



There is a stillness and an acceptance in these closed eyes and untroubled faces. In part, Michelangelo is reminding us of their life together at an earlier time; the sculpture references not only the passion but also the birth and early life of Christ. Those days when Mary previously held her son – then a sleeping child, rather than a dead man – are brought to mind, and there is a reminder of the continuity of the story, and of the connection between birth and death.

TRANSFORMATION

But there is also a wider link to the absolute kernel of the story, to the absolute kernel of all our stories. Because those faces, both that of Christ and that of Mary, seem oddly unconnected to one another and yet connected to something else – and who else can that be, but God? There is an acceptance, a trust; a belief in something bigger and better, and ultimately in transformation. This is the sacrifice that made and makes redemption possible – it involves pain and suffering, and what could be greater than the loss for a mother of her child? – but contained in the experience of that suffering is the gateway to the liberation and happiness we all strive for, and both Christ and Mary understand that, and have given themselves up to it. We can all learn something from that; in the heart of our abandonment, in the midst of our deepest suffering, is the doorway to future fulfilment.

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**O Lord, hear my voice, for I have called to you;
of you my heart has spoken: Seek his face;
hide not your face from me, alleluia.**

FIRST READING Acts 1:12-14

PSALM Psalm 26

**RESPONSE I am sure I shall see the Lord's
goodness
in the land of the living.**

Or **Alleluia!**

1. The Lord is my light and my help;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
before whom shall I shrink? **R.**

2. There is one thing I ask of the Lord,
for this I long,
to live in the house of the Lord,
all the days of my life,
to savour the sweetness of the Lord,
to behold his temple. **R.**

3. O Lord, hear my voice when I call;
have mercy and answer.
Of you my heart has spoken;
"Seek his face." **R.**

SECOND READING 1 Peter 4:13-16

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Alleluia, alleluia!
I will not leave you orphans, says the Lord;
I will come back to you, and your hearts will be
full of joy.
Alleluia!**

GOSPEL John 17:1-11

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Father, I pray that they may be one
as we also are one, alleluia.**

Next Sunday's Readings:

Acts 2:1-11
1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13
John 20:19-23

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SUNDAY BULLETIN

MICHELANGELO, PIETÀ

It's a high bar, but many art historians believe Michelangelo's finest work isn't the awesome ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or even his sculpture *David*; it's his *Pietà*, a study in a mother's grief that encompasses the whole of the Christ story and manages to unite despair and hope, birth and death, failure and success in one extraordinary piece of marble. That marble stands in its own side chapel in St Peter's Basilica in Rome; these days, following various attempts to damage it over the years, it's behind bulletproof glass. As tourists and pilgrims pour into the cathedral, they tend to make a beeline for it; if you're visiting Rome and want a ringside view, make sure you go first thing in the morning.

The piece was created in 1498–99, having been commissioned from the artist by a French cardinal called Jean de Bilhères, who wanted it to be the monument for his grave. Initially, his tomb in the chapel of St Petronilla was indeed its home; but by 1519 it had been moved to the original St Peter's Basilica, and it was there when it was seen by Giorgio Vasari, the art historian par excellence of the Renaissance. His opinion was that it represented "the ultimate limits of sculpture"; and from this moment on, its place in history was assured.

The sculpture is made of Carrara marble, a white and blue stone from that region of Italy, and it shows Mary cradling the body of her dead son. She is all folds and voluptuousness; to create the scene he wanted, Michelangelo has had to make the Mary figure a lot larger than the Christ figure, to allow the sense that she is bearing his weight and holding his frame. Her body is almost all veil, robes and skirt; his is unclothed save for his loincloth. Her head is turned down towards him; his is thrown back. But amidst all this contrast, there is one strikingly similar aspect; the faces of both figures are serene, composed and strangely unmoved. Both have their eyes closed; Christ, of course, is dead; Mary is pondering the enormity of what has happened to her son, and to her.

Divine images



Joanna Moorhead
continues this series
looking at religious art.



24 MAY 2020

7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER
YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK III