

The Corner **OUTREACH**

Saint Augustine and Saint Francis Xavier parishes'
newsletter for Spring 2021

Portrait of an Artist - Tom Glisson

By Bill Cahill

Artist Tom Glisson, for decades a fixture in New York ecclesiastic art circles, has been a special friend of St. Augustine's since the mid 1980's. Tom has a number of works of art in various media throughout the church: all reflecting his deep faith and spirituality and an abiding desire for his art to make the sacred present and accessible. This article will look at those works at St. Augustine's and other works with a local connection.

Tom was born in Ocala, Florida, went to high school in Marion County and graduated with a BFA from the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. Searching for a "northern influence" he followed this with an MFA from Syracuse University. In 1985 Tom moved to Brooklyn and became a member of St. Augustine's. He worked in various art related positions in the following years and from 1985-1992 was Design Director at Rambusch Studios involved in all aspects of ecclesiastical arts including church interiors, stained glass, lighting, historic restoration, conservation, replication, art metal, and mosaic. Tom is a painter at heart and particularly enjoyed making watercolor illustrations of period piece ecclesiastic render-



At the studio in Dumbo shared with a special effects company, Tom is posing with the crozier he made for Bishop Joseph Sullivan.

A Glisson stained glass window in a Florida Church featuring Bill Cahill and his daughter Caitlin.



ings for Gothic revival church projects. One of his paintings at St. Augustine's "Christ Meeting the Women of Jerusalem" was made as a study piece that was part of a proposal for a larger work at the cathedral in Salt Lake City, Utah. That project did not come about and the study piece made its way to St. Augustine's.

The canvas processional cross, one of two Glisson papal crosses at St. Augustine's, was made for the Pope's planned visit to NYC in 1994. This visit was canceled and the cross was not used for

the Pope, although Tom recalls that when he could not get the cross in a cab, he walked it up First Avenue from his home in Stuyvesant Town to the Diocesan offices at 56th Street attracting a lot of

attention along the way. Thereafter, Tom had begun working on a second processional cross commissioned by St. Augustine's parishioner Judith La Monica for the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the parish. The Archdiocese then



Baptistery with six female and six male saints reflecting the diversity of Brooklyn.



Papal Cross used by Pope John Paul II in Central Park in 1995.

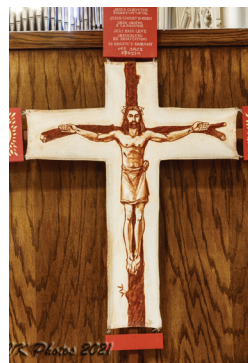
asked Tom if he would have a processional cross available for the Pope's now re-scheduled visit for 1995 and Tom proposed using the La Monica cross. That cross was under construction and finished just hours before the Pope's visit. It was used to lead the procession to the main altar in Central Park and then venerated with incense by his Holiness, Pope John Paul II. The cross is modeled on an African storytelling

stick in the Brooklyn Museum. The bronze corpus, cast at the Excalibur Foundry in Dumbo, depicts a triumphant resurrected Christ. The wooden elements were built with Bill Cahill in Bill's basement workshop on Flatbush Avenue. The Presider's Chair at St. Augustine's was used by Pope John Paul II at Shea Stadium during a Diocesan prayer service in October 1979.

In 1988, Tom and his wife, Anne Williamson, came to the aid of Fr. Ernest Fiorillo, pastor of St. Augustine's, to design and execute a new baptistery in the back of the church. The baptistery was previously located in a separate chapel off the main entrance of the church but Fr. Fiorillo, in keep-

ing with Vatican II norms on the centrality of the sacrament of Baptism, wanted to move the baptistery to the center of the church at the beginning of the center isle. Tom created an area to receive the Baptismal font and surrounded the font with depictions of twelve saints. The saints, six men and six women, were all painted by Tom and his wife Anne Williamson and represent a multicultural parish. Sharp-eyed cinema fans will note that the Baptistery is prominently featured in the wedding processional scene in the 2002 movie *Mona Lisa Smile* starring Julia Roberts.

St. Augustine is blessed to have one of Tom's greatest works, a life-size wood carving that depicts the Blessed Mother as an old woman. The statue was hand carved in American basswood at a studio in Dumbo. This statue is



Canvas Papal Cross made for Pope's canceled 1994 visit.

now located in the south vestibule of the church. For many years it resided at the Bishop Mugavaro Nursing Home in Cobble Hill, but when the home left the Catholic system, the statue was no longer there and St. Augustine's was fortunate to get it. It is a great addition to the Glisson collection at St. Augustine's. The Blessed Mother is traditionally depicted as a teenager or young woman, in her 20s at the

most. This depiction of an older woman is extraordinary. Tom's own mother, then 70 years old, served as a model for the statue. When asked about the statue, Tom said, "Her gesture was intended to give dignity to the elderly. My mother is a gentle soul, the mother of five children and her hands rest easily on her cane. There are no depictions of Mary in her middle age in sculpture."

