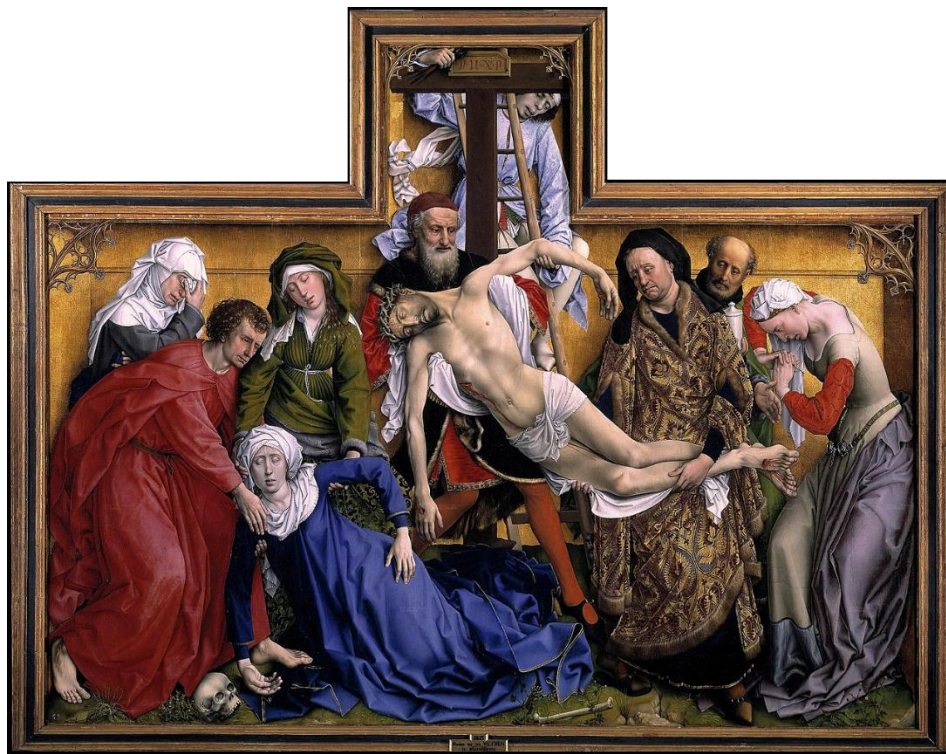


Art of the Month: April



This painting, *The Descent (or Deposition) of Christ from the Cross*, is on a wood-panel by the Flemish artist Rogier van der Weyden. It dates from around 1435 and can be found in the Museo del Prado in Madrid. There is a copy of this painting in the Chapel at Turnbull Hall, the Catholic Chaplaincy of the University of Glasgow. Jesus is dead and has been lowered from the cross, by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The flesh tones of the Body of Christ stand in stark contrast to the beautiful and sometimes rich garments the others are wearing. Look at the grief on the faces of those around the Dead Christ. Bewilderment, grief and piercing sorrow. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, seems to faint or swoon with shock and is comforted by John, the Beloved Apostle. This small group alone care tenderly for the Beloved One. Where are all those he healed and cured and comforted during his public ministry? Where are we? Are we mere on-lookers? The month of the Crucifixion! This year, Good Friday

falls on 10th April which happens to be the anniversary of the election to the See of Peter in 2005 of His Holiness, Benedict XVI. Holy Week and Good Friday in particular, presents us with time and opportunity for being holy in all things. A time during which we may strengthen ourselves and the pupils, as Saint Ignatius of Antioch has it in his letter to the Church of Ephesus, "by your faith, your encouragement, your patience, your serenity." As we observe the Passion of the Lord, we mark the day with fasting and abstinence. It may be useful to remind ourselves of what this involves. As on Ash Wednesday, on Good Friday everyone 14 years of age or older is bound to abstain from meat. Those of us who are 18 or older, but under 59 years of age are bound also to fast on on these penitential days. In practice, what does this involve? We should eat only one full meatless meal. Two other small meatless meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one's needs, but together they should not equal another full meal. So, we could have two snacks during the day to keep us from feeling unwell. That apart, eating between meals really shouldn't happen! Ill health, of course, could be an excusing cause but we should not lightly excuse ourselves from these these rare acts of penance and mortification. The greatest act of mortification the world has ever known was the Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord. Look again at the painting and at the unusual shape of His Body. Does it remind you of anything? Well, here's a clue. The artist, Rogier van der Weyden, was commissioned by the Leuven guild of archers for their chapel and very cleverly and uniquely, he positioned Christ's body in the T-shape of a crossbow to reflect the commission. The feet of Christ seem still to be nailed together; the arms still stretched as they were on the Cross as if to suggest the Crucifixion will not end until the world does. The Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen used to speak of "the eternal freshness of the wounds of Christ." Holy Week is such a poignant time but one comforting thought that gets us through Good Friday is that, of course, it is not quite the end!

Monsignor Monaghan