

Lent 1 St Marylebone 2014 *Stations*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

On Thursday evening, we welcomed more than 400 people into our parish church for the Opening of the exhibition which hangs not only all around you but which is displayed in fourteen Underground stations across London.

400 people were forced to engage, in a new way, perhaps for the very first time, with the events of Good Friday and the story of Jesus' Passion. Not Café Church perhaps, but certainly a Fresh Expression of our Christian faith to a new audience!

These 400 representatives, of the media and the contemporary art world, were brought face to face with these images which will be displayed here until Holy Week.

Some of the images, like Ricardo Cinallis' hands, *The Grand Crucifixion*, are easily accessible and easily interpreted, others such as Paul Fyer's *Black Pieta* or the American bran Symondson's *Phat Jesus, My Kingdom was this World*, will undoubtedly shock and perhaps

confront the viewer in ways that evoke a truly uncomfortable and visceral response.

All will, I hope, challenge those who see them to revisit and think again on our Lord's slow and painful progress along the Way of the Cross from Pilate's judgement hall to the hill of Calvary.

Ever since Christians began making pilgrimages to Jerusalem, men and woman have walked in the bloodied footsteps of Christ along the Via Dolorosa, taking time to reflect on the awful cosmos-changing events of Jesus' Passion which.

In the mid-Fourteenth Century, the Franciscans were granted the right and duty of administering the holy places of Jerusalem, and nine Stations of the Cross, were established along the Via Dolorosa, as it wended its way from the northwest corner of the Temple Mount to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; and, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, five more Stations were established.

By the early Sixteenth Century, the Franciscans had begun to build outdoor shrines across Europe, duplicating their counterparts in the Holy Land, so that Christians, who could not afford to make pilgrimage to

Jerusalem, could walk the Way of the Cross for themselves.

Over the next two centuries, Stations of the Cross began to appear in churches across the Western Christian world, and in the late Eighteenth Century Saint Alphonsus Ligouri, the founder of the Redemptorist Order, developed the method still most widely used by those who follow the Stations of the Cross as a devotion.

The Stations which hang here are not meant to be comfortable, just as the Way of the Cross was itself not comfortable.

So much of our religion – especially perhaps here at St Marylebone - is packaged and tidy, well-ordered and beautiful, that it can be all too easy to divorce who we are and what we do as Christians, not only from the realities of the core events which give birth to our faith, but from a world racked with pain, doubt, and bloody mess.

The first Station in this exhibition, *Kill your Idol*, by Antony Micallef, raises contemporary questions about the fickleness and shallowness of fame and celebrity,

success and failure. About who has the power to say just who is going to be a hit and who a miss.

Victor Schroeder, *The Fragility of Goodness*, strips the human figure of Jesus, literally, to the bare bones of his true humanity. Here is no painted plaster-cast Jesus, or a Jesus beautifully rendered in oil paint. Here is Jesus, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood, born of the blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit and crucified under Pontius Pilate.

Bran Symondson's *Phat Jesus My Kingdom was this World* along with his *Crucified by Green* is a truly potent exploration of the place of money in religion; the two pieces bring into very sharp focus a critique of US televangelism, the proclamation of the Prosperity Gospel in Africa and South America as well as forcefully reminding us that Jesus was sold by Judas for thirty pieces of silver.

And it is the silver *Crucifixion Nails* by Sebastian Horsley which mirrors to us, perhaps most vividly of all the exhibits, the fact that we have turned the raw iron nails used to pin Christ to the cross, into precious works of art and into beautiful jewellery to make such things more palatable, more comfortable and, by doing

so, to eviscerate them of their potency and power and ability to shock and to disturb.

I hope that you will take time, over the next six weeks, to reflect prayerfully on the installation that is now here.

It might be that only one of the works speaks to you or draws from you something you can turn into the prayer that will bind you even more closely to the One who gladly embraced the rough cross of wood, so that we might all be embraced by the Father's all-powerful love: the love that was to deny death and sin and darkness their victory over the Light and Love and Peace who had come into the world.

We adore you, O Christ and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world. Amen.