

Meditation

The story behind this beautiful painting, full of meaning, is not in the Gospels. It depicts a woman known to the Western Christian tradition since the Middle Ages as Veronica. She represents the nameless women who, like Mary and her friends, came from Galilee with Jesus to help and support him. The story is that as Jesus was on his way to Calvary carrying his Cross, a woman dashed out of the crowd and wiped the blood and sweat from his face with a handkerchief; the likeness of his face remained on the cloth.

‘Veronica’ comes from the Latin ‘vera’ meaning ‘true’ and the Greek ‘eikon’ meaning ‘image’, or ‘likeness’, and came to be the name attributed to the woman herself. The piece of cloth was also known as ‘the veronica,’ and was believed to be conserved in a chapel in Old St Peter’s in Rome from at least the end of the 12th century. There are many stories throughout the centuries about this cloth and its whereabouts, as there were also about the burial shroud of Christ. But for those of us looking to gain spiritual profit from the story, it is rich in meaning.

In this depiction, Veronica stands holding up the cloth with the likeness of Christ upon it. She looks upon it tenderly, as if remembering the event; depicted far away in the distance is the city, as far from her thoughts as if it were a different world. Here, she is alone with Christ.

The story of the Veronica reminds us of our true vocation; to be Christ-like. That entails knowing Christ; reading about his words and his actions in Scripture, thinking about what we read, meditating deeply upon it, and applying it to our everyday lives. We become like what we gaze upon. We are called to live in the light of Christ, and to reflect that light to our world. And we are called to continue Christ’s mission; to proclaim the closeness of the Kingdom of God, to make known its claims and its values to our own generation, and to live out those values in our everyday lives. In so doing, we too will become true Veronicas for our world.