In 1992, Tom and his wife, Anne, who has since passed away, formed the Wysong Company to render design and decorative services to churches and other entities throughout the New York area and in Florida as well. Tom has maintained Florida connections over the years and has produced art works and furnishings for churches through out Florida as well. In the 1990's he created a six foot wide

round stained glass window depicting Jesus gathering children around him. This window, located at Prince of Peace Church in Ormond Beach, Florida has a local Brooklyn connection in that Bill Cahill (then age 39 and his daughter Caitlin then age six) were the models for the work. Bill also appears in a Glisson bas relief as St. Peter the Fisherman in Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

St. Augustine's is not the only Brooklyn church with a special connection to Tom Glisson. Around 2012 and for some years thereafter Tom was an Artist in Residence at St. James Cathedral Basilica in downtown Brooklyn. He designed and built liturgical furnishings for St. James including a tintinabulum and an umbralina, ritual objects that would be used in a procession in which the Pope was present. He also designed and built the cross in the Byzantine style that hangs over the main altar at St. James, suspended from the baldachin.

Tom Glisson's art has been widely, but perhaps unknowingly, seen by many of us over the years. Tom worked at Gothic Scenic for 15 years where he was a studio foreman,



The Blessed Mother as an old woman. The artist's mother was the model.

directing execution of sets and associated art work for the *Sesame Street* television show and Radio City Music Hall. After Gothic Scenic moved to Northern New Jersey, Tom moved over to episodic television where he was studio foreman on the NBC show *The Blacklist*. He was with *The Blacklist* for eight seasons and was called upon to paint and sculpt and otherwise create realistic looking brick buildings, dead bodies, wood planks and even rusting tin. Tom contrasts his scenic work with his ecclesiastical work. The ecclesiastical work has a different time line. "When someone enters a

church 300 years from now, I want them to see what we intended."

Tom's adult children follow his footsteps in the art world. His son James is a published author and is curator of contemporary art at the Santa Barbara Museum following his tenure as chief curator of American art at the Huntington Gallery in San Marino, California. Tom's other son Nathaniel is also in the scenic business.

The breadth and ubiquity of Tom Glisson's art are an ongoing blessing for all of us who encounter that art. Whether sacred or secular, Tom's art asks the viewer to think, to dig a bit deeper, to open one's heart, to become more fully part of the human race and ultimately to be open to



A study for a larger project, "Christ Meeting the Women of Jerusalem".

the existence and presence of God. When thinking about Tom's work, especially at St. Augustine's where there is so much of it, I call to mind the inscription in St. Paul's Cathedral in London in honor of Christopher Wren, the great English Baroque architect who built St. Paul's: "*Lector, si monumentum requiris, circumspice*" (Reader, if you seek his monument, look about you).

Book Club in Times of Pandemic

After 10 years and over 100 books the SFX book club (now the SASFX book club) has been faithfully sharing through reading and discussion of a variety of fiction, nonfiction, classic and contemporary literature.

The pandemic didn't stop them. After a break of several months the book club resumed meeting on Oct. 18, 2020 via the parish Zoom account. Now you can drop in from the comfort of your home and be a part of this exciting and truly interesting group. The Corner Outreach recently connected with Ellen Shea, the moderator, to find out how it was going and what effect virtual meetings were having on the club.

Corner Outreach: How are you going about holding the book club virtually?

Ellen Shea: The book club took a break from March until October due to Covid and we were happy to be able to gather again virtually by using our new parish Zoom account. Our first meeting was October 18th and it proved to be glitch-free and easy for everyone. We were also glad to see a couple of new faces, so that was great, and we hope that by doing this virtually more people will be able to join us.

CR: Do you think you'll attract a wider audience by adding the link to the SASFX website?

ES: Adding the Zoom link to the website is a great idea. I know that in the past some people can't make it in person on Sunday mornings, so now more people might be able to attend the book group virtually.

CR: What criteria do you use for choosing books?

ES: I like to have a variety of fiction and nonfiction, classics and contemporary, Catholic and non-Catholic traditions. I also think it is important to pay attention to the mix of authors and make sure we are reading books by women and people of color as well as people outside the US or Western culture. The group has a discussion at the end of June to talk about the next year.

CR: What are some of your upcoming selections?

ES: March 21, 2021 - *Twenty Poems to Nourish Your Soul*, selected and introduced by Charles Reynard and Judith

Valente. A wonderful array of poems accompanied by short essays. This is truly a lovely collection.

