

## The Story of the Tree-of-Life Crucifix, as told by John Collier, sculptor

**John Collier**, award-winning American sculptor and chief artist for the Catholic Memorial at Ground Zero, New York City, was chosen to create the *Tree-of-Life Crucifix* for the Day Chapel of the new St. Mary's Church, Cochrane, Alberta, where it was installed on March 28, 2007. Collier explains, "Human beings have always made art about what they think is important. I think Our Lord is important. I make art about Him."



About the Tree-of-Life Crucifix, Collier has the following to say concerning his work of art:

"The inspiration for my *Tree-of-Life* interpretation of the crucifix is found in the grand story of salvation in the Bible from its first book to its last. It is actually a story about three trees of life.

"**The first tree of life** appears in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), the idyllic abode of Adam and Eve, where they walked and talked with God in breathtaking intimacy. Eden was theirs to enjoy, along with everything is contained — everything, that is, except for the tree of the-knowledge-of-good-and-evil. The fruit of that tree God specifically forbade them to eat. But as we all know, our original ancestors could not resist the cursed tempter, and in an act of self-will, they rebelled against their benevolent Creator. As a result, God removed them from Eden and from *the tree of life* at its centre, lest they eat of its fruit and "live forever" in their disgraced, alienated state. No longer Life, but Death, now characterized the human journey.

"**The second tree of life** is the cross on which Jesus was crucified. Likewise tempted, He did not yield, but "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). He substituted Himself for the descendants of Adam and Eve, and as 1 Peter 2:24 states, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." Jesus, "the second Adam," reversed the human alienation from God brought about by the first Adam.

"**The third tree of life** is found in the holy city of the new heaven and earth described in Revelation 21 and 22. In it is "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is *the tree of life* with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (Rev. 22:1-2).

"By the Cross of Christ we have been reconciled to God. The healing journey of salvation is complete: access to the *first tree of life* has been restored in the new reality of *the third tree*, where the cursed tempter finds no home. God once again is intimately present with His people. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

"While I was sculpting the **Tree-of-Life Crucifix**, lines from an ancient hymn by Fortunatus filled my thoughts, and with these words I praise God for the privilege He has given me, as an artist, of making His story known:

*Faithful Cross! Above all other,  
One and only noble Tree!  
None in foliage, none in blossom,  
None in fruit thy peer may be;  
Sweetest Wood and sweetest Iron!  
Sweetest Weight is hung on thee."*

(Photos by Warren Harbeck)