

The Paschal Mystery



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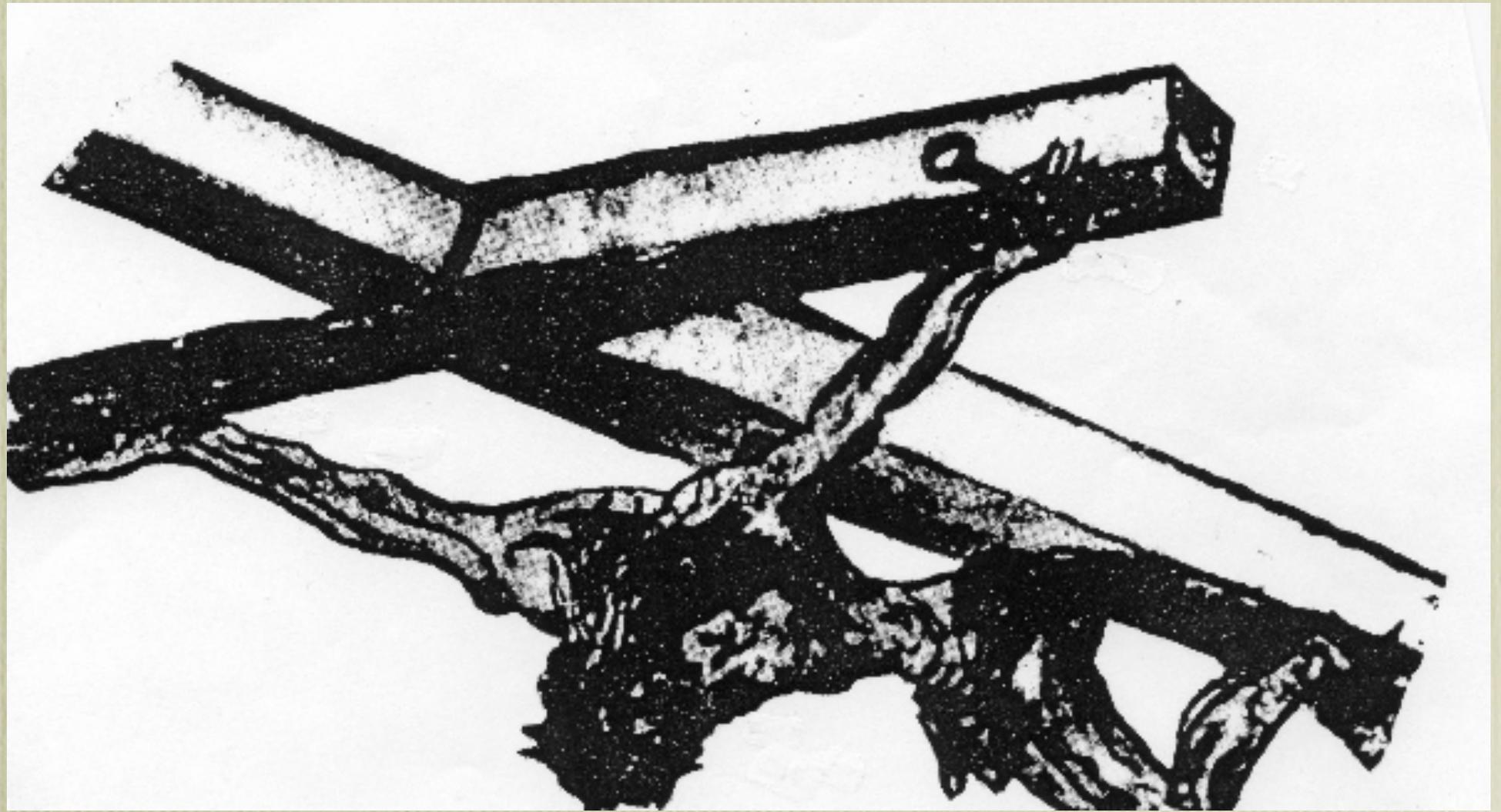
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Drawing by Saint John of the Cross



Giotto

- The unjust act of crucifying Jesus was against God's will
 - Paul asserts that it 'displeased God'(1Thessalonians 2:14).
 - Jesus said: 'You kill me because there is no place in you for my word'(John 8:37).
 - Stephen accuses those who killed Jesus of 'opposing the Holy Spirit'(Acts 7:51).
 - 'You are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors ... Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!'(Matthew 23:31-32, 37).

