

22. The Life of Christ and The Virgin panels – Agony in the Garden Panel

This panel is called “Agony in the Garden” or “Mount of Olives”. It depicts the New Testament story in Matthew Chapter 26 where Jesus leaves the majority of disciples to rest while he takes Peter, James and John into the garden of Gethsemane, near the foot of the Mount of Olives. Peter is on the left with his short curling white hair, bald on top, John the Apostle (also the Evangelist) with one of his attributes, a book, and James in the middle behind.

Jesus leaves them to keep vigil while he moves a short distance away to pray. The story continues:

{26:39} And continuing on a little further, he fell prostrate on his face, praying and saying: “My Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass away from me. Yet truly, let it not be as I will, but as you will.”

{26:40} And he approached his disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter: “So, were you not able keep vigil with me for one hour?

{26:41} Be vigilant and pray, so that you may not enter into temptation. Indeed, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

{26:42} Again, a second time, he went and prayed, saying, “My Father, if this chalice cannot pass away, unless I drink it, let your will be done.”

{26:43} And again, he went and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

{26:44} And leaving them behind, again he went and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.

{26:45} Then he approached his disciples and said to them: “Sleep now and rest. Behold, the hour has drawn near, and the Son of man will be delivered into the hands of sinners.

{26:46} Rise up; let us go. Behold, he who will betray me draws near.”

{26:47} While he was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived, and with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, sent from the leaders of the priests and the elders of the people.

The garden is shown with a wicker fence, with Peter, James and John fast asleep. Jesus kneels, praying, while the chalice referred to in the text is on the rock before him (the bitter wine symbolising the evil of mankind and the terrible suffering he is about to experience). In some compositions the angel is seen carrying the chalice, but in this panel the angel carries a cross, less commonly depicted, which emphasises what is in the future. The chalice is also interpreted as the strength sent down to Jesus in answer to his call for divine assistance (the sweet wine symbolising the goodness that mankind can do).

In the top left, Judas is seen leading into the garden the soldiers, high priests, Pharisees, and servants to arrest Jesus. He holds his bag of money, thirty silver coins (Matthew 26:14-16). He turns back towards the soldiers saying “Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; hold him fast”, whilst pointing them forward. The soldiers are in splendid early 15 century armour.



BURRELL COLLECTION AGONY IN THE GARDEN PANEL
FROM THE LIFE OF CHRIST AND THE VIRGIN WINDOW