April 18, 2021 - *Dorothy Day: The World Will Be Saved by Beauty: An Intimate Portrait of My Grandmother*, by Kate Hennessey. The life and work of Catholic activist

and founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day.

May 16, 2021 - *Transcendent Kingdom*, Yaa Gyasi. The moving portrait of a family of Ghanaian immigrants confronting addiction and grief and explores themes of faith, science, religion and love.

June 27, 2021 - *From Fire, By Water: My journey to the Catholic Faith* by Sohrab Ahmari. A fascinating memoir by journalist Ahmari that follows his journey growing up in Iran not believing in God all the way to becoming a Catholic convert as an adult.



The SASFX Book Group meets once a month on the 3rd Sunday of each month from 11am-12:15pm: dates changed on holiday weekends. If you would like to be added to the email list, or you would like any further information please contact Ellen at ellenshea301@gmail.com or you may leave a message at the rectory at (718) 638-1880. Or go to the parish website (SASFX.org) click on "get involved" up top. Then go to "ministries and groups>book clubs." Scroll down for info on our book of the month and Zoom link.

The Corner Outreach also connected with two book club members, Debbie B. Rosenberg and Marge Danser to get their perspective on the book club.

"From the moment I came to the book group about five years ago everyone was welcoming. We have a diversity of books and opinions. Because I'm a convert to this faith I'm especially intrigued by the experience of cradle Catholics and how that influences their faith. Ellen leads the group wonderfully and asks pointed questions that are always food for thought. I particularly enjoy when my faith is sparked in ways that I didn't expect. Each person can contribute, not only in the discussion, but by suggesting books. I feel there's a great deal of camaraderie in the group as well as continuity. I love our discussion. I honestly miss seeing people in per-

son but we had a very lively discussion of Sr. Joan Chittister's book *The Time Is Now*. I'm not generally a joiner but I feel a deep connection to this book group and to SFX which gave me both a spiritual and Gospel-inspired home."

-Debbie B. Rosenberg

"I've been a member of the book club for quite a few years now. It's been a wonderful way for me to explore my spirituality with a group of people I enjoy and admire. Sharing ideas and opinions on writers like Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day and Flannery O'Connor has been a pleasure and an education of its own kind. When everything closed down in March due to Covid I certainly missed those meetings and discussions. When we recently were able to Zoom back into action it felt exciting and satisfying to be talking with and seeing my book club friends again. Being a part of the book club feels more meaningful and important now more than ever. In such a difficult and stressful time, dealing with this new, strange isolation, it's helping me to have a deeper connection with my faith as well as with my fellow parishioners.

-Marge Danser

COVID MEMORIAL

This past year has tested us all. Mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, spouses, friends, lost to Covid. Most of you know someone who has been lost to this pandemic. And while the loss of a loved one is difficult enough to endure, the comfort of family and friends can help to mitigate some of the sadness and loneliness we feel. During this pandemic the isolation and social distancing it brings with it have prevented us from attending the funerals and memorial gatherings that help to comfort us.

SASFX is in the process of planning a Covid memorial to take place in the spring. In much the same way that St. Augustine marks World AIDS Day, we would like to place ribbons on the fence around the church with the names of those who have passed away from Covid 19. We are also planning a memorial service to remember and honor those we have lost to Covid 19. We hope that this will bring some comfort, not only to the survivors of victims, but to all in the surrounding community who are living through this life changing time.

If you, or anyone you know, would like to have the name of someone you know who has been lost to Covid 19 written on a ribbon placed on the church fence and remembered in the memorial please submit the name (s) to the following email address: jennifertnapoli72@gmail.com

