

# The Washington Post

## Homeless Jesus sculpture searches for a home

TORONTO — This homeless Jesus can barely find a home.

Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz notes the ironies in his latest creation, “Jesus the Homeless,” a bronze sculpture depicting the Christian savior huddled beneath a blanket on an actual-size park bench. Only the feet are visible, and their gaping nail wounds reveal the subject.

“If Jesus was watching the streets today,” Schmalz says from his home in St. Jacobs, Ontario, “I think he would want himself represented as one of the most marginalized. That’s what he said in the Gospel.”

Indeed, as Schmalz notes, Jesus calls on his followers to clothe the naked, feed the hungry and tend to the lame. Possibly referring to himself, Jesus says, in the book of Matthew, that “the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

“I’m visually translating one of the most powerful aspects of the Gospels,” Schmalz said. “It’s a visual sermon.”

That’s why Schmalz is frustrated with the reception his homeless Jesus received from two prominent Catholic churches.

As an observant Roman Catholic, he was “heartbroken” when, last summer, Toronto’s St. Michael’s Roman Catholic Cathedral and St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York rejected “Homeless Jesus” after they had expressed interest.

Schmalz said the rector at St. Patrick’s “loved” the artwork and told him he would like to place it at the cathedral’s entrance: “My thought was, ‘Everyone would see this message.’”

Schmalz said the same thing happened at St. Michael’s in downtown Toronto.

But higher-ups in the New York and Toronto archdioceses nixed the plans, he said.

“Their rejection means they have a problem with the poor. It’s just absurd how some people come to those conclusions.”

The Toronto archdiocese said the decision may have had to do with renovations at the cathedral. The sculpture now stands outside Regis College at the University of Toronto, a Jesuit school of theology.

Kate Monaghan, a spokeswoman for St. Patrick’s, said “we did love the statue but right now we just couldn’t really look at anything” because of ongoing restorations to the landmark cathedral. That could change once the \$175 million project is complete.

“I’m sure we could take a look again if it was still offered,” she said.

Undaunted, Schmalz plans to create exact replicas of the sculpture, each weighing nearly 1,000 pounds, and hopes to interest churches in prominent locations across the U.S. and Canada. He’s seeking patrons to offset the cost of up to \$25,000 per piece.

“To be a Christian sculptor, the analogy is preaching. If you have a great location for your sculpture, it’s like preaching to a large audience. If you have a bad location, it’s like preaching in a closet.”

The 7-foot-long artwork allows space for one person to sit near the feet of the Jesus figure.

“It’s a very uncomfortable seat,” Schmalz said.

(Kevin Eckstrom contributed to this report.)

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