

Scripture ~ Matthew 27:57-60

⁵⁷ When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹ So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.

Reflection for Adults

There is a story told in South Africa about some children who threw rocks at a delivery van one day. The army was called, and they opened fire, killing an innocent 10-year-old girl. One of the soldiers was chosen to guard the little girl's body, which was lying in the dust, while they waited for the authorities to arrive. Seeing that the girl's dress was torn and her body exposed, the soldier took off his own shirt to cover the child. Then he stood guard, dressed only in his pants. When one of the other soldiers mocked him and asked why he would do such a thing, the soldier replied, "She is also made in the image of God."

Christians throughout the ages have always given great respect to the human body after death. Whether through washing and anointing, incensing, sprinkling baptismal water, burying it in the earth, or returning a person's ashes to God's creation, Christians have ritually shown their profound belief that our bodies are dwelling places of God's Spirit.

At this fourteenth station, we meet Joseph of Arimathea, a person of great wealth and merciful compassion. Mary was the widow of a poor carpenter, and Jesus was an itinerant rabbi. In the eyes of many, they were just poor peasants. In the eyes of the state, Jesus was a criminal unworthy of a proper burial. But to Joseph, a secret follower of Jesus, Jesus was the very image of God! And, as such, he deserved a respectful burial.

Take a look at the picture. On the front of the stone, there appears to be a seed hanging from the branch of a tree. Around the seed, it looks like things are beginning to emerge and grow. Take a closer look at the picture...perhaps what looks like a seed is also a cocoon.

Going Deeper

- How does your own tradition give respect to the body after death?
- What do the funeral rituals of your church teach you about the dignity of the human body?

Reflection for Children

After Jesus died on the cross, one of his friends, Joseph of Arimathea, asked Pilate if he could take Jesus' body down from the cross. Along with Mary, Jesus' mother, and some other friends of Jesus, Joseph prepared Jesus' body for burial. Then he buried Jesus in his own tomb.

Discussion with Children

- Have you ever been to a cemetery? How did it make you feel to be around the graves?
- Have you ever seen a butterfly come out of its cocoon? Why do you think the butterfly is one of the symbols people use at Easter?