- The unjust act of crucifying Jesus was against God's will

‘The owner of the vineyard still had one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘Surely they will respect my son.’ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard’(Mark 12:6-8).

‘While Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him”’(Matthew 27:19).

- In his agony we see him struggling to find a way to carry out his mission. Faced with apparent failure (even his close disciples weren't yet ready), what was he to do? Heroically he determined: 'Father, not my will but Yours be done'(Mark 14:36). He did not want to die and leave his mission unfinished, but he decides to continue doing what his Father wanted of him.

He determined to keep loving whatever the cost, to keep opposing injustice, to keep trusting God however hopeless things seemed. If it meant death, he would make his death a gift of love





‘The soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced” (John 19:32-37).



‘When the centurion, who stood facing him, saw how Jesus died, he said: Truly this man was God’s Son!’

(Mark 15:39)

‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him’(John 8:28-29).



The sacrifice of the cross

On the cross Jesus offered his life, his love, his very self to God and to us in order to draw us into communion with God.

To be in communion with God
= to be made holy : **sacrum** **facere**
sacrifice

Jesus' death meant different things to Pilate, the high priest, the Pharisees and the crowd. To see what it meant to Jesus we go to the Last Supper.

1 Corinthians 11:23-25

(see Luke 22:10-20)



‘The Lord Jesus on the night when he was handed over (**paradidômi**) took a loaf of **bread**, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my **body** that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

‘In the same way he took the **cup** also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my **blood**. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

‘Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks [*eucharisteô*], he broke it and gave it to them saying: This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me’(Luke 22:19).

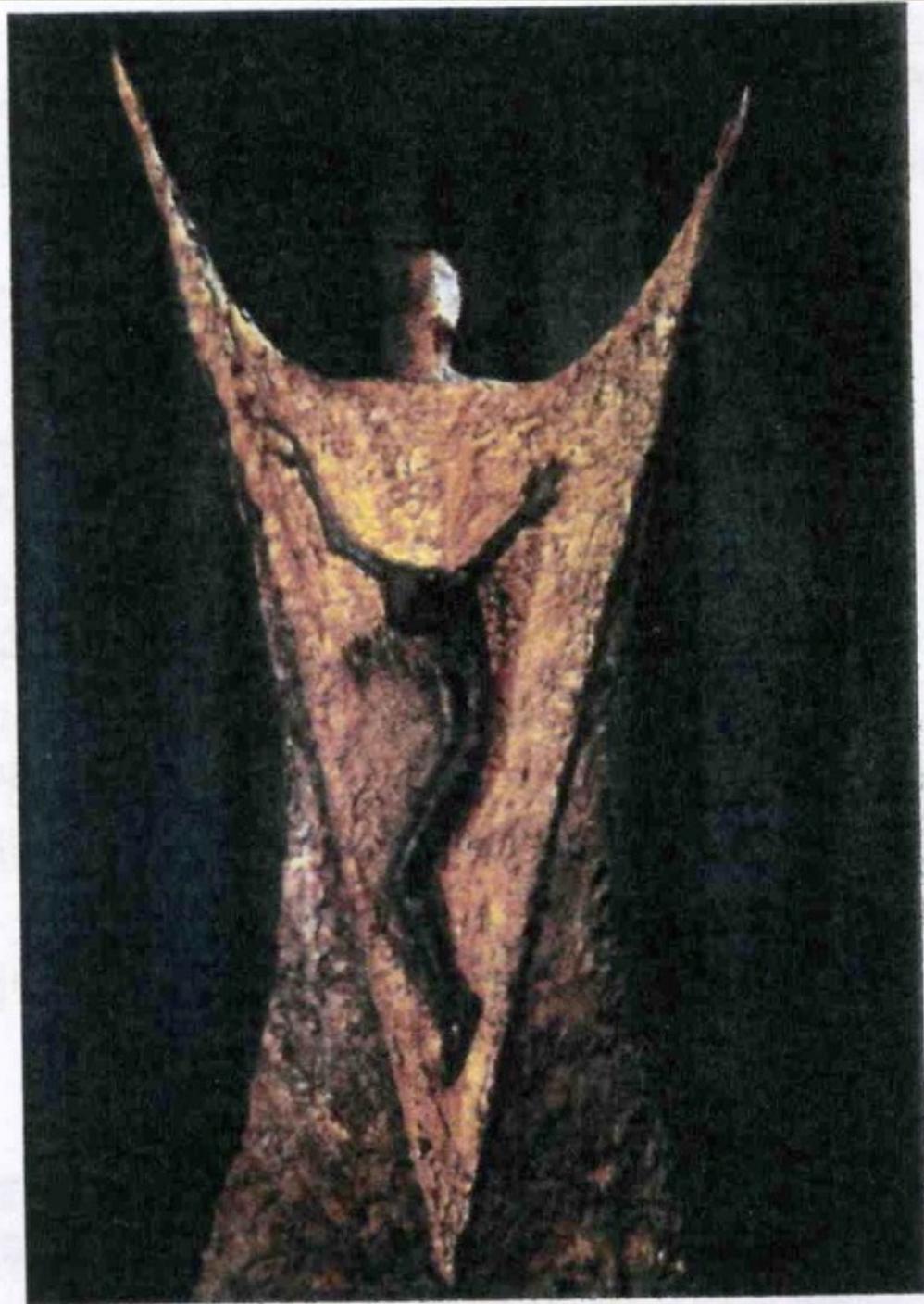
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Tintoretto

