

Entering into a time of mourning the death of Christ

Sunday School Opening

Brother Jon Hardinger 2022.7.17

Opening Songs

- Songs and Choruses
- #134 “I Love My Savior.”
- #135 “Holy Bible Book Divine”

Mark 16:10 b

- “those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping.” NASB

John 19:25-27

- **“But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the *wife of Clopas*, and *Mary Magdalene*.”**
- **“When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.” NASB**

1462 Bologna, Italy, even after a hundred years the plaque marked their thinking. The prevailing words sayings about this: I was alive like you are now, but you are going to be dead like me. Center of trade, influenced their religious beliefs. Textiles.

- A Lifesize Terra Cotta Sculpture

Depicting the Disciples at Christ's death.

Niccolò Dell' Arca (Who started a memorial sculpture to Dominic and Michelangelo finished)

A Wild Gathering of Sorrow

By WILLIAM E. WALLACE

JUST A FEW STEPS from the grandiose Piazza Maggiore in Bologna, Italy, is the unimposing church of Santa Maria della Vita. You might easily walk past the building, for just ahead are the bustling open-air markets of Bologna's medieval quarter and the two famous "leaning towers" celebrated by Dante in his "Divine Comedy." But you would be remiss if a visit to the Città Grassa ("City of the Fat") included only gastronomic delights and not the artistic treasure hidden in a corner of that modest church.

Bologna is blessed with an immensely rich cultural heritage. A crown jewel of the city's Renaissance sculpture is Niccolò dell'Arca's 1462 "Compianto sul Cristo Morto" ("Lamentation Over the Dead Christ"), a group of seven life-size and lifelike terracotta figures mourning the body of Jesus.

A wildly distraught Mary Magdalene rushes toward us—limbs outstretched, disordered drapery flying behind, and an open-mouth scream disfiguring her young face. She is the most flagrantly demonstrative of the figures who surround the supine Christ with theatrical displays of misery, sorrow and resignation. But all four of the women emit plangent cries and gesture expansively. One shields herself from the horrible sight, another grips her thighs with vise-like tenacity, and Mary, the mother of Christ, wrings her hands in contorted but useless prayer.

In contrast, the young St. John

stands motionless, internalizing his lament by covering his mouth and pulling his cloak protectively around his turned shoulder. He cannot restrain, however, the tears that well up at the corners of his eyes.

Kneeling at the left and staring at us from under a stylish hat is a heavy-set man dressed in a belted and pleated wool tunic. Labeled as Joseph of Arimathea, the wealthy aristocrat who gave his tomb for Christ's burial, he may in fact—given the hammer and pliers hanging on his belt—be Nicodemus, who helped remove Christ from the cross. In either case, his broad visage, individualized features, and rich curling mustache and beard suggest a contemporary portrait. He bridges space and time: between us and the work of art, between past and present.

Although most persons today approach the Lamentation group as a *capolavoro* (master work) of Renaissance sculpture, it is nearly impossible to remain immune to its visceral emotions and confrontational proximity. It is a work that both advances upon us and invites participation. The viewer helps close the semicircle of figures around Christ. We begin as specta-



tors and inevitably become participants.

We are offered the privileged place closest to Christ—close enough to touch. Because sculpture was three-dimensional and often painted to be lifelike (unfortunately, only traces of Niccolò's original polychromy survive), contemporary viewers approached such works as potentially alive. Sculpture was meant to be stroked, kissed, dressed and frequently paraded through the streets.

The Lamentation group is now behind a low iron grille that protects the precious work from the indiscriminate hands of tourists. Yet it retains its power both as a work of art and sacred encounter. As the Michelin guide might recommend, it definitely merits a

It is impossible to remain immune to the mourners' visceral emotions.

visit—even before your luncheon of Lasagna alla Bolognese.

Little is known about Niccolò, who was born somewhere in the southern Italian region of Apulia between 1435 and 1440, and whose family may originally have been from Dalmatia. We know he arrived in Bologna shortly before he was commissioned to create the Lamentation group, and therefore can assume he must have been a fully mature artist with a respectable résumé.

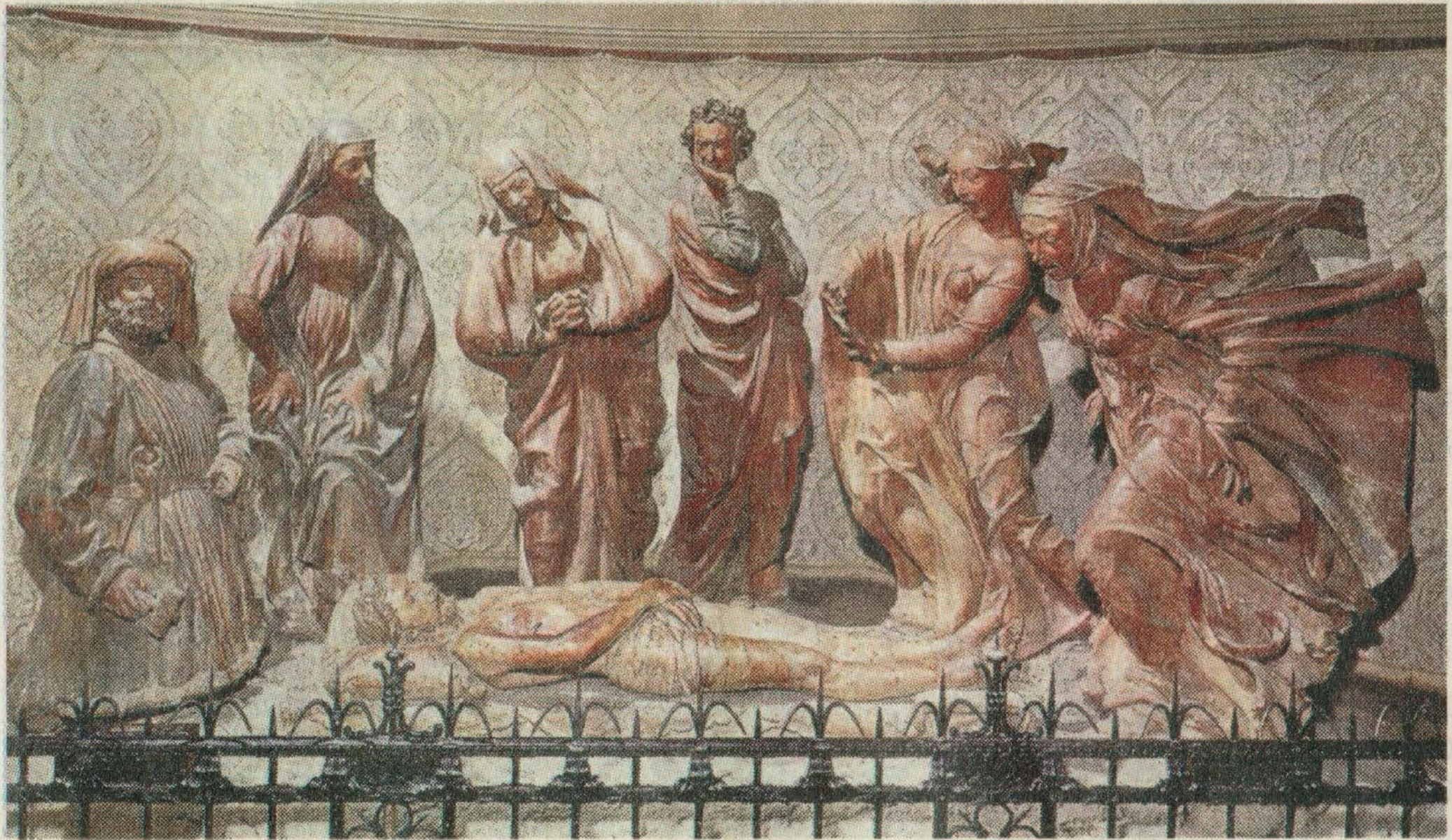
In the Renaissance, Santa Maria della Vita (Saint Mary of Life) was a hospice and hospital dedicated to caring for pilgrims and the indigent. The Confraternity was an association of brothers, influential and often wealthy individuals dedi-

cated to good works and public welfare. Although we are uncertain who put up the money for Niccolò's sculpture group, the modeling and firing of seven life-size figures in terracotta would have been a logistical and costly undertaking. Is the confraternity member who financed Niccolò's creation commemorated in the portrait-like figure kneeling at the left? From under a deeply furrowed brow, with eyes fastened upon us, he seems to ask how we might contribute to the Confraternity of Santa Maria della Vita.

In 1494, a 19-year-old Michelangelo Buonarroti fled Florence when his Medici patrons were expelled from the city. During a nearly yearlong sojourn in Bologna, the young sculptor carved three small figures for the incomplete tomb of St. Dominic, known as the Arca, in the church of San Domenico. The imposing monument had been largely carved between 1469 and 1473 by our Niccolò, which is why he adopted dell'Arca as his surname. Michelangelo was familiar with both of Niccolò's master works in Bologna, and certainly was influenced by the overwhelming tragedy conveyed by the Lamentation group.

