



PILGRIMAGE TO OUR PAST

Celebrating 225 Years of Parishioners for Others

April 2019

Interpreting the *Crux Gloriosa* *Holy Trinity's Forty-Year-Old Cross*

The sculpted cross that hangs behind the altar in the Holy Trinity Sanctuary has a special history. A plaque on the front right wall of the church reads: *"The 'Crux Gloriosa' honors the men and women of the Parish who accomplished the restoration of Holy Trinity Church, and it is dedicated to the memory of Pau R. Connolly who, with his wife, Mary, accepted leadership in the restoration, and who was called home to the Kingdom of God even as the work was completed, 5 April 1980."*

A 1990 bulletin article by Pat Murkun credits the idea of commissioning a cross to Paul Connolly, who—when the restoration of the church was just an idea—said he would be happy to give a check to pay for a new cross for the wall. Paul and his wife Mary ultimately led the committee overseeing the lengthy restoration of the church in the late 1970s.

The original idea was to install a Celtic cross. However, Pastor James English, S.J. was intrigued with the idea of the *crux gloriosa*, the cross of glory, which he had been studying in a liturgical history course at Georgetown University. In the first centuries of the Church, the cross was always shown as a triumphal sign of Christ's victory over death and often made of precious jewels, cameos and agates. It wasn't until much later in our Church's history that the suffering Christ was depicted on the cross.

Architect Joseph Giuliani, familiar with the various ideas for the cross, brought onboard artist Albert S. Vrana of North Carolina. After several visits and meetings with parishioners, Vrana's first drawings were rejected. He returned with new ideas and, according to Fr. English, "what followed was the longest committee meeting in my years at Holy Trinity."

Vrana cut lucite into four sections, placed the sections on horses, and drilled from underneath to make the figures with great artistry. Vrana carved an interesting set of figures and religious symbols in the lucite, but left the interpretation of the carvings open to the eye and imagination of those who would see the cross in place.

Sister Christine Doyle, S.S.J, the artist-in-residence at Holy Trinity in 1990, liked its interpretive nature. "You see symbols used in liturgical space as being not definitive in themselves, but as a means of opening the a door into the Mystery," she said. "This cross engages the views and calls on the imagination. Therefore it draws on the Spirit and allows prayer to happen. Liturgical symbols are not left-brain, stop-and-go symbols. Rather they should draw us into the Mystery."



Vrana purposefully chose not to share the meanings of the carvings and symbols. Over the years, pastors (including Fr. English and Fr. William Byron, S.J.) and parishioners alike have given their own interpretations:

The bronze medallion depicts the "Lamb of God." This shows the Lamb Triumphant in contrast to the Lamb Slain, the marble figure on the front of the altar. Around this is a sunburst which is reminiscent of a monstrance with a sunburst that Father English had shown the sculptor.

Immediately below the lamb on the vertical bar is a depiction of the Good Shepherd or the Prophet. Parishioner Scott Dean who wrote "A Walking Tour of Holy Trinity Church"

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Crux Gloriosa, *cont. from page 1*

saw the figure as the Good Shepherd. Fr. Byron agreed with Dean, but Fr. English believed the figure to be a Prophet.

Below that image is the juggler. There are many versions of the story of a poor itinerant juggler named Barnabas. Having nothing to offer God but his skill as a juggler, Barnabas juggled his clubs prayerfully before the statue of Mary. The statue of Mary appeared to come alive with a radiance that the juggler had never seen before. Through the centuries, this story has taught generations of Christians that everyone has his or her unique gift and that using the talent one has from God is the best way to honor Our Lady and her Son.

Below the juggler, Fr. Bryon suggests the Angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she was to become the Mother of God.

At the base of the cross, at the bottom of the vertical bar, is Moses and the Ten Commandments. Fr. Byron noted that this symbolizes the roots of our religious traditions and symbols. Fr. English believed the Moses figure to be a self-portrait of the artist.

The figure at the top of the vertical bar is identified by Fr. Byron as a representation of a Crusader. Beneath that figure he suggested a "learned teacher, perhaps a Father of the Church, a theologian." Interestingly, Fr. English saw a female figure, "a prophet perhaps. The female is holding the

cup and plate, which could suggest the artist's hope for female ordination."

On either side of the lamb you see the "Ichthus," a fish-like symbol used by early Christians to indicate they were followers of Christ. At either extreme of the horizontal bar is a representation of a human figure reclining. Fr. English suggested they were representations of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Fr. Byron saw an apostle at the Last Supper on the left, and suggested the figure on the right was Francis Xavier holding a crucifix as he lay dying on an island close to China."

What do you see?•



Adapted from "The Cross a Sculptor Made for Us" by Pat Markun (1990) and "Interpreting the Symbols in the "Crux Gloriosa" by Fr. William J. Byron, S.J. (2002).

