

13<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## Pity

**“A pity beyond all telling  
Is hid in the heart of love.”**

*W B Yeats, The Pity of Love*

The *Pietà* (“The Pity”) is a 15<sup>th</sup> century sculpture by Michelangelo in St Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican City. Made of Carrara marble, it was commissioned for the French Cardinal, Jean de Bilhères, as his funeral monument and is the only piece of work that Michelangelo ever signed. It stands nearly a meter tall and depicts the body of Jesus on the lap of his mother, Mary, after the Crucifixion. When I the *Pietà*, the effect on me of the subject matter, the wonder of Michelangelo’s skill and his depiction of this moment of pity with such tenderness, was quite overwhelming.

On a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, I purchased a small, olive-wood carving of the *Pietà* in a Palestinian craft-shop in The West Bank. And, once again, I was overwhelmed. But this time it was because my heart went out in pity for an oppressed people; for the injustice perpetrated on Palestinians in the West Bank; for those forcibly evicted from their land; for the victims of illegal settlements, oppression and fear. My heart was broken, as Mary’s was, because of the pain and suffering of humanity.

But tears of pity aren’t enough. In the centre of Edinburgh there’s a shop called *Hadeel* ([www.hadeel.org](http://www.hadeel.org)) which sells Palestinian crafts. Handcrafts have always been living examples of ethnic art deeply rooted in Palestinian folklore. They have now become a symbol of a people and their striving for a normal way of life with a national identity, in the face of the Israeli occupation of their land. Buying Fairtrade Palestinian crafts helps sustain infrastructures, as many of the producer groups also provide health, education and emergency services in communities which lack any form of local government which might do this. In response to pain and injustice, *Hadeel* has gone beyond pity to action.

When we express pity for the injustices of our world, let us also give ourselves to righteous action, in the belief that pity of itself is not enough, when justice and renewal are needed so much to bring healing and peace.

### **A prayer for today**

*Lord, turn my pity to action, my prayers to deeds, my concern to commitment. Amen.*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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