



“Into Thy Hands”

The mural that adorns the sanctuary wall of St. Peter Church is meant to capture that moment of Christ’s offering of Himself to the Father which is *re-presented* in every Mass. The image reflects this moment, recorded in his quote in Luke’s Gospel, *“Into your hands O Lord, I commend my spirit.”* (Luke 23:46) It is the moment that Christ makes the total and complete gift of his life for us and the moment that God pours out the Holy Spirit through Him to us.

Representing the Church gathered at this altar of sacrifice are the Blessed Mother Mary and John the Evangelist. Mary is depicted with her arm outstretched suggesting a spirit of surrender, a continuation of her Fiat *“Be it done unto me according to Thy Word,”* (Luke 1:38) first spoken those many years previous when the archangel Gabriel appeared and announced that she would conceive and bear a Son and name Him Emmanuel – God-is-with-us. Her facial expression makes clear that this surrender is total, that it is a heart-wrenching *“Yes”* to the Father’s plan, trust in the midst of total darkness.

John is depicted wearing rose-colored clothing and bearing a youthful, almost feminine face. John is traditionally depicted this way to emphasize that he was the youngest of the disciples, a teenager at the time of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. His face and gestures express a sense of awe before the offering of the Lord – it is at the foot of the Cross that John comes to fully comprehend the utter depths of Christ’s love for him and for all of us.

Through Mary we are invited to have the same sense of surrender of our lives to the Lord even in the dark nights of our own Calvary. We are meant to bring this offering to the Mass and visualize ourselves giving our life in the bread and wine that will be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Through John we are invited to have that same sense of awe and recognition of the depths of God’s love when we see Christ crucified for our sins and when at the Mass we see Christ made present in the Most Holy Eucharist out of love for us.

At the foot of the Cross lies the skull. We remember that Golgotha, where Christ was crucified, means *“place of the skull”* (John 19:17) There is an old tradition that the site of Calvary was also the site where Adam, the first man, had been buried. Thus, Christ, the New Adam, the new Creation, stands above the Old Adam, the old creation. The blood of the New Adam falls upon and recreates the Old Adam.

Christ’s side remains without wound, as the lancing did not take place until he had completed the sacrifice and died. This image is depicting the moments shortly before that final wound. Above Jesus hangs the sign on which *“Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross, it read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’ Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.”* (John 19:19-20) If you walk closer to the painting you can see it clearly written in each of those three languages. As that passage makes mention too, the city is nearby, seen in the background. The city, Jerusalem, was the site

of the Temple sacrifices to God. The Mass, now takes the place of the Temple sacrifices, only now we do not offer the blood of bulls and goats that had to be constantly sacrificed but, once and for all, the blood of Jesus Christ, the eternal high priest. For a beautiful description of how the sacrifice of Christ now takes the place and fulfills the sacrifices of the Old Covenant see Hebrews 9:11-28.

Jesus, eyes open, stretched out, is in the midst of the total offering of Himself to the Father. He is the Head of the Body, the Church. In the Mass, we the body, unite with our Head, and make our sacrifice “Through Him, with Him, and in Him, in the Unity of the Holy Spirit” and we give “all glory and honor” to the “almighty Father, forever and ever. Amen!” He makes up for what is lacking in our offering, just as we, by bringing the content of our lives, the hopes and fears, joys and sufferings, make up “what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ” (Colossians 1:24).

At the top of the painting we see God the Father, receiving the sacrifice with arms outstretched. His face bespeaks eternity. Its seriousness reminds us that our salvation has been paid for by a dear price, the blood of His Only-Begotten Son. He in turn sends out the Holy Spirit, the bond of Love between the Father and the Son. And now all who have been baptized into this death and soon-resurrection of His Son share in that very same Holy Spirit. This is made possible through our union with Christ. This is where all grace comes from in the Mass.

The colors of the clothing of the figures also have meaning. The color blue symbolizes truth and clarity, it is the color of the sky, and therefore a symbol of heaven. Mary is traditionally depicted with blue, as is God. The colors red and rose are the colors of love. John, the Beloved Disciple, is depicted in rose, symbolizing his burning love. Mary and God the Father both have red in addition to their blue garments. Jesus is clothed in a white garment. White symbolizes the purity of the soul, innocence, and holiness. On the Cross Jesus is revealed as the innocent victim for our sins.

The Crucifixion Scene, the Holy Mass, both are one and the same. What we see in the colors of paint is what we witness at the altar during every Mass. May our prayer be that this painting help us to see with the eyes of Faith, just what we are truly witnesses of in the Mass. There is nothing greater on earth than what is celebrated at the altar. For here we are made witnesses to the offering of Jesus for us. Here is incarnated Infinite Love.

The painting stands 23 feet tall and is eleven feet wide. It was painted on one sheet of canvas in a studio and then applied to the wall constructed in the sanctuary by *Sunrush Construction Company*. It was painted and the ornate frame designed by artists with *Murals by Jericho*. The mural itself was paid for by the Prusas family and was dedicated in the memory of long-time St. Peter parishioner, Elizabeth Prusas. The ornate frame, lighting, and sanctuary preparation work was made possible by the many parishioners who contributed to the 2008 Bishop’s Annual Appeal. Special thanks is given to parishioner John Williamson who coordinated all of the various work that went into this project. His knowledge and involvement was indispensable. Finally and especially, thanks to all of those who have prayed for the artists that their work might glorify God and lead us to deeper conversion.