

12th SCRIPTURAL STATION - JESUS GIVES HIS MOTHER TO JOHN

by Fr Robbie Low

(Jn. 19 v 25 -27)

When did she first know?

When did the news filter back through the long confusion of the night?

The Supper over, the Kidron Valley crossed?

The close ones, the disciples, the band without the groupies or the roadies hunkered down in the olive grove for a long night of prayer. Hands together , eyes closed and drifting into sleep, wondering what dawn and day would bring after this exhausting and triumphant week?

Was she waiting at a friend's house while Gethsemane was invaded?

When the disciples fled only for some to reconvene and watch from a distance the unbelievable disaster of the early hours?

Who would have woken her from fitful slumber and told her of the guards, the temple police, the kiss of Judas, the torches and the terror and His implacable and inexplicable calm?

At what hour did she first know the worst was unfolding? Tumbled from her warm cot in the cold of the pre-dawn dark to confront her ancient fears, to revisit the long ago prophecy of old Simeon, 'a sword will pierce your heart'.

To go where? To dress in haste and shuffle through the empty streets to here and there. Where have they taken Him?

From High Priest Cabal, the enemy's high command post, the regular target of His revolutionary ire?

To grubby Herod's pied a terre, hastily changing his pyjamas into royal robes, scratching his belly as he leaves his warm adulterous bed to confront this long heralded novelty item – this religious pretender with unsettling credentials?

And fearful to the Gabbatha, the Pavement, the Imperial seat of Judgement, the solitary place where death can be pronounced?

When did she know? When did she intuit this juggernaut of tragedy and death had finally come ramping down the track?

Out of a clear night sky, out of a week of chaos and confirmation?

The joyous crowd, the eager listeners, the signs of supplication to His kingship?

His outburst in the Temple? Was that the turning point? The moment when they knew that He must be stopped, muzzled, stood down, eliminated?

The long wait. The hours of obscurity precede the waking bustle of the street, the city on edge, the news travelling, the carefully seeded rumours of blasphemy and sedition taking hold. Growing anxiety and dread.

And then the exposition. The awful moment when He appears, bruised and battered and bloody on the steps of judgement. The crowd are baying. Scarcely believable, the ones who cheered His triumph now demand His blood. We have no king but Caesar. Can this be real? The City of David now, in this dreadful dawn, rejecting the saving heir of David's line? They prefer Bar Abbas – son of the father – to the real Son of the Father. And Him? The royal heir of chosen people's sovereignty? A cruel death.

Was it for this that she endured the shame of Nazareth's tattling tongues?
The loneliness of Joseph's short-lived doubt?
The long ride south to Bethlehem, eight months gone.
The birthing in a barn, the hospitality of the cattle, the cradle a feeding trough.

What then did all this mean?
Was it for this the Angel spoke so long ago, in another lifetime now it seems?
Was it for this the angels danced in the sky above the House of Bread and sent excited and ecstatic shepherds racing from their flocks to worship in the byre?
Was it for this the Magi made their long and winding track, starbound, to this unlikely palace of a king and gave the signs and bowed the knee?
Was it for this that, discreetly to the Temple to give thanks, we were waylaid by prophets and proclaimed the promised hope of Israel?
Was it for this we, angel warned, fled Herod's cruel slaughter and lived refugee in Egypt's exile camps?
Quiet return, years of obscurity and then, when quiet reigned the famous God blessed cousin, heir of promise too, state murdered and the ministry begun?
Was it for this we tramped the countryside, Him preaching, teaching, healing, crowds everywhere, lepers and lunatics, the lovers and the lost, the curious and the hopeful, the sheep without a shepherd and , where it all began – the

wedding and the wine.

John remembers.

And now the long agonising parade to the hill of death, the son, my only son, I could not save. To Moriah, the place where God spared the son of Man and Abram got his promised future back.

To Moriah, now named Calvary, where Man will not spare the Son of God.

On this Way of Sorrows, brief encounter, Our Lady moves beyond the sword points and the threat of spears to kneel and embrace the bloodied child she cannot rescue now from sin's domain. No tears can wash this blood away. No prayers impede this road of death, no arms defend this royal sacrifice.

The road of majesty subsumed in suffering, the thorn crowned king invites all men to kneel before His immolation and the final metamorphosis of Man.

STABAT MATER – sing the voices of the faithful. Here on Zion's sacred mount she stands still, in company with the beauty of the Magdalene restored and this much loved disciple, son of thunder, faithful to the gates of death.

The hours of the agony go by. The tears do not diminish. The Saviour rocks and gasps and bleeds. He speaks forgiveness to his torturers. He calls on the Father whom He can no longer, in the blinding pain of death, perceive. He grants, Paradise to the man who shares his dying bed of pain and penitence.

And then this.....a final glorious gift. At once domestic housekeeping and a sign that will echo down the ages and make sense to all who have known the Spirit's overshadowing and joined the company of the 'called', the Ecclesia, and become the faithful Followers of the Way.

To Her, beloved mother of the Son of God, He gives this beloved disciple, another son, each beloved disciple that has ever lived, her child.

To this disciple, much beloved, who faithful to the Cross has come and stood in solidarity with all the saints, He gives the precious Mother. He gives the one whose joyful and obedient co-operation with the love of God and openness to the Spirit has made salvation possible, whose 'be it unto me' has creaked open again the door of Paradise, whose refigured Eve has loosed the rusted Gates of Eden. He gives the ikon of the Church and, with John, with all the beloved of

the Lord, we take her, from this hill of sacrifice, into our homes, into our hearts, that we may learn from her, each day, what it is to have a heart of love for Jesus.

Sweet mother, sufferer, handmaid of God, supreme intercessor for the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve, pray for us now and at the ninth hour in our final agony.