Art in the Chapel of St. Ignatius

"Beyond these doors anything is possible," was the message of a presentation on the design of the interior of the new Chapel of St. Ignatius that Anne Murphy and Kirk Willison shared with parishioners in the late '90s. Anne Murphy was appointed by Fr. Larry Madden, S.J. in 1997 to chair a "Chapel Design Committee" to commission and select chapel elements such as the altar, font, tabernacle, Stations of the Cross and an image of Mary. In 1998 more than 20 artists convened to fashion chapel elements as "reflections of the human spirit which reflect the imagination of God in the world." Later that year, a formal selection process confirmed the work of three artists.

Premier Washington artist John Dreyfuss was commissioned to create the font, altar, ambo, tabernacle and candlesticks. The unifying element in each is a coil-like line serving as a metaphor for the line of faith from the apostles to us as disciples of Christ.

Annapolis-based artist Claire McArdle crafted the Marian image for the chapel. The statue is carved in white Carrara marble and depicts Mary as Mother to the infant Jesus

whom she holds. The Christ Child rests gently on her hip, with his arm around her shoulders in an intimate image of a love recognizable to all who have been graced by the presence of a loving mother and child.

Pazzy de Peuter, a classically-trained artist from Belgium, carved the Christ for the crucifix. The figure depicts a crucified but rising Christ. McArdle and de Peuter collaborated on the Stations of the Cross which were molded in clay. The story of the Passion has been abstracted to its essential elements and is cast in figures that stand out from the base and draw the viewer into the scene.

Next time you visit the Chapel, take a moment to appreciate the Chapel Design Committee's goal to provide a "space that reflects and recalls the early Southern Maryland churches... and a chapel that would "inspire devotion, encourage prayer and meditation, and emphasize that we are a gathered community of faith."

Enjoy the various art forms and appreciate that, as we celebrate our 225th anniversary together, the sentiment remains that "anything is possible."•



Left to right: the baptismal font by artist John Dreyfuss highlights the unifying element of the "coil"; a scene from the story of the Passion case to draw the viewer into the scene; Clare McArdle's Madonna in marble.

Icons of Prayer & Adoration at Holy Trinity



What kind of sacred art reveals more opposites than religious icons? Icons can be ancient and contemporary, static and dynamic, bright and solemn, and stoic and intense. They go far into past centuries for expressions of prayer virtually unknown to modern observers, and at the same time can be immediately accessible to the youngest and least-sophisticated viewers. The images on wood and in mosaics contain ancient symbols and styles, but they also contain enduring and recognizable links to our deepest spiritual feelings.

Holy Trinity is fortunate to be a home to a group of iconographers who have met every few weeks since 1995 to “write” icons and share their love for making this special kind of art. They have displayed their work since the beginnings of this ministry in annual shows in the parish center and in other locations in the city, but surprisingly their work is not well known to many parishioners.

This year, in honor of the 225th Anniversary of the parish, the artists have

been collaborating on making a processional icon. The image the group chose was originally made by Andrei Rublev, a 14th-century Russian iconographer. It is based on the text in *Genesis 18:2* in which Abram was visited by three strangers who predicted that Sarai would have a child. In Rublev’s icon, the three visitors are perceived as three aspects of the same divine being. The image is popularly known to the art world as the icon of *The Holy Trinity*.

Some features of the Holy Trinity Church icon are quite traditional. Icons do not convey mere visual information, but rather sacred meanings. The image may seem flat, without revealing the expected information found in other works of art. The absence of shadows is one clue. Additionally, the geometric perspective is opposite from what we have come to expect. Instead of the vanishing point fading into the distance, the perspective is reversed; and the vanishing point rests upon the observer. According to one of the artists, George Ziobro, “You are the focal point. It brings you into the image.” The angles of the footstools in *The Holy Trinity* icon, for example, converge upon the observer, and the three figures face forward to meet the observer’s gaze. The expressions in the icon are uniform, and all eyes are visible despite the angled postures of the heads, hands, and feet. *I Corinthians 13:12* states, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” Icons invite prayerful observers to see God’s nature face to face.

Dan MacDougall, founder of the Holy Trinity Icon Guild, described the early days of the icon guild’s existence. They were encouraged by a Holy Trinity staff member Bruce Baumgarten, Holy Trinity School art teacher Maria Velez, and most critically, the inspirational

teaching of Master Iconographer, Irena Beliakova. Her careful tutelage of the small group of iconographers has guided them to many successful art shows over the years. The parish supports the group, which meets twice per month in the parish library through the ministry led by Martina O’Shea, Pastoral Associate for Ignatian Spirituality and Prayer.

Parishioner Mary Carter explains her process of making icons: “As far as ‘writing’ an icon as prayer, I am caught in the ‘flow.’ Someone asked the Curé of Ars about his prayer and he said, ‘He looks at me, and I look at him.’ So, I guess that is what happens. I have a copy of the head of Christ opposite my chair, and there is some mutual ‘looking.’”

The current group of eight iconographers are working on their own icons and contributing to the processional icon for the anniversary celebration. At the beginning of each session, the group prays to St. Luke, the patron saint of iconographers:

Oh, Holy Spirit, who was present in the creation of our beautiful universe, be present in our life and inspire us to echo the eternal beauty of Jesus, his mother Mary, and all the saints, in the tradition of St. Luke and all the iconographers who followed him down through the ages, we wish to dedicate our talents to the Holy Spirit. By His grace teach us the techniques of painting holy icons and thereby give glory to God. Amen.

The Holy Trinity icon will be displayed on a stand donated by the Knights of Columbus and will be part of the 225th Anniversary Mass procession on October 6, 2019.▪

—Duane Nystrom



Memories of Father James English, S.J.



Rev. James English, S.J. was at Holy Trinity from 1969-1981, serving as pastor from 1976-1981. Fr. English is remembered as an imaginative and energetic celebrant and preacher. Attend a 225th History Committee meeting or engage in a conversation with any parishioner from that time period, and you will be delighted by an infinite number of cherished memories. During his time at Holy Trinity, he helped develop programs that still exist today: Religious Education, RCIA, and the Young Adult Community. He is also remembered for launching the Parish Picnic and for his leadership during the renovation of the church in the late '70s. One memory that often comes up is his homily on Palm Sunday in 1975 which involved a circus troupe. It is impossible to include all of the many stories, but following are a select few.

“One Sunday, he told a story of two guys down on their luck who had to steal to survive. We learned about their lives. They were sympathetic. Human. Eventually, they are caught and sentenced. They meet another condemned man—Jesus. Fr. English had told the story of the two thieves from their point of view. It was brilliant and as far as I know, fabricated by him. At the time I remember being delighted by the way he turned things around...

“Grander, and widely remembered, was his homily on the story of Joseph. Again, he created an entire world and fleshed out the cast of characters. All of the brothers, the family. The homily stretched out over several weeks. I want to say six.

“As important as the content of the homily was the form. He did not stand fixed on the altar, but rather, walked the aisles and perimeter of the congregation. He spoke with us, not at us.

“I remember at one point he told us

that God didn't care what we wore in church. He declared the following week “old clothes Sunday.” We came in overalls.

“The most important lesson, which I draw from to this day, was his response to the conflict with Mitch Snyder. Snyder took Father English and the church as emotional hostages. At every turn, at least publicly, Father English took the high road. Snyder was always welcome in Jim's parish. Fr. English's ability to contain so much hostility with grace was inspiring then and now.”

—Christopher Russell

“A young woman in pink and gold spangled tights balanced herself on a weaving pole 20 feet above the high altar of Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church in Georgetown yesterday...A cheeky clown shouted encouragement to the priest; a sequined showgirl piled her cape of fluffy turquoise marabou on the altar as her part of the offertory. While worshipers throughout Christendom celebrated Palm Sunday yesterday with more traditional commemorations of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Rev. James English of Holy Trinity enlisted the talent of nine circus performers to drive home a gospel lesson.”

—Washington Post, March 24, 1975

“I knew Fr. English quite well. He told me he had a friend who had a connection to the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus. He thought it would be a great idea for some of the circus performers to come to the 9am Mass (it was called the Children's Mass then) and “do their thing.” His rationale was that their appearance related to the readings of the day... They did show up and did a great job! Somehow, the Washington Post picked up the story and then someone wrote a letter to the editor complaining about having a circus performance in the middle of Mass. The Archbishop of Washington at that time was Cardinal Baum. The Cardinal called both Fr. English and Fr. Butler to his office. Fr. English told me later that they were sure they were going to be fired and the Jesuits kicked out of Holy Trinity. Most people do not know this, but when Fr. English explained his rationale for the Mass, Cardinal Baum was so excited about the Mass that he told them both to “keep up the good work at Holy Trinity!”

—Dennis Lucey



The Circus comes to Holy Trinity! On Palm Sunday 1975, Fr. English enlisted the talents of nine circus performers.

“I remember going to the rectory to find out how I could become involved in the parish. Fr. English told me to have Macy Galbraith (who lived in the same apartment building as I) introduce me to Paul Quinn, who led CCD. The rest is history. He married us and baptized both our sons.”

—Cathy Quinn

“The Rev. Jim English was a popular pastor at Holy Trinity in Georgetown and was popular with the Washington glittery set, which was unhappy when he was transferred to the wilds of Raleigh, NC. When it was learned back in Washington that he was building a new church down there that was accessible only by a dirt road, Mary Connolly and Nancy Dickerson threw a roadbuilding fundraiser at Dickerson's Merriwood estate last week. Some of his friends, including Edward Bennett Williams, the Rev. Gilbert Hartke, Joe Califano, and Rep. John Dingell got together at the fundraiser, which raised more than \$12,000 for the paving of the road.”

—Washington Post, circa 1982



With Mary Connolly and Nancy Dickerson