

# TREASURES OF THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL

STAINED GLASS IN THE SANCTUARY window # 3

depicting

**the crucifixion**

by Bernard Lauwyck



For more than 35 years, visitors and worshippers alike have looked at the (4) four colourful stained glass windows, behind the altar in the sanctuary of the Roseau Cathedral. They looked but all they could see were a mosaic of bright colours.

As these 4 Sanctuary windows are like burning flames, “flamboyant” or “rayon ante”, most of us do not know what they are depicting. This is a sad state of affairs, which I want to rectify with some articles on them.

Today we look at the third top window, depicting Jesus crucified on the cross, with two persons underneath.

The crucified Christ, King of the Jews, is the best known symbols of Christianity.

It is however not well known that the cross and crucifix were not used as Christian symbols during the first 400 years of Christianity. Crucifixion as punishment was practiced by the Roman Empire till Emperor Constantine I stopped the practice in 317AD. For centuries, Pax Romana or “Roman Peace” was enforced by brutal repression by the roman legions. Remember the slave revolt under Spartacus, which ended with the crucifixion of 6000 slaves along the Via Appia in Rome. After the first Jewish revolt, Emperor Titus ordered thousands of Jewish prisoners of war to be crucified on the walls of Jerusalem and there were as many as 500 crucifixions a day.

Crucifixion was a punishment for political rebels, and carried the stigma of disgrace and humiliation, indicated the criminal's low social status. It was the most dishonorable death imaginable. Today crucifixion has lost much of its power to shock. Crucifixion was a brutal painful way of executing people, long pure torture . Our stained glass before us somehow manages to convey suffering, sorrow and grief but really pales before other crucifixion artwork .

It might be interesting for the reader to know that in Christian art , there are several different ways to depict Jesus Christ's crucifixion: The main difference is Jesus being alive or death. Another variation is in the persons who are standing around the cross.

I found the following different depictions :

- Christ depicted , with his mother and John, the beloved disciple underneath the cross reminding us of John 19:26 “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “*Woman, here is your son.*””



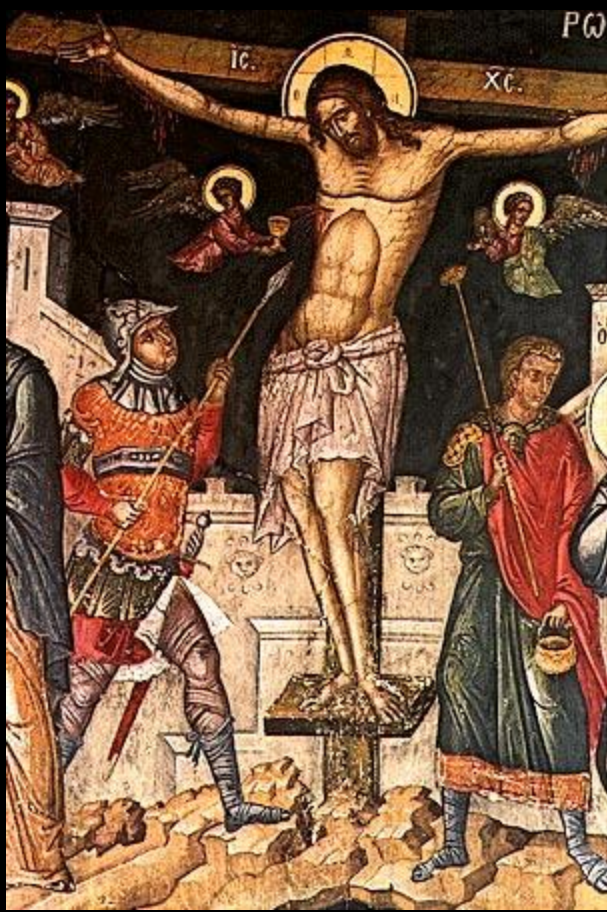
- Christ alive, experiencing extreme agony, as painted by Matthias Grünewald



- Christ on the verge of giving the spirit, bending his tortured body, looking up to heaven and screaming : “ ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI ”

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Mark 15:34.



- In another composition, Christ just died (John 19:30 he said, “*It is finished.*” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.). The roman soldier Longinus is about to pierce Jesus’ side with the spear and another soldier is walking away with the sponge.

- Christ may be depicted death, with his mother Mary, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene (John 19:25), kneeling and weeping under the cross.



- Christ totally alone on the cross, surrounded by darkness





- or Christ hanging between the two criminals .

- Less often we find a crucifix with Christ as king and priest on the cross.

