

TREASURES OF THE ROSEAU CATHEDRAL: MURALS part 2 .

By Bernard Lauwyck



MURAL 2 : THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM



As we continue to look at the murals in the Roseau Cathedral, we now focus on the second one: The Entry into Jerusalem.

The purpose of ornamentation or decoration is to enrich a building and to reveal the building's use or purpose. Ornamentation in a church building should be based on scripture and be directly related to beauty, Beauty as a gift from God. Beauty makes the Truth of Christ in the liturgy attractive, drawing people in, inviting them to be part of the liturgy, the Heavenly Banquet.



Every time I enter the Roseau Cathedral on a bright afternoon and I see the sun lighting up this beautiful painting, I feel like I have caught a glimpse of Heaven. All our catholic churches and chapels should reveal a glimpse of Heaven.

As mentioned in part 1 of this article, Belgian Redemptorist Brother Ildephonse (1860-1910) was the artist who “from his own brush” produced this master piece. He followed the established iconography of the Entry in Jerusalem, as described in all four Gospels.

Matthew 21.1-9 : “As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. “Go into the village over there,” he said. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will immediately let you take them.” This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said, “Tell the people of Jerusalem, ‘Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey — riding on a donkey’s colt.’ The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it.⁸ Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Jesus was in the centre of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, “*Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest*””



The fulfilled prophecy is from Zechariah 9:9 on the FUTURE KING

Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion!
Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem!
Look, your king is coming to you!
He comes triumphant and victorious,
but humble and riding on a donkey -
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.



“ And the crowd that went before, and that followed, cried, saying,
” *Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the
Lord; Hosanna in the highest*””

look at the palm branches, the daisies, the lilies and roses, the design of the rug on
the ground.

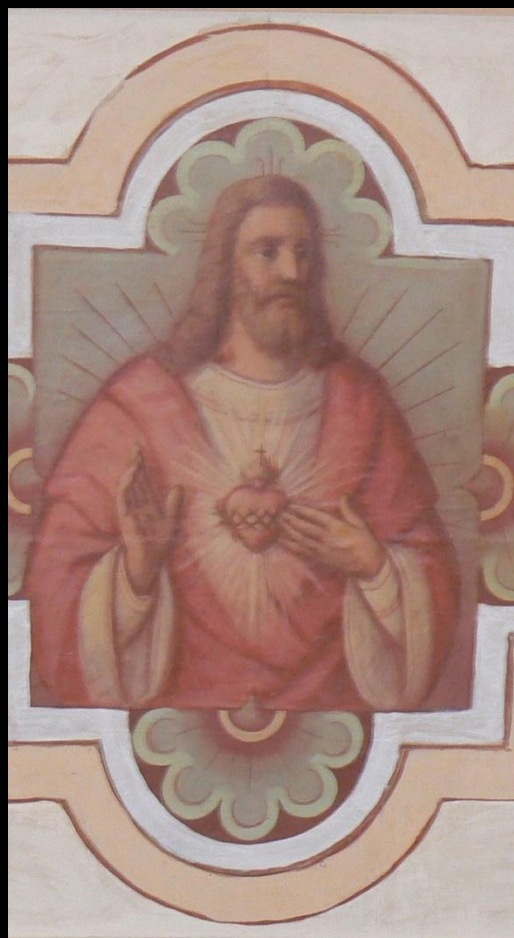


With this photograph below, I want to illustrate the exceptional quality of artistry and high workmanship in this painting: Notice the intricacy of the translucent VEIL on Mary Magdalene, the red- haired woman on her knees.



Above this “Entry into Jerusalem” mural, fixed to the ceiling board are murals, connected to the Sacred Heart.

In the centre of the ceiling panel is an image of Jesus presenting His Sacred Heart, rayed, and topped with a small cross on a crown, ringed by thorns, symbol of his pain and suffering.



A cinquefoil: 5 leaves for the 5 wounds of Jesus.



On the left side of this Sacred Heart panel, are three glorious angels with the Latin text “**Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde**” which means



“Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart”

This is taken from the Gospel of Matthew 11: 29 “ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls;*



On the right , again three angels with a Latin text of Proverbs 23:26
“ Praebe fili mi cor tuum mihi”

”My child, give your heart to me”



A little revelation, completely out of context : the Diocesan documents make it very clear that the original intention was to construct a western side chapel to the Cathedral so that the church would have a cruciform (= shape of the cross) floor plan. I quote: “No doubt, Bishop Poirier had conceived the plan, and laid the foundation for a side chapel, opposite the existing chapel. But, ... the plan has never been, and very likely, never will be executed”. End quote.



THE CONDITION OF THE MURALS TODAY :

This is an extra large oil painting : 22 feet in width and 17 feet in height. It painting was also restored by French artist Ronny Rodriguez after Hurricane David in 1984. He did a fantastic job but this is more than 25 years ago.

It is very important to me that each of you understand the dilapidated condition of this painting, now in 2012. As we mentioned before in a previous article, canvas will deteriorate with age, for several reasons:

This canvas is fixed on timber boards, which poses its own problems, especially due to the size of the painting. As an organic or “living” material, timber is vulnerable to the elements in quite specific ways. Room temperature changes, fluctuations in moisture content, gravity and tremors can induce dramatic changes in the shape of the boards, especially when they are not well braced by a frame, as is the case here, or not well clamped together. The boards can split, warp, twist and bend away from the frame or canvas.



Notice the splitting of the individual boards causing vertical cracks in the canvas.

Even if the underlying support seems sound, you might find the image itself has areas of cracked, loose or flaking paint, fading colours, signs of mildew or mould, whitening caused by old age and/or wear and tear. By expanding and contracting the structure becomes stressed and begins to fall apart. Paint layers may crack, canvas split and paint flake off.

Local artist Earl ETIENNE inspected this second mural and concluded that the painting is too fragile and damaged to be moved and stored away. His recommendation is to box the painting up with plywood, protect it from the rain with a small roof and from condensation with brown paper and ventilators. Once the roof works are finished, he will have a huge task to restore the painting.



Let us have a look why;

1. Several signs of water damage due to leaking roof valleys:

The paint is discoloured, blistered and flaked. There is mould around the affected area. The reaction to the water deteriorated the fabric of the painting and caused de-lamination of the painting from the canvas. The back of the canvas is most vulnerable.

Water damage causing WET ROT to the boards and moulding strips. The timber support of the canvas is no longer solid.

2. “Craquelure” is the technical name for cracking; the single most obvious sign of old age in an oil painting. It is a French term to refer to the cracks, visible when the surface of the paint literally separates from the base, revealing the white ground colour beneath.



3. Torn canvas exposing cracked timber backing.



As Palm Sunday is drawing near, I would invite all of you to have a “new” look at this marvellous mural, look with new eyes and SEE the beauty, the artistry !

This might be your last chance to see Brother Ildephonse’s masterpieces “from his own brush”. TO GOD BE THE GLORY, GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE.