

The Holy Cross - A Painting by John Cairney - 2018

The Sign of the Cross has been in my imagination and practice since I was an altar boy at St Michael's, Parkhead, at the start of the War in 1939. The priest there, Father Power, thought I might make a priest and the Marist Order in Dumfries actually came for me when I was still in short trousers, but my mother put paid to the idea by telling the Marist Brother, *"Sorry, It's no' the right job for him."* The good brother understood a mother's intuition and left, pointing to the Cross above our lobby door, saying, *"Don't worry, Mrs Cairney, if God really wants him, I'll be back"*. I never saw the good man again, but the image of the Holy Cross has stayed with me constantly throughout the 76 years since. And, thank God, it remains with me to this day in the back pew at Holy Cross Church. Hence this painting.

Indeed, the Holy Cross has been with me all the way round the world while touring as an actor. But it all began much earlier. It was with me through the years of wartime evacuation at nine to several non-Catholic, aristocratic mansions in Dumfries and Aberfeldy and later National Service with the RAF in Germany when I was 19, although its image was slightly blurred by civilian conditions in that mostly Protestant environment. But I carried my particular cross in the rosary, which was always in my uniform back pocket. I somehow found the chapel among the many ruins which was that country's particular cross to bear then, so there was always a Mass somewhere in that very minor Catholicity.

Similarly, when later I became an actor touring the world as the very Protestant Robert Burns, few saw me make the Sign of the Cross in the wings before I went on stage. And few heard, when I was in the Far East, what a Chinese Archbishop said to me during confession after I told him that it wasn't always easy for me to receive communion while on a world tour:

"Don't worry, just don't sin. Keep the image of the Holy Cross in your heart and when you meet temptation, see it, and Our Lord in it, and you'll be in safe hands."

This canvas was created by me for the people of Holy Cross parish with this sincere intention in mind. May God Bless and Protect you all and I thank Monsignor Bradley, whose initiative made it all possible.