‘I live now in faith, faith in the Son of God loving me and giving himself for me. I cannot give up God’s gift.’(Galatians 2:21)

Jesus is Raised to Life



‘Though they found no cause for a sentence of death, those residing in Jerusalem and their leaders asked Pilate to have him killed.

God raised him from the dead’(Acts 13:28-30).

- The crucifying of Jesus was clearly sinful, and so against the will of God. Sinful people committed the murder.

God ‘lifted up’ Jesus.

We are to complete
his death with our
life.





‘From the Heart of Jesus
pierced on Calvary,
I see a new world coming forth – a
great and life-giving world,
inspired by love and mercy:
a world which the Church must
perpetuate on the whole earth.’

(Jules Chevalier, Sacred Heart 1900)

Recognising God as Love, we might allow God's graceful Spirit to create in us, as God did in Jesus, someone who dares all for love.

As Paul says: 'For freedom God has made us free. Stand firm then and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery'(Galatians 5:1).

‘Jesus gave himself for our sins to set us free’(Galatians 1:4).

- from the corrupting influence of the environment
- from illusions that bind and possess: ‘People are slaves to whatever masters them’(2Peter 2:19).
- from self-indulgence (Galatians 5:13) that leads to loneliness and isolation
- from obsessions and compulsions
- from past choices made against truth and love (‘sin’) and the effects of these decisions on our present lives. ‘To commit sin is to be a slave’(John 8:34).

- ‘Jesus died that he might ... free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death’(Hebrews 2:14-15).
- Set free to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible
- Set free to belong in a communion in love. ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’(2Corinthians 3:17)
- Set free to enjoy the religious experience of communion (Romans 8:21).
- Set free by knowing ‘the truth’ (John 8:32)

- To be truly free we must learn to trust what God is doing in our lives as God gives us a share in Jesus' Spirit.
- Jesus' self-giving is a revelation of God's self-giving in love, and is powerful enough to attract us away from what is keeping us enslaved.
- It is life giving, making possible repentance, forgiveness and salvation.
- There is no other way. There is no substitute for the giving of self in love.

- This is not something we can do by simply deciding to do it, or by joining a certain group, or following certain prescribed actions.
- We must open ourselves to Jesus' gift of himself to us, and to the grace and peace that comes to us from God through Jesus' love.
- 'God proves his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us'(Romans 5:8).
- Living Jesus' life is the fruit of Jesus' gift. This is the way to freedom.