

Reflection

Michelangelo (1475-1564), the Renaissance sculptor, painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel after a jealous rival recommended him for a job requiring him to use an unfamiliar art form. That man's name is now an obscure footnote in history. Michelangelo's masterpiece features a fresco of Jonah that visitors see when they first walk into the chapel.

Jonah is depicted as a muscular, well-fed younger man who is slightly off-balance and leaning backwards in his chair with his feet dangling in the air. He is looking up and to his left towards the Lord, the light and love of his life. But his torso is twisted and contorted towards the right while his fingers point to something unseen below him. His lips are parted as if he is about to ask a question.

Jonah could easily be the poster boy for contemporary Christians living in our secular, post-modern world. We long to see the Lord but we feel off-balance by the pace of life and twisted by vexing personal and social concerns. Doubts and questions become our constant companions. In such an environment, how shall we find hope and meaning for ourselves, our families, and our communities?

Michelangelo may offer clues. On the right side of the fresco, a large fish, a reminder of the fish sent by the Lord to save his life from drowning, nibbles his left thigh. Above his left shoulder is the image of the vine the Lord provided to shade Jonah when he was about to faint of heat stroke. To strengthen hope for tomorrow, remember the past. Remember how the Lord has provided for you and your friends. Remember how he has worked in the lives of the saints, in the stories from Scripture.

Secondly, Michelangelo depicts two angels. One seems to have his head bowed in prayer for Jonah. The other has his hand extended in blessing towards Jonah. These are reminders that we are never alone. The Lord and his angels intercede on our behalf. There is an invisible realm that we can sometimes experience in prayer, through dreams, or probing our inner world if we slow down enough to take the time.

Image from wikiart.org
Reflection by Steve Stuckey



The Prophet Jonah
By
Michelangelo 1508