

# The Death of Jesus in Art

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**Holy Week:** Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday.

The **Passion** (L. *passio* suffering) refers to the suffering of Jesus Christ from after the Last Supper through Burial.

- Agony in the Garden
- Betrayal and Arrest
- Trials before Jewish & Roman Authorities (Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod)
- Sentence
- The Way to the Cross
- Crucifixion
- Burial

These events have been represented frequently in art, both as part of an iconographic program (a sequence of images) and as individual works.

## Iconographic Program

### 1. Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy

Arian cathedral built by Theodoric the Great (504), rededicated to Orthodox worship (561). (UNESCO WHS, 1996). Series of 13 mosaics: Last Supper—two post-resurrection appearances.

### 2. Monreale Cathedral, Palermo, Sicily

Mosaics by Byzantine craftsmen (l. 12th–mid 13th cent.). Series of 12 mosaics: Last Supper—Pentecost.

### 3. Duccio, Maestà, Siena

Duccio di Buoninsegna (c. 1255–c. 1318), *Maestà* (1308–11, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena). Altarpiece for high altar in Siena's cathedral.

- Front side: devotional image for the community of the faithful. Center: Madonna and child enthroned.
- Back: narrative cycle intended for closer observation of clergy:
  - crown: series of 8 post-resurrection appearances + Pentecost.
  - central panel: 26 images: Entry into Jerusalem—Emmaus Road. The most comprehensive Passion cycle that has survived.

### 4. Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy

Giotto di Bondone (c.1267–1337), fresco cycle (1303–1305) for the Arena Chapel, Padua, the personal chapel of Enrico Scrovegni, a wealthy banker. Includes Life of Christ cycle: 26, of which 13 cover Raising of Lazarus—*Noli me tangere*.

### 5. Fra Angelico, San Marco, Florence

Fra Angelico (c. 1387–1455), a Dominican monk. Series of frescoes (1438–1443) for Dominican Convent (now Museum) of San Marco, Florence. Includes one in each of the 44 cells for personal devotion. Of these, 20 are crucifixion scenes, and St Dominic appears in 27 as the model of devotion.

## Scenes

The Passion begins with The Agony in the Garden, but most cycles include the Last Supper and sometimes also the Entry into Jerusalem. For most scenes, artistic depiction began in the Greek Byzantine world, still represented in Orthodox icons, then spread to the West c. 11th-12th cent.

### The Last Supper

Greek: ὁ Μυστικός δείπνος *The Mystical Supper*. Icon usually hangs over the royal doors of iconostasis in an Orthodox church.

West: *The Last Supper*.

- San Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, e. 6th cent. mosaic. Earliest surviving Last Supper.
- *St Augustine Gospels* (illuminated MS, Italy, l. 6th cent.; Corpus Christi College, Cambridge) brought to England by St Augustine 597. First inclusion of chalice.
- Monreale Cathedral, Palermo (l. 12th–mid-13th c.). Jesus passes bread to Judas.
- Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel: John rests on Jesus.
- Duccio, *Maestà*: Jesus offers bread to Judas; John rests on Jesus.
- Stefano di Antonio Vanni, fresco, Florence, c. 1454. Judas has black halo, sits on opposite side of table, dips bread.
- Fra Angelico, *Institution of the Eucharist* (San Marco cell 35). Last Supper becomes Lord's Supper. Judas with black halo. Mary Magdalene kneels at left.
- Leonardo da Vinci, *il Cenacolo* (1497-98, Lat. *cenaculum* dining room). Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan (church & Dominican convent; in refectory of convent). Disciples in groups of three: l-r: Bartholomew, James the Less, Andrew; Judas, Peter, John; Jesus; Thomas, James the Greater, Philip; Matthew, Judas Taddaeus, Simon. They react to Jesus' statement: "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."
- Sadao Watanabe (1913-1996): two Japanese woodblock prints (1966, 1973).

*Washing the Disciples' Feet*: sometimes accompanies the Last Supper scene. Usually depicts Christ washing the feet of Peter: "Lord, do you wash my feet?... You shall never wash my feet" (John 13:6-8).

- Duccio, Giotto.

### The Agony in the Garden

All 11 disciples sleep; 3 sleep separately (Peter, James, John). Sometimes an angel attends Jesus (Luke 22:43).

- Duccio *Maestà*: l. 8 disciples sleep; c. Jesus tells Peter, James & John, "Watch and pray"; r. Jesus prays attended by angel.
- Fra Angelico, cell 34: upper left, Jesus prays attended by angel; below Peter, James & John sleep; at right, Mary reads and Martha prays in their house.

### Betrayal and Arrest

Judas kisses Jesus; Peter cuts off ear of Malchus (Luke 22:50; John 18:10); disciples flee (Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50).

- Duccio *Maestà*: 3 scenes in one panel: l. Peter cuts off Malchus' ear; c. Judas kisses Jesus; r. disciples flee.
- Giotto: l. Peter cuts off ear; c. Judas kisses Jesus.
- Fra Angelico, cell 33: c. Judas about to kiss Jesus; r. Peter cuts off ear.

### Trials

Duccio *Maestà*: 11 episodes, a comprehensive sequence: Jesus before Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, Pilate again.

Individual scenes:

- The Flagellation: Jesus usually tied to a pillar; scourged with a whip.
- The Crown of Thorns: Hieronymus Bosch, *Christ Crowned with Thorns* (c. 1510, National Gallery, London)

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- The Mocking: stripped, scarlet/purple robe, crown of thorns, reed in hand, jeering, struck face.
- *Ecce Homo*: Antonio Ciseri, *Ecce Homo* (1871, Museo Cantonale d'Arte, Lugano). Pilate: "Behold the Man! *Ecce Homo*" (John 19:4-5).

## The Road to Calvary

*via crucis, via sacra, via Dolorosa.*

Jesus would have carried only *patibulum* (cross-beam) with *titulus* around his neck.

- *The Road to Calvary* (mosaic 504, Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna): a simple, small procession.
- Giotto, Duccio.
- Hieronymus Bosch, *Christ Carrying the Cross* (c. 1530-40, Ghent).

## Stations of the Cross

14 (number fixed by Pope Clement XII 1731): 9 on via Dolorosa, 5 inside Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Several are non-Scriptural. *via Dolorosa* (Sorrowful Way): c. 600 m, 2000 ft.

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus receives his Cross
3. Jesus falls for the first time under his cross
4. Jesus meets his afflicted mother
5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7. Jesus falls the second time
8. Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross
14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

## Veil of Veronica

6th station of the cross. Veronica offered Jesus her *sudarium* (Lat. sweat-cloth) to wipe his face, leaving an image of his face on it. Veronica is an anagram of L. *vera* true + Gk εἰκών image. A true image, an *acheiropoieton* (pl. ἀχειροποίητα not made by human hand). In 1216 Pope Innocent III declared an indulgence for one who prayed in front of a Veronica image. Led to composition of a special prayer: *Salva sancta facies* (Hail, holy face; e. 14th c.).

- Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, *The Procession to Calvary* (c. 1505, National Gallery, London) shows Veronica with veil.
- Master of Saint Veronica, *Saint Veronica with the Sudarium* (c. 1420, National Gallery, London).
- Hans Memling, *St Veronica* (c. 1470, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC).
- Francisco Zurbarán, *The Veil of Saint Veronica* (c. 1635, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm).
- Hieronymus Bosch, *Christ Carrying the Cross* (c. 1530-40, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent): Veronica and her veil at lower left.
- Warner Sallman, *Head of Christ* (1940): the blue-eyed, blond-haired Christ that hangs in so many homes!

In 1991 Pope John Paul II introduced a new set of 14 Scriptural stations, covering the entire Passion sequence. Canadian author and artist Michael O'Brien painted each station.

- Michael O'Brien, *Stations of the Cross*.
  - top: 1. Christ Prays in the Garden; 2. Jesus is Betrayed and Arrested; 3. Jesus Is Condemned by the Sanhedrin; 4. Peter denies Jesus; 5. Jesus Is Condemned by Pilate; 6. Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns; 7. Jesus Takes Up His Cross.
  - bottom: 8. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross; 9. Jesus Meets the Weeping Women; 10. Jesus is crucified; 11. Jesus promises Paradise to the crucified Thief; 12. Jesus Cares for his Mother; 13. Jesus Dies;

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14. Jesus is Buried.

