

St Francis The San Damiano Crucifix

Francis while at San Damiano church and praying before the Crucifix, had a vision to rebuild the church. Francis took this to mean literally San Damiano church, he later realised it was the Church, not a single building, it was the people, starting with himself and his relationship with Jesus and taking on a life of poverty.

His initial response was to beg for stones to help restore San Damiano. He sold cloth from his father's shop and his horse to fund the restoration and this ended in conflict with his father and the well-known story of the encounter of between Francis, his father and the local bishop. The bishop told Francis to return the money to which Francis did and then stripped off his clothes and said his only father now was God.

There is no record of Francis speaking to his Father again. This could be seen as a turning point in Francis' conversion.



San Damiano cross – creator of image unknown - Public domain

The San Damiano Crucifix

The Crucifix is 190cm high, 120cms wide and 12cms thick.

The Crucifix remained at San Damiano with St Clare and his sisters until after Clare's death. The sisters moved to Assisi, with the Crucifix. It remained there for over 700 years. In 1938, a major restoration took place and in Holy Week of 1957 it went on public view above the altar of the Basilica of St. Clare in Assisi.

Some of the images and figures that surround Jesus on the San Damiano Crucifix

Top Centre

The Hand of God offering a blessing

Below the hand

The Roundel, a circle symbolising the Ascended Christ

Each side of the roundel

Five angels.

Writing below the roundel

Translation - Jesus Saviour of Men of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

The halo

Symbolises the triumph of Jesus crucified and risen.

Hands

There are three angels around each hand.

Left of Jesus, as you view the crucifix

Mary, mother of Jesus and John.

Right of Jesus, as you view the crucifix

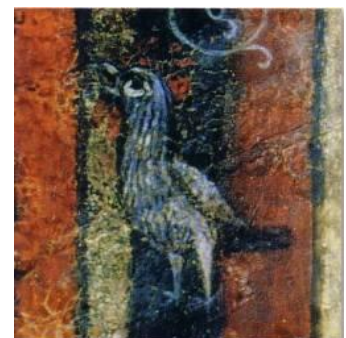
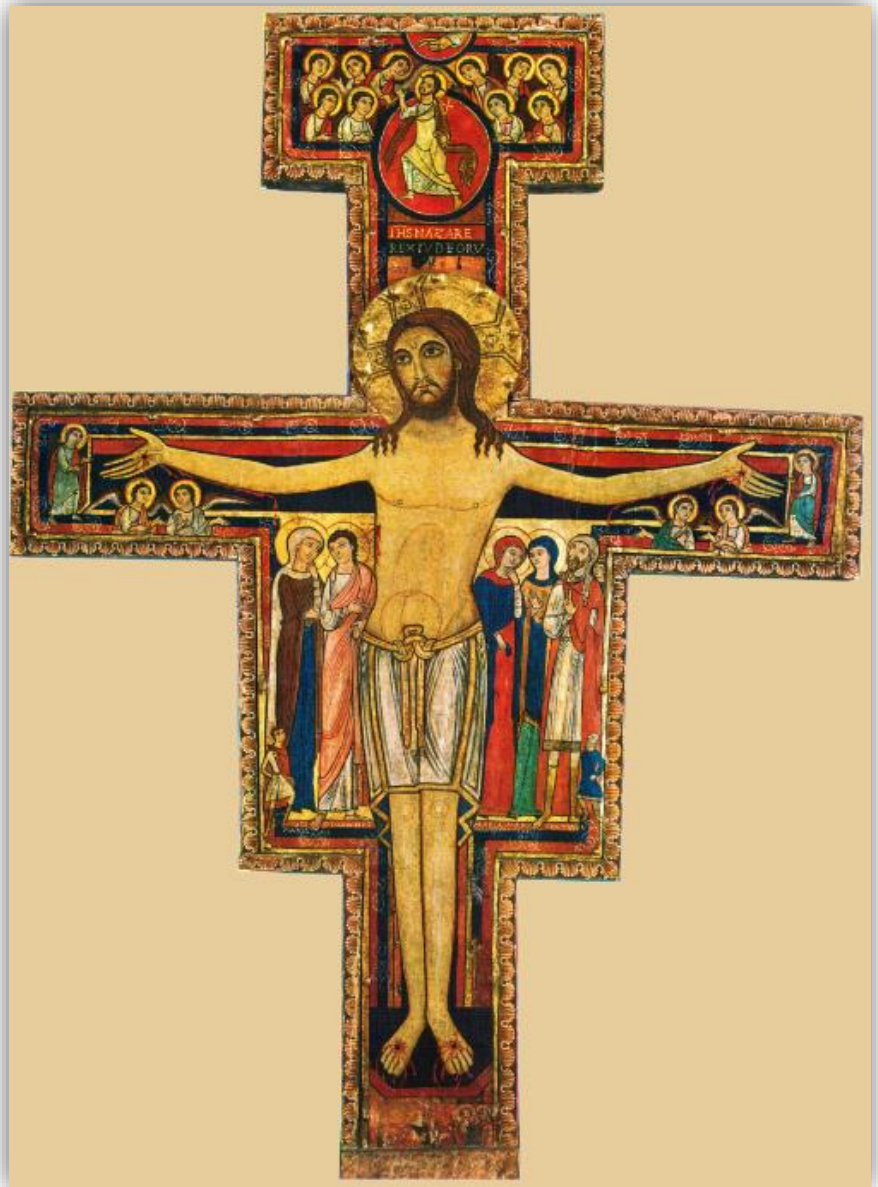
Mary Magdalene, Mary, wife of Clopas and the Centurion.

