

# Reflections on Lent & Easter through Art

## Week 1: February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024

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### **Jonah and the Whale, c 1987**

Albert Herbert

(1925 - 2008)

Oil on canvas

11" x 14"

(27.9 x 35.6 cm)

Private Collection

*Jonah 1: 17b;*

*2: 10; and 3: 6*

Albert Herbert was born in 1925 in London. He studied at the Royal College of Art in the late 1940s and early 1950s alongside a group of artists that became known as the 'Kitchen Sink' painters. Herbert was Principal Lecturer at St Martin's School of Art in the 1960s and '70s.

Early in his painting career Herbert realized that he wanted to make "figurative, emotive, symbolic paintings". He was, however, fighting against the tide of the times. In the late 1950s and early 60s waves of American painting, led by abstract expressionism, burst over Britain's artistic shores. Herbert found abstraction too restrictive which led him to give up painting in a representational way for a time. He repressed his instinctive drive to make images that tell stories but eventually found a way back to painting through children's art and began creating primitive, figurative etchings. It was while studying at the British School in Rome that Herbert, who had no religious background, was drawn towards Christianity. Some of you may remember, at the beginning of last year's Lenten reflection, we contemplated a work of his entitled "Ash Wednesday".

The British art critic, religious Sister Wendy Beckett, described in her 1993 book *The Gaze of Love*, Albert Herbert as probably one the greatest contemporary religious artists. Albert Herbert, painter and etcher, died in May 2008.

Questions: Am I, like Jonah, running away from God's message to repent?



## The Last Judgment, 1535-1541

Michelangelo (1475-1564)

Fresco

539.3" x 472.4"

(13.7 m x 12 m)

Sistine Chapel, Vatican City

*Matthew 25: 31, 33, 46*

Michelangelo was born in 1475 in Caprese which is a part of the Republic of Florence.

At the age of 24 (1499) he had already created probably his most venerated marble sculpture: 'The Pieta' located in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City. In 1504, he sculptured his magnificent 'David' which is now at the Accademia Gallery in Florence.

In 1508, Pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to decorate the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which had been built within the Vatican between 1477 and 1480. Michelangelo, who saw

himself as a sculptor rather than a painter was reluctant to take on the work; he suggested that his young rival Raphael should paint the ceiling instead.

The Pope, however, was persistent; and insisted that Michelangelo should paint the ceiling, leaving him little choice but to accept. The contract was signed in 1508, with a promised fee of 3,000 ducats (approximately US\$600,000 in gold in 2021). The final part of the ceiling was unveiled to the public on All Saints' Day in 1512.

The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was immediately regarded as one of the greatest masterpieces ever composed and cemented Michelangelo's reputation as the greatest living artist of his time. He continues to be held as one of the preeminent artists in history.

The fresco 'The Last Judgement' was commissioned by Pope Clement VII more than twenty years after Michelangelo had painted the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Michelangelo was 66 years old at its completion in 1541.

'*The Last Judgement*' is a depiction of the Second Coming of Christ and the final and eternal judgment by God of all humanity. It was to be an eternal warning of the transitory nature of life and the universe. The dead rise and descend to their fates, as judged by Christ who is surrounded by almost 400 figures including prominent saints. Originally nearly all the males and angels were shown as nudes; many were later partly covered up by painted draperies, of which some remain after cleaning and restoration in the 1980s and early 90s.

Questions: Does my **life** merit joining Christ and the Saints in heaven?





### **Magdalene with the Smoking Flame, c1640**

Georges de la Tour (1593-1652)

Oil on canvas

3'10" x 3'0" (116.8 x 91.4 cm)

Louvre, Paris

*Luke 9: 22 and 23*

Georges La Tour was born in 1593 in Vic-sur-Seille, a town in the independent Duchy of Lorraine in northeastern France. His family belonged to the provincial artisanal class: both his father and grandfather were bakers. There is little documentation about his artistic training or early career.

La Tour, heavily influenced by the work of Caravaggio who had died in 1610, when La Tour was a young artist, is best known as a religious and genre painter with devotional scenes, depicting deep contemplation and intense spirituality structured by dramatic effects of daylight and candlelight.

After the unveiling of Caravaggio's first public commission in 1600, artists from across Europe flocked to Rome to see his work. Caravaggio's international reputation spread quickly thanks to the numerous French, Dutch, and Flemish artists in Rome, who disseminated his style across Europe. The increasing demand for paintings by Caravaggio and his followers contributed to

the rise of the Caravaggesque movement: artists who produced works in a naturalistic vein, with dramatic chiaroscuro (an artistic technique that uses light and shadow to create depth behind the subject), often treating subjects that Caravaggio himself had made popular.

Of note, Caravaggio never painted a picture with a candle in it, yet his name is often associated with candlelight scenes.

La Tour whose knowledge of Caravaggio was most likely indirect, took the genre to a new level of sophistication and refinement. As well as chiaroscuro, La Tour used careful geometrical composition, and simplified painting of forms. During his career his work displayed different qualities from Caravaggio moving towards greater simplicity and stillness. La Tour's religious paintings omitted Caravaggio's dramatic effects. La Tour often created very quiet and intimate moments, leaving large expanses of the canvas empty. His surviving output is relatively small despite often painting several variations on the same subjects. After his death at Lunéville in 1652, two weeks after the death of his wife; both of their deaths likely from an epidemic, La Tour's work was forgotten until it was rediscovered in the 1910s.

Question: Do I make time, as Mary Magdalene, for contemplation, a key component of our faith formation?

The Biblical Roots of Ash Wednesday by Dr. Pitre:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vnGEJHg05E>