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2019.

Reddaway, Chloe. *Transformations in Persons and Paint: Visual Theology, Historical Images, and the Modern Viewer*. Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2015.

The Visual Commentary on Scripture, (thevcs.org) by Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London.

The National Gallery, (nationalgallery.org) by The National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London.