Yet three years later, when Michelangelo was commissioned to carve his own version of a dead Christ for St. Peter's in Rome, he substituted motionless silence for Niccolò's screaming figures, carving a mother mourning her dead child: the Pietà. Radically different visions of infinite sorrow, both masterpieces.

Mr. Wallace is a professor of art history at Washington University in St. Louis.



Mary Magdalene here depicted, rushing to His body after it is taken down from the cross. Later, she runs from the empty tomb to tell the yet to believe, mourning disciples.

- John 20:2 she ran to tell the disciples, Peter and John the tomb was empty.



Mary, wife of Cleopas John 19:25, Luke 24



I surmise that
this represents
Salome, the
mother of the
disciple whom
Jesus loved.
Mark 15:40



There were also some women looking on
from a distance, among whom were Mary
Magdalene, and Mary the mother of
James the Less and Joses, and Salome.
Mark 15:40,

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of
Joses were looking on to see where He
was laid. Mark 15:47

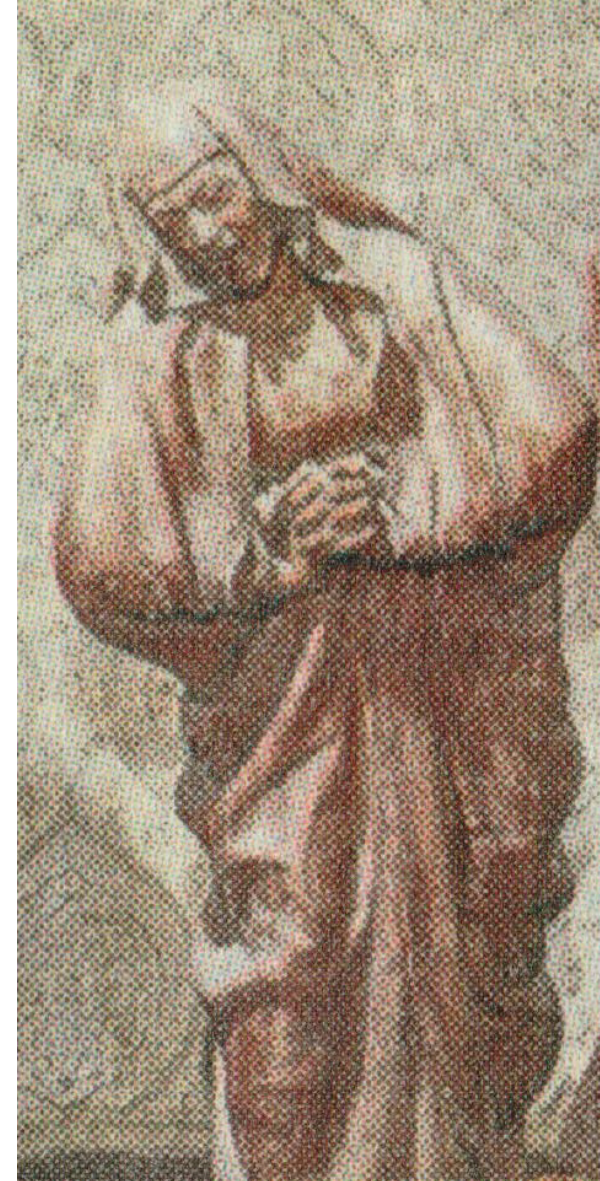
Among them was Mary Magdalene, and
Mary the mother of James and Joseph,
and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.
Matthew 27:56 (The mother of the sons
of Zebedee is Salome)

Apostle John



Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus

Simeon had prophesied
and a sword will pierce even your
own soul—to the end that
thoughts from many hearts may
be revealed.” Luke 2:35



Observer



Nicodemas

Joseph of Aramathea

Present obsever

Mr. Wallace's comments

- It is a work that both advances and invites participation. The viewer helps close the semicircle of figures around Christ.
- Sculpture was meant to be stroked, kissed, dressed and paraded through the streets.
- It is impossible for the viewer to remain immune to mourner's visceral emotions.

Lord Jesus represented as deceased, lying supine.



My own meditations: Help us “remember Him”

- This depicted experience is before His resurrection. We know that after His resurrection and appearances and sending the Holy Spirit, the disciples ceased to mourn in this way.
- Acts 3:15, Peter tells the Jews, “but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.”
- Acts 2:38, Peter’s sermon caused them to be pierced to the heart.
- Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.



June 24, 6:30 am