Lenten Reflection

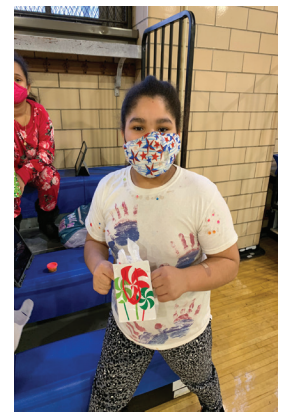
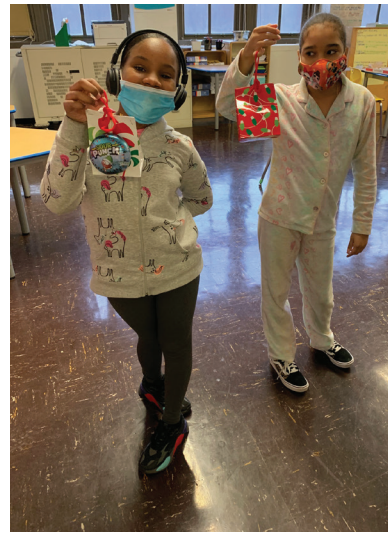
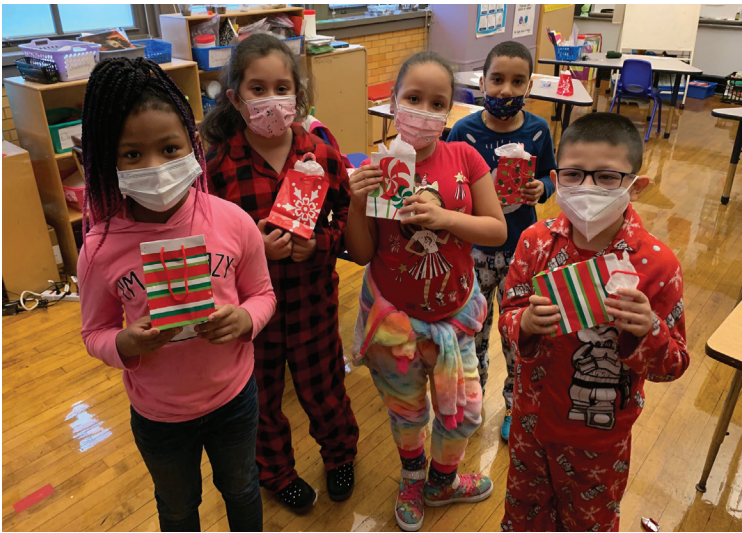
by Fr. John Gribowich

Jesus clearly promised that we would be able to accomplish great things with ease if only we have faith. Why? Because it is not we, but God himself who performs the actions. - *Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan (1928-2002)*

In the Hebrew Scriptures, we hear of the unique covenants that God makes with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. While we may liken the idea of covenant to that of a contract between equals, when it comes to God's covenant with humanity He always has the upper hand. Lent is a time for us to reenergize our faith in this covenant, but how exactly can we do that? Rather than placing the burden solely upon ourselves with acts of personal sacrifice, perhaps we could shift the emphasis on accepting God's acts of personal sacrifice for us.

Faith in God is only possible because of His faithfulness to us. The covenants in the Bible reveal that our lives have meaning and purpose and that the same God who gave us life in the first place will continue to sustain us and provide us with everything we need when we need it. The great "sin" of humanity is thinking that we are independent contractors who need to convince ourselves—and God—as to what we need and when we need it. Even the temptation of Jesus in the Gospel reveals that Jesus needed to lean into the faithfulness of His Father who sent angels to minister to him in His moment of need (Mark 1:13). The mission of Jesus culminates in the resurrection which is the ultimate sign of God's faithfulness to Him—and to us.

Perhaps this Lent we could make it a point to daily meditate upon the faithfulness of God towards us—especially when we find ourselves in a difficult place. We can think back on a challenging moment in our life and reflect how we were given everything we needed in that moment to get us through. In short, the struggles of our past are often what strengthen our faith in God. For those times when we refused to see God's hand in our personal passions we ask for His forgiveness, but more importantly we ask for the grace to once again embrace the covenant of love that He first made with us at our baptism. May we pray, "Jesus, I know that you love me, help me to see your love for me with your eyes!"



Gift Cards Make the Holidays Great



What can I say? Our parish families have come through again! We have brought smiles to many children, and one family in particular from P.S. 676 by setting up little holiday bags for Christmas to receive from Santa at their holiday party. You can see these pictures below. Principal Priscilla Figueroa dropped us a line also.

“Thank you for generously supporting our school. We appreciate you always helping our community. Wishing you the best holiday ever. Be Safe and Well,”
Priscilla Figueroa

We have also purchased Christmas gifts for people who come to St. Vincent de Paul or give them gift cards so that they have an option to shop wherever they need for whatever they need, which is a great idea! So many have donated generic gift cards which were fantastic.

We are running low on Gifts Cards, so if you would like to help by donating a gift card, we would appreciate it! Please make sure it is a generic gift card (such as Visa or Amex).

The gift cards and cash donations can



be left at the rectory or in the collection basket at church. Please make sure the envelope is marked for: St. Vincent de Paul Society.

We are a lively community where interesting things happen. Please feel free to peruse our website, call with any questions and/or follow us on Facebook: @staugustinercparkslope; @stfxbrooklyn

St. Augustine - St. Francis Xavier
Saturday Vigil Mass
5:00 PM at St. Francis Xavier
(225 6th Avenue)
Sunday Masses
9:30 AM at St. Francis Xavier
(225 6th Avenue)
12:00 Noon at St. Augustine
(116 6th Avenue)

Contact Information
225 6th Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11215
718-638-1880
info@sasfx.org
www.sasfx.org

Ministry
Rev. John Gribowich,
Administrator
Rev. Richard Bretone,
Parochial Vicar
Sr. Helene Conway, C.S.J.,
Pastoral Associate
Deacon Dean Dobbins, Business
Manager