

## Stepping into the Light

Even as an older man, Michelangelo was an amazing worker. A French visitor once reported that, in frail health, Michelangelo could still hammer more chips out of hard marble in a quarter hour than three young stone carvers could do in three or four.

When he was about age 75, Michelangelo carved one of his more striking sculptures: a larger-than-life, seven foot Pieta, or "deposition off the cross" of the crucified body of Jesus. Jesus' mother Mary holds Jesus up on one side with her arms and knees. She is helped by Nicodemus who stands behind Jesus and another grief-stricken woman, presumably Mary Magdalene, on the other the side of Jesus.



Michelangelo never finished this sculpture and eventually he abandoned it, but he carved his own face as Nicodemus' face and at one time he asked to be buried at the foot of this

work. There must have been something about the Jewish leader which attracted the Italian sculptor. What made Michelangelo chose Nicodemus for his self-portrait?

Nicodemus appears only three times in the Bible and only in John's gospel, but we can be most grateful to this prestigious Jewish teacher. He first came to Jesus by night, not wanting people to see him. If you also have ever wanted to know Jesus better but without drawing attention to yourself, you understand something of his fear and timidity.

Nicodemus did not understand Jesus that night but he prompted one of Jesus' greatest explanations of his mission and one of the Bible's most famous verses (John 3:16).

Later, Nicodemus grew much bolder. He spoke up in Jesus' defense before the Sanhedrin, trying to stop their plot.

Our last glimpse of Nicodemus is particularly endearing. After the crucifixion, he came with a huge supply of spices to help Jesus' friends bury the body.

Whatever Michelangelo was thinking, I too am drawn to Nicodemus. He sought out, spoke up and stood for Jesus. He talked with Jesus privately, defended him publicly, then helped care for Jesus' body and Jesus' friends.

We can each take a tip from Nic. We can change from being a lone believer in the shadows to a bold defender in daylight and a disciple eager to help our grieving brothers and sisters anyway we can.

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