

Night Journey 60: στίγμα/Shadows of Time and Death

Night journey 60 is a mosaic of convergent themes that structure our thoughts of being. The seated figure reflects upon the experiences of the life invisibly confined within his memory. Everyone arrives at the universal crossroads: Socrates' "An unexamined life is not worth living," and Aristotle's "A life not lived is not worth examining." Self-examination is sufficiently encapsulated within the lyrics from the song, *Who am I?*, by Lou Reed: "One thinks of what one hoped to be and then faces reality." In reflection, we become aware that we are the summation of our choices, which we examine in contrast to the paths and experiences not taken. Life creates conflicts and the conditions for human suffering.

Duer's *Adam and Eve* painting is symbolic of humanity's mortal sufferings, caused by human choice and weakness. Our world is what we have collectively made it. The paradise of equality is unattainable to many confined within the contemporary Sisyphean life.

In the Christian faith, it is believed that the Son of God suffered and died for humanity's sins. A different interpretation is that suffering is the consequence of becoming human and, as humans, we all individually suffer for our own choices and our own sins. Although we are not literally crucified, we still bear the visible marks of our suffering.

The word stigmata is the plural translation of the Greek word στίγμα. The meaning attributed to the word στίγμα is a mark, a tattoo used for the identification of animals or slaves. Many throughout history have worn the physical marks of στίγμα (stigma), which represented unspeakable human suffering. But aside from human slavery in all of its forms, we all bear the visible stigmata of time. It is the time, place, and ethnicity of our birth. It is what determines our choices - who we become and how our lives will be lived. The numbers on the hands and feet of the seated individual represent the stigmata of time, or the year of birth. Although we do not go around wearing numbers, nonetheless, our bodies display the unmistakable physical passage of time, and too often bear the signs of mental and physical suffering - of being human.

The two children's drawings at the feet of the figure represent choice. The one on the left is of 5-year-old Asher Girard's *Man Climbing Stairs*, which I symbolize as *Ascending Man*, someone who is actively engaged in reaching his potential. The one on the right, which is upside down, is 5-year-old Jasper Girard's *Sheep*. I use these drawings to represent the two options of choice: active and passive. We can actively pursue our dreams to reach our potential, or passively become what others make of us.

The child-shadow emanating from the figure symbolically represents the memory of childhood – a time of imagination where dreams always seemed within reach. The large shadow, also emanating from and looming over the figure, casts back to the Christian symbol of human mortality and the acceptance and tolerance of human suffering. The cherries on the window sill are a symbol that earthly paradise is unattainable to humanity by human choice. Paradise's unavailability is made more apparent today through global warming and constant human

conflict and suffering. One must contemplate one's own life, but also the lives of others. There is too much darkness in the world in which we live.