### The Crucifixion

Golgotha (Aram.), Calvary (L. *calvarium*).

Greek: ἡ Σταύρωσις *staurōsis*.

*Titulus*: the Charge: attached to cross. “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews” in Aramaic, Latin, Greek (Matt 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19-22). Jesus would have carried this round his neck as he walked to Golgotha.

Written to inform general public of crime meriting crucifixion; serve as warning.

- Aramaic: ישו הנצרי מלכא דיהודיא
- Latin: *Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum* (hence INRI shown in so much art).
- Greek: Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.
  
- Duccio, Giotto, Fra Angelico.
- Salvador Dalí, *The Christ of St John of the Cross* (1951, St Mungo Museum of Religious Art and Life, Glasgow).
- Mathias Grünewald, *The Crucifixion*, central panel of *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512-16, Colmar, France). For high altar of hospital chapel, St Anthony’s Monastery, Isenheim, Alsace.
- Graham Sutherland, *The Crucifixion* (1946, St Matthew’s Church, Northampton, UK).
- James Tissot, *What Our Lord Saw from the Cross* (c. 1890, Brooklyn Museum).
- Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), *The Bound Lamb* (Agnus Dei). 6 known version.

### At the Foot of the Cross

- Mary & John (Jesus commends them to each other, John 19:26-27).
- Three Marys: Mary mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene; Mary mother of St James the Less/Salome (John 19:25).
- Mary Magdalene: often clutches foot of cross weeping at Jesus’ feet (as early as c. 1050, regularly from 14th cent.); often depicted with long hair uncovered (Giotto, Fra Angelico); often with jar of ointment.
- many women (Matt 27:55).
- soldier piercing Jesus’ side with the Holy Lance (John 19:34) & bystander offering vinegar-soaked Holy Sponge on reed (Matt 27:48; Mark 15:36; hyssop John 19:29).
- Longinus: a soldier pierced dead Jesus’s side with lance (John 19:34), centurion’s confession (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39). These two were conflated, and given a name: Longinus, probably Latinization of Gk λόγχη “lance” (first named in *Acts of Pilate, Gospel of Nicodemus*, mid-4th cent.), Gk Λογινος (first depicted in *Rabbula Gospels*, illuminated MS, 586). Venerated as martyr.
- soldiers dividing Jesus’ garments (Mt 27:35; Mk 14:24; Lk 23:34; Jn 19:23-24), throwing dice for his seamless robe.
- hostile crowd: Duccio, Maestà.
- skull: tradition identified the cross as the site of Adam’s burial. Giotto; Fra Angelico.

**Stabat mater**: 13th cent. hymn, comprising 20 triplets. Begins *Stabat mater dolorosa juxta Crucem lacrimosa dum pendebat Filius*, “The sorrowful mother stood next to the cross weeping, where her Son was hanging.” Set to music by many famous composers.

### Deposition/ Descent from the Cross

Greek: Ἀποκαθήλωσις *Apokathélosis*, from 1. 9th cent.

West: *Deposition of Christ, Descent from the Cross*, from 10th cent.

13th station of the cross. Joseph of Arimathea lowers body from cross; Nicodemus removes nails with pincers. Ladder: early art had low cross; as cross got higher, the ladder was added. Three Marys: mother Mary faints into John’s arms; Mary Magdalene at foot of cross.

- Peter Paul Rubens, *The Deposition of Christ* (1612, Cathedral, Antwerp), central panel of altar triptych.
- Sadao Watanabe: all the iconography of a Western Deposition, but contextualized in Japanese idiom.

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### Instruments of the Passion

*Arma Christi* (the weapons of Christ). Primary group, most commonly depicted:

- the Cross: the Holy Cross or Holy Rood. The True Cross was discovered by Constantine's mother Helena.
- the Crown of Thorns
- the pillar to which Jesus was tied and whipped (Flagellation of Christ)
- whip or scourge
- the Holy Sponge in which gall and vinegar were offered to Jesus
- the Holy Lance with which a Roman soldier pierced Jesus' side, inflicting fifth wound
- the Nails: inflicted four wounds

Others:

- the reed: placed in Jesus' hand as a mock sceptre
  - the purple robe
  - the hammer: used to pound in the nails
  - the dice used by soldiers to divide Jesus' garments
  - the pincers: Nicodemus used to extract nails
  - the 30 coins: betrayal money paid to Judas
  - the ladder
  - the chalice used at Last Supper: the Holy Grail
  - spitting face: mocking Jesus
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- *Instruments of the Passion*: a very complete set (Church of Saint-Pierre de Collonges-la-rouge, France).
  - e.g. *The Adoration of the Lamb*, central panel of *The Ghent Altarpiece*: cross, spear, sponge, pillar.

### The Five Wounds

The Sacred Wounds: 2 hands, 2 feet, side.

The Sacred Heart: a flaming heart, pierced by the lance, bleeding from the wound, encircled by the crown of thorns, topped by a cross.

### Lamentation

Greek: Ἐπιτάφιος θρήνος, *Epitáphios thrénos*, Lamentation at the Grave.

West: *Lamentation of Christ*; from 11th cent.

Mourning over Jesus' dead body.

*Pietà*: Mary cradles her dead son in her lap; often portrayed as a statue.

- Michelangelo, *Pietà* (1497-1500, St Peter's, The Vatican).
- Giotto, *Lamentation of Christ* (Scrovegni Chapel).

### Anointing

Laying on slab/bier (ἐπιτάφιος) for anointing in preparation for burial.

West: *Anointing of Christ*.

### Entombment

West: *Entombment of Christ*. Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, John, the Three Marys lower Jesus' body into the tomb.

- Duccio, *Maestà*.
- Mathias Grünewald, *The Entombment*, from Isenheim Altarpiece.
- Hans Holbein, *Dead Christ* (1521, Kunstmuseum, Basle)

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### Man of Sorrows

Greek: *Akra tapeínosis* (ἀκρα ταπείνωσις, Utmost Humiliation).

West: *Man of Sorrows*, or *Imago Pietatis* (Image of Pity).

“He was despised and rejected by men, a *man of sorrows*, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa 53:3).

Usually with Wounds visible, sometimes with instruments of passion. Jesus often stands in tomb, head inclined to left.

- *The Man of Sorrows*, probably by Jacobello del Bonomo (c. 1385-1400, National Gallery, London).
- l. 13th–e. 14th cent. Russian icon.
- 2 early icons (The Sinai Icon Collection, Princeton University).
- *Man of Sorrows*, in *The “De Grey” Hours* (a Book of Hours, c. 1390, National Library of Wales); with Instruments of the Passion.

### Resurrection

Greek: ἡ Ἀνάστασις *Anástasis*.

#### Descent into Hell/Harrowing of Hell

Jesus breaks down the doors of death, crushing Satan; enters Limbo, brings out the OT saints, grasping Adam & Eve by the hand.

- Duccio, Giotto.
- *Anastasis* (Resurrection), Chora Museum, Istanbul (fresco, 1316–1321).

### Post-resurrection appearances

Jesus made multiple appearances to his disciples after resurrection. Three became popular in Western art. Narrative cycles include some others.

#### *Noli me Tangere*

Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, “Touch me not,” Lat. *noli me tangere* (John 20:17). She was the first person to whom he appeared.

- Duccio, Giotto, Fra Angelico.
- Titian (c. 1515, National Gallery, London).

#### The Road to Emmaus

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him (Luke 24:30-31).

- Caravaggio, *The Supper at Emmaus* (1601, National Gallery, London): at the moment of recognition.
- Sadao Watanabe: fish and sushi rolls.

#### The Incredulity of Thomas

Thomas: “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”... Jesus: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20:25,27).

Thomas pokes his finger into the wound in Jesus’ side.

- Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of St Thomas* (c. 1601, Sanssouci Picture Gallery, Potsdam).
- Bernardo Strozzi, *The Incredulity of St Thomas* (c. 1620, Compton Verney House Trust).