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*Friendship.*

**As Jesus suffers in order to draw all humanity to God,  
he pauses to care for his mother and best friend's future  
together on earth. In this vignette, God's universal love  
is revealed to be utterly specific and concrete.**

*Lorenzo Monaco (c. 1365/70-c. 1425). THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST BETWEEN THE VIRGIN AND SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST (c. 1406). Tempera on wood, gold ground, overall, including gable, 33 5/8" x 14 1/2". Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.67). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

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# Near the Cross of Jesus

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

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In the midst of describing the horrific public events of the Crucifixion, the Gospel of John pauses to render this marvelous scene of friendship at the foot of the cross:

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

*John 19:25b-27*

The other Gospel writers do not mention this intimate detail which has inspired so many great works of art. Indeed, only the Gospel of John records that Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple were present as he died. (Mark 15:40 and Matthew 27:55-56 name Mary Magdalene and other women as "looking on from a distance.")

Both Lorenzo Monaco and Hendrik Terbrugghen simplify the Gospel scene to just three characters – Mary the mother of Jesus, John the beloved disciple, and Jesus – in order to focus on the theme of personal friendship in the narrative. (Other artists, as we might expect, have used John's story as the textual source for placing the other two Marys at the foot of the cross.) Even as Jesus is suffering in order to draw all humanity to God – he was "lifted up," John says, so that "whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15; cf. 8:28, 12:32-34) – Jesus pauses to care for his mother and his best friend's future life together on earth. In this vignette, God's universal love is revealed to be utterly specific and concrete.

Christ's sacrificial death is his ultimate expression of friendship toward his mother Mary and John. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you," Jesus teaches his disciples in this Gospel. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). In entrusting Mary into his beloved friend John's care – so that they will "love one another as he has loved them" – Christ unites them in friendship with one another. This small scene in John's Gospel becomes a window into our salvation: in making us friends of God, Christ draws us toward true friendship and love with one another.

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*Hendrick Terbrugghen (1588-1629). THE CRUCIFIXION WITH THE VIRGIN AND SAINT JOHN (c. 1625). Oil on canvas, 61" x 40 1/4". Funds from various donors, 1956 (56.228). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.*

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Though the artists Monaco and Terbrugghen share the theme of Christ's friendship, they are separated by two hundred years of history and quite different artistic styles – the Early Italian Renaissance and Dutch Baroque styles respectively. Lorenzo Monaco, born Piero di Giovanni, was a monk of the Camaldolese Order. He was trained in the Late Gothic style that is reflected in the gold background of the altar panel of the Crucifixion, *The Crucified Christ between the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist* (see p. 52). Around the time he was ordained as a deacon Monaco lived outside the monastery and opened his own painting workshop. His craftsmanship and

use of pure color are characteristic of artists transitioning from the fourteenth-century style of Giotto to the Early Renaissance style of Masaccio.

Hendrik Terbrugghen was one of the Utrecht Caravaggisti—a group of Dutch painters who were much influenced by the contemporary work of Caravaggio in the 1620s. For example, in *The Crucifixion with the Virgin and Saint John* (see p. 54) Terbrugghen applies Caravaggio's meticulous attention to realistic detail in the disheveled hair and pained face of John and the dirty feet of Mary. Yet in other ways this painting is less Caravaggesque than other works by Terbrugghen from this period. The low horizon, simple composition with emphasis on the scriptural narrative, and rendering of the body are often referred to as being influenced by Northern artists, or in these elements the artist may be trying to recall the great accomplishments of the fifteenth century.

Note the position of the cross in the two paintings; both are exceptional for their respective styles. Monaco's work is well known as an early presentation of the cross as if it were three-dimensional, sculptural, and emerging out of the picture. Terbrugghen achieves this same effect, for artistic perspective and modeling for three-dimensionality had been developed during the time between the two works. Instead of using the characteristic diagonal of the Baroque style, Terbrugghen maintains a more traditional Renaissance composition to further emphasize the presence of Jesus' mother Mary and devoted friend John the Beloved. The result, in both cases, is a balanced, harmonious, and symmetrical composition. In keeping with the visual tradition, both artists give Mary prominence by placing her on Christ's right side while they place the figure of John on his left.



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