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Despite Satan's assaults, intense physical and emotional pain, and the mockery of his wife, Job patiently maintains his faith amidst the shadows of the candle.

Georges de La Tour (1593-1652). JOB MOCKED BY HIS WIFE (c. 1630s). Oil on canvas. 38" x 54". Musee Departemental des Vosges, Epinal, France. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

The Patience of Job

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

French Baroque artist Georges de La Tour presents the confrontation between Job and his wife (Job 2:9-10) as a private and difficult moment between the couple. Satan has “inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (2:7). At Job’s feet is the potsherd he has scraped over his skin to relieve the itching caused by those sores or for self-mortification. And now Job’s wife taunts him: “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.” She is telling him to commit suicide (or what some scholars consider a form of euthanasia) because things have gotten so bad for him. Job’s proverbial patience is apparent when he responds that she is a foolish woman and declares, “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” (2:9).

This painting – from La Tour’s mature period when he preferred biblical narratives – is a keen observation of the relationship between the husband and wife. They are clearly in conversation as the wife speaks and gestures with her left hand. Job looks up at her with an anguished and direct stare.

Like this biblical couple who had seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:2), La Tour and his wife Diane Le Nerf had an abundance of children – possibly nine. La Tour spent almost his entire life in Lunéville, near Nancy, in the duchy of Lorraine.¹ Although La Tour is now considered one of the four most important painters of his era (along with Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorraine, and Louis Le Nain), he was forgotten in the scholarship until 1915.²

La Tour’s characteristic use of light, originating from a single internal source, is a variation of tenebrism as used by Caravaggio, a contemporary and influential Baroque painter from Italy. Like many of La Tour’s paintings, this one has a spiritual quality inherent from the intense candlelight. Despite the assaults of Satan, the accumulating effects of physical and emotional pain, and the mockery of his wife, Job maintains his faith, patiently and humbly, amidst the shadows of the candle.

NOTES

1 Michel Sylvestre, “La Tour, Georges de,” *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T049527 (accessed November 11, 2015).

2 “LA TOUR, Georges de,” *Benezit Dictionary of Artists, Oxford Art Online* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/benezit/B00105038 (accessed November 11, 2015).