

## Abbey Church Crucifix

The new cross in the Abbey Church was raised above the altar on the night of September 11th and dedicated on the Vigil of September 14th, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in the year of our Lord 2014, coinciding thus with the 75th anniversary of the founding of our monastic community in Canada in the year 1939.

The figure of the Crucified is half life-size and at the height of its elevation is seen to be of human proportions. As one of the brothers said, "Jesus is ascending" – in other words perspective affects perception. The total height of the cross and figure is 5 feet 6 inches.

The original orientation of the cross was toward the east with Jesus's head turned to Mary in the south transept. It was decided at the last moment, however, to hang the cross facing west toward the nave. The Lord's head now looks north at the young John personified by the seminarians in the pews. The cross was cast in bronze at the InBronze foundry in Burnaby, and silver plated at the abbey with the generous assistance of a goldsmith friend of the monks.

Any interpretation of the crucifixion must surely begin with Paul's magnificent statement in Philippians 2:5-8: "Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

This emptying of Jesus is clearly his acceptance of the human condition, an acceptance that seems to involve a contradiction. St. Luke attests, "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age before God and men." (Lk. 2:52) This same Jesus is also, in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, "full of immeasurable grace from the first instant of his conception", not excluding the beatific vision! How to reconcile this apparent contradiction? He sees God face to face, yet cries out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46)

The answer is suggested by the words of Jesus himself: "'The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. ...I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself.' He said this to show by what death he was to die." (Jn. 12:23,32-33). He also declares "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father." (Jn. 10:17-18)

These words affirming the divinity of Jesus also acknowledge his humanity. Christ looked forward to his death as a glorification, as expressed in his high priestly prayer, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you". (Jn. 17:1) This he achieves when he commends his Spirit into the hands of his Father.

The darkness that occluded the vision is rent; the glory of God now floods his entire consciousness. Jesus dies of love "since no man can see God and live."

In the figure Fr. Dunstan has tried to represent the climax of Christ's agony: his self-offering is simultaneous with the glorification of his soul – which is seen as the primary cause of its separation from his body. Jesus is elevated in front of the Cross without being nailed, as an expression of his soul's passing into glory.

When the Second Council of Constantinople declares of Christ's death, "one of the members of the Trinity has died," it asserts that the only death God could have died for the salvation of men was a fully human death, the death of the Word incarnate – this is the glory and the scandal of the cross.