

A Sorrowful Life

A description of the painting *Man of Sorrows* by Joe Coleman

I am dying; my lonely and burdened life flashes before my eyes.

In a dirty alley, Mother is forced to the ground. Her cloak tossed to the mud as a soldier rapes her--some miraculous conception. I am born a burden to my father. He casts Mother aside. She sits as a statue, feeding me with no emotion or love. My father is "ashamed" of us, distancing himself from Mother and me as he tells the town of our unusual powers.

I grow.

I am in a bright green meadow, playing with my friends. They transform into Goats! This is a fun game! I want to play! But, they sprint away and the sky turns black. I am afraid of the dark. They shout, "Do not let him go outside the door because anyone who angers him dies!" Nothing will ever change; people never want to stay with me. "My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?"

I am in a large house with food, goats, and fruits. Ripe orange, ruby red stained glass windows shed a sparkling light through the house. I invite everyone inside to live happily in prayer, but Greed has overtaken them. They rush from the sanctuary, grasping the goats and fruits and ripping the once beautiful decorations. I am furious, shaking my fist, frustrated. How can I help them if they are so greedy? Crippled, plagued men run to me; hundreds beg for help. Why should I help these sinners? I am a father with selfish and spoiled children--however, I still cure my children "who [are] afflicted with various diseases, and cast out [their] many devils."

Listen. “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you.” I will continue to cure those who steal from me. I will continue to help those who turn away from me, leaving me sick and dying.

I am alone, diseased, bleeding, and afraid. No one cures me. No one comforts me. He says I must die, what difference did I make in my life? Why die now? “Why died I not from the womb?”

I stand with my closest friends before my death, and tell them to take my body for their benefit. “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you.” They devour my body; eating my arms in huge bites, leaving me weak and deformed. They still crave more. I offer them the leftovers--my blood. “This cup is the New Testament in my blood: drink it in memory of me.” The blood that escaped their hungry mouths is rescued in a gold cup. They stare up, worshipping every crumb of flesh, fighting and deceiving one another for more of my blood.

But now, I am dead. Broken. Bleeding. Rotting. Weak. Alone. My toes twist, my fingers fracture. My crippled, grey corpse has no life left for you to take. Even though I am gone, “Behold a wine drinker and a glutton, a friend of publicans and sinners,” begging for mercy on his hellish soul. The flames engulf the sinners of the world beneath me. Still, I answer their prayers with the last glimpse of life I have left. Now, they will continue with rich and healthy lives, abandoning my worshipped skeleton. After all, I am the *Man of Sorrows*.

All quotes are taken from the painting *The Man of Sorrows* by Joe Coleman, 1993, published in Original Sin (New York, NY: Heck editions, 1997): color plate 1.