

STATIONS OF
THE RESURRECTION

The Way to Life

ORIGINAL ICONS
BY CAROLINE LEES

MEDITATIONS
BY FATHER TERRY TASTARD



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*This book is dedicated to the people of
the parishes I have served. They have taught me
so much about faith, hope, and love.*

FATHER TERRY TASTARD

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FOREWORD

One feature of Catholic spirituality in recent years has been a growing awareness of the role of icons in encouraging us to pray, and indeed to pray more deeply. The Catholic Church encourages the use of sacred images in prayer and worship. As stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), “Sacred images in our churches and homes are intended to awaken and nourish our faith in the mystery of Christ. Through the icon of Christ and his works of salvation, it is he whom we adore” (1192).

Pope John Paul II himself prayed frequently in front of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan, which had been entrusted to his safekeeping in 1993. In August 2004 he returned this icon to the Orthodox Church in Russia, as a sign of the shared faith of Eastern and Western Christianity. It was also a sign of his yearning for closer relations between the Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church.

It is true that icons have been associated especially with Eastern Christian spirituality. Their growing use in the West shows that all true prayer to Christ is itself an act of unity, in which we transcend our divisions.

The icons in this book are a fresh expression of the wonderful tradition of creating icons for the people of God. It is a tradition both new and old, for today a new generation is discovering for itself how the stillness and beauty of the image can help in the quest for spirituality.

May those who turn to this book of icons and meditations find that they are drawn into prayer. May they discover for themselves what Saint John Damascene wrote when he said that the beauty of sacred images moved him “to contemplation, as a meadow delights the eyes and subtly infuses the soul with the glory of God” (as quoted in CCC 1162).

CORMAC CARDINAL MURPHY-O’CONNOR

INTRODUCTION

Icons are an aid to worship. They assist us in going from this world of change and chance to the unchanging world of eternity. There is a stillness about icons, therefore, which draws us into them, and beyond them. Through the door of the icon we gaze into that eternal realm where God is all in all. Here, there is noise and confusion; there, we find heavenly peace.

We hope that these paintings and prayers will help you to enter more deeply into the mysteries of our redemption, as you walk the way of the resurrection. This is the way to life, opened up for us by Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

The process that led to the creation of these icons was set in motion by Father Clive Lee, parish priest of Saint Thomas More Catholic Church, Manor House, in the Hackney area of London.

Saint Thomas More Church was built in 1969, which was not the most inspired period of British architecture. It became the focus of a vibrant, lively parish, with a reputation for liturgical creativity and involvement in the community.

Father Lee found the people there to be warm-hearted and strong in faith. He wanted to adorn the church in a way that would reflect the warmth and faith of the people, while at the same time encouraging their spirituality. Father Lee had made many visits to Russia and had drunk deeply from the well of Orthodox spirituality. He knew that icons are powerful representations of that transcendent eternity where the splendor of God shines forth. Icons convey the faith of the ages and draw us, heart and mind, deeper into prayer.

He resolved to commission a series of icons for the church of Saint Thomas More. He dreamed of a series of icons that would focus on the disciples and their experience of the risen Christ, both directly and in the encouragement they received to go forth as witnesses of the Lord.

His friendship with the London artist Caroline Lees provided the opportunity. Caroline Lees studied at the Corcoran Gallery School of Art in Washington, D.C., and later attended master classes at The Slade School of Art, London. Her works have been exhibited widely in the United States, the Middle East, and the United Kingdom, including the Royal Academy. Caroline Lees now works from her studio in Fulham, southwest London. Having lived for many years in the Middle

East, she returns there often to paint; her main interest is depicting light.

More recently she became fascinated with the art of icon painting, studying under Aidan Hart and attending a master class at Sergiev Posad outside Moscow. She also studied in Saint Petersburg with Tatiana Kolibaba to improve her technique.

The subtle light that characterizes these icons is conveyed through her mastery of egg tempera and gold leaf. This is a medium that Caroline Lees uses in paintings both sacred and secular, and uses superbly in the icons reproduced here.

FATHER TERRY TASTARD

DESCENT
INTO
HELL



DESCENT INTO HELL

Matthew 27:50–54

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

If you visit the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem you will find a large rock underneath the Calvary Chapel. The rock is split, and you can see a streak of red running through it. A tradition associated with the rock says that when the blood of Jesus trickled onto the ground, it fell on the place where Adam and Eve were buried. As the blood trickled down, they too were brought to eternal life in Christ.

The story illuminates our deep longing that as many people as possible may find life in Christ. Christ, after all, brings us the generous love of God. We know that

the power of Christ's resurrection reaches forward to embrace all people who acknowledge God in Christ. Why, then, should it not reach back through time to embrace all those who never had a chance to hear of Christ? This is the subject of our icon here, and it is one of the ways Christian tradition has interpreted the biblical text of 1 Peter 3:18–20, and the phrase in the Apostles' Creed in which we affirm that Jesus "descended into hell."

In our icon, Adam and Eve symbolize the whole human race, in this case, all those who were born in the generations before Christ. The cross has torn open the earth that held them in the stillness of death. The placing of the cross reminds us of what is sometimes called the harrowing of hell: the cross, like a plow, tears into the underworld to set its captives free.

In our icon, Christ reaches out to lift Adam to his feet. Beside him, Eve opens her hands to the Lord in acknowledgment, although it also seems as if she is clapping her hands in delight.

The robe of Christ is black, shot through with gold. There is black on his robe because death remains an earthly reality. Death can still bring heartache. But the gold shows that the love of God in Christ has removed the sting of death.

There is something awesome about death. It seems so final. It comes to the high and mighty, just as it comes to the poor and the weak. No one is exempt. But there is a power even greater than death: the power of God, who is love. Love gives life, and God, in Christ, draws us to share his Son's resurrection.

Our icon shows ghostly figures below. They are blinking at the cross in the daylight as Christ's cross bursts the walls of their prison. The cross, an instrument of death, has become now an instrument of life.

These shadowy figures remind us that there are others still locked in a world of sadness and oppression, waiting for Christ to break through and set them free. This draws our attention back to our own times. It reminds us that there are many who feel trapped in their lives, with no way out. Jesus takes them by the hand—takes us by the hand—and invites us to join him in the way to life.

We adore and praise you, O Risen Lord

*Because by your death and resurrection you give life
to the world.*

Lord, do not let the tomb enclose me.

The tomb of self-doubt and anguish.

The tomb of cynicism or indifference.

The tomb of selfishness.

The tomb of hurt and despair.

Always, dear Christ,

reach down and draw me out.

Set me on my feet again

and send me on my way,

comforted by the knowledge

that you are the hidden presence

beside me,

knowing that I am not alone,

but part of a great company of people

to whom you give life.

MYRRH-BEARING

WOMEN



THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN

Matthew 28:1–7a

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead.’”

The angel sits confidently atop a hillock. Why should he not be confident, who moves between heaven and earth as God’s messenger? The women, however, are taken aback. One of them stares in amazement, while the other two turn to each other for reassurance. We are left in no doubt that this is a heavenly visitant, an irruption into the earthly world: his robe is still fluttering, while one wing points upward to heaven whence he came. You can almost hear the thump of his arrival, and the gasp