Close to the Right of Jesus, as you view the crucifix

Cockerel which crowed immediately after Peter denies Jesus three times. The inclusion of the crow has been also interpreted as announcing the everlasting dawn of the new creation.

Scallop shells

The San Damiano crucifix is surrounded by scallop shells which are traditionally identified with Baptism.



Jesus the central figure

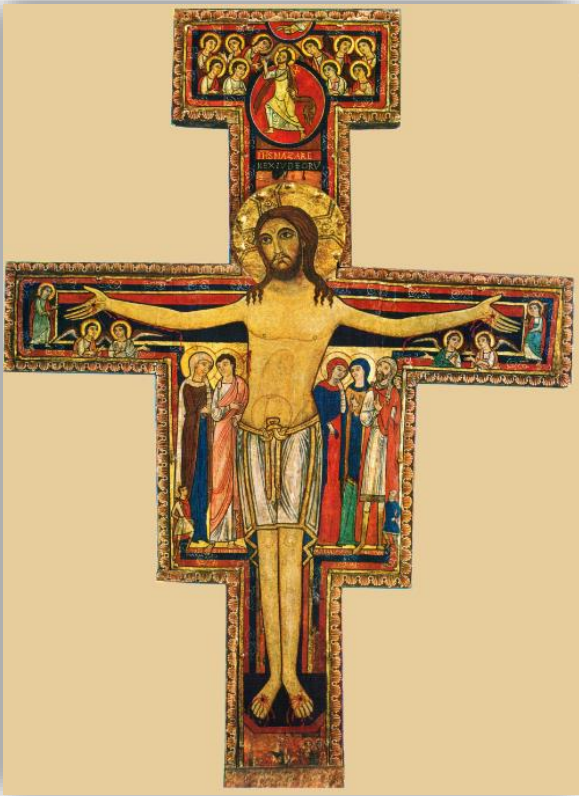
Although Jesus is shown as crucified, his appearance is different to the majority images of the crucified Jesus. The images usually depict the agony of the cross Jesus hanging, head bowed, eyes closed close to death, with a rough crumbled loin cloth. There is a sense, understandably, of despair in the majority of crucifixes but the Damiano Crucifix is different. It is as if it is illuminated, Jesus' eyes are open, the loin cloth is pristine, his hair carefully arranged. While there are the marks of the crucifixion on Jesus, the nails are not present. The appearance of Jesus has been described as if he was raised above the wood of the cross.

This crucifix has the appearance of an icon which had become more common in central Italy around the 11th and 12th century. The icon was often described as a window into the Divine and has characteristics of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

This was the cross that Francis was to gaze at, pray before, receive visions and hear Jesus' call. The Damiano Crucifix became the window into the Divine call of Jesus to Francis.

Thomas of Celano born 1200 an early follower of Francis and biographer, he wrote an early biography of Francis and spoke of Francis 'closeness to Jesus.

*The brothers who
lived with him know
that daily, constantly, talk of Jesus
was always on his lips,
sweet and pleasant conversations
about Him,
kind words full of love.
Out of the fullness of his heart
his mouth spoke.
So the spring of radiant love
that filled his heart within
gushed forth.
He was always with Jesus:
Jesus in his heart,
Jesus in his mouth,
Jesus in his ears,
Jesus in his eyes,
Jesus in his hands,
he bore Jesus always
in his whole body....
With amazing love he bore
in his heart and always held onto Christ Jesus and Him crucified.*



Find your favourite space for this time of prayerful reflection

light a candle and look upon the San Damiano cross.

Slow down, breathe calmly, be comfortable and relax.

Set aside 10 minutes or more

Sense the presence of God in this stillness.

Prayer does not always require words

Recall Jesus' words about using many words.

'And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.' (Matt.6:7)



Our opening prayer

Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me true faith,
certain hope, and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge,
Lord, that I may carry out
Your holy and true command.

Amen

(The Anglican Society of St Francis)

I invite to spend time gazing at the cross, not as a piece of Byzantine* art but as a window to the story of Jesus and the Cross. What does the story mean, how does the story still touch us?

Take your time and then play the John Michael Talbot** song 'Prayer Before the Cross'



<https://youtu.be/To5kWZTKljk?si=u2Zmdov8BXReezPi>

'Prayer Before the Cross'

We adore You most holy Lord
Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus Christ
As we gather together in this place
And throughout all the world

We worship You Lord
We adore you Oh Lord
And we bless Your holy name
For by Your cross
You have redeemed us
You have redeemed all the world

We worship You Lord
We adore you Oh Lord
And we bless Your holy name
For by Your cross
You have redeemed us
You have redeemed all the world
For by Your cross
You have redeemed us
You have redeemed all the world

This prayer formed the basis of daily prayer for the early brothers and later sisters, who could not read or write. They would say the 'Paternoster', the Lord's Prayer

Let us pray in confidence using the words our Saviour gave us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil. Amen

The closing words are attributed to St Francis

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Fr Derek Akker

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(Derek is a retired Anglican Parish Priest and a member of the congregations of All Saints & St James. Prior to his ordination he was accredited as a Methodist Preacher in 1968 and served within the Methodist Church until returning to the Anglican Church in the mid 1980's)

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Parish of Kirklees Valley, Bury, (All Saints, Elton & St James, Woolfold) - In the Diocese of Manchester

While I seek to use only reliable sources when using websites, I cannot guarantee that the content on these websites is or will remain accurate or appropriate.

Image - San Damiano cross - Unknown author - Public domain

* **Byzantine Art**

National Galleries of Scotland have a short article of Byzantine Art.

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/glossary-terms/byzantine-art>

** **John Michael Talbot**

I first came across John Michael Talbot in the 1980's and bought some of his early vinyl LP's. The first being 'Troubadour of the Great King'. He is a contemporary Catholic Music and Christian leader.

'John Michael lives and leads the monastic life, which overflows into his very active ministry from Little Portion Hermitage in Arkansas, where he is the Founder and General Minister of the Catholic based community The Brothers and Sisters of Charity.' (extract from his web page)