

**For Immediate Release**

April 29, 2005

Contact:      Andrée Corroon      212-636-2680      [acorroon@christies.com](mailto:acorroon@christies.com)  
                 Rik Pike                      212.636.2680      [rpike@christies.com](mailto:rpike@christies.com)

**MASTERPIECES FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BROOKLYN  
HIGHLIGHT CHRISTIE'S OLD MASTER PICTURES AUCTION IN MAY**

**Property from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn Sold to Benefit Catholic Education**

**Old Master Paintings**

**May 25, 2005**

**New York** – Christie's New York Old Master Paintings Department announces the sale of four pictures from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, including a magnificent full-length painting by Murillo and a compelling *Saint Francis* by Bernardo Strozzi which, along with a captivating 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch still-life of a dog asleep by Gerrit Dou from the Stark Foundation in Texas, are the definitive highlights of Christie's New York *Old Master Pictures* sale to be held on May 25 at Rockefeller Center.

The proceeds of the sale of these four paintings will form an initial contribution to a proposed \$100 million endowment fund that Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn will establish to provide a sound financial footing for Catholic education in the future. The Bishop has begun seeking the support of the New York City business community to achieve that goal.

The group of paintings was bequeathed to the Diocese in 1956 after the death of Archbishop Thomas E. Molloy, who formed his personal collection during the 1930s and 1940s. He purchased the paintings from highly-respected New York dealers, including the Schaeffer Galleries and Julius Weitzner. It is a fitting tribute to the Archbishop that his collection will be sold to benefit the church he so devotedly led, perpetuating his generous service to the people of the Diocese of Brooklyn.

Bishop DiMarzio's decision to earmark the proceeds of the sale of the paintings for the support of Catholic education recalls Archbishop Molloy's personal commitment to that cause. In the 1930s Archbishop Molloy dismissed plans to build a cathedral at a site in Fort Greene and chose instead to use it to build a high school---Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School.

"Archbishop Molloy said the Diocese needed a high school more than a cathedral," said Msgr. John J. Bracken, the Vicar General for Temporalities. "The sale of these works is a testament to Archbishop Molloy's keen eye for art and his personal support of Catholic education."

### **The Paintings**

Included in the group is Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's *Saint Augustine in Ecstasy* (estimate: \$1,500,000-2,500,000), which the connoisseur Dr. Gustav F. Waagen described as "the finest I know of the master...(a) chef-d'oeuvre." Murillo is universally recognized as one of the greatest painters of the so-called "Golden Age of Spanish painting", and the present painting, not seen publicly for nearly a century, is a major rediscovery. Datable to *circa* 1665-75, it is a late work by the artist, and was originally painted for the Sacristy of the Convent of Saint Augustine, Seville. Murillo's last two decades represent his period of most intense activity and produced some of his greatest masterpieces, including monumental *Saint Augustine contemplating the Virgin and the Crucifixion*, now in the Prado, Madrid, which is directly related in composition to the present work. The painting reveals the influence of both *Cinquecento* Venetian paintings, as well as van Dyck (from whose own *Saint Augustine in Ecstasy* the pose is borrowed) – artists he was exposed to whilst visiting Velázquez in Madrid. It was once owned by Marshal Jean de Dieu Soult, Napoleon's commander of the French Army in Spain during the Peninsula War, who amassed the single most important private collection of Spanish paintings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and whose collection of works by Murillo inspired French 19<sup>th</sup> century artists such as Eugene Delacroix. The painting last appeared at auction in 1933 when it was sold by Christie's London from the Collection of George Pretzman, Orwell Park, Suffolk, England, who also owned Murillo's *Christ Healing the Paralytic*, now in the National Gallery, London.

A newly-discovered picture by Bernardo Strozzi, *Saint Francis embracing the Crucifix*, painted circa 1618-20 (estimate: \$300,000-500,000), reveals the Genoese painter's debt to Caravaggio and his *tenebrist* technique. A principle figure in the development of Baroque painting in *Seicento* Genoa, and later Venice, the choice of subject matter was a popular one for Strozzi, who excelled in religious painting and had himself started out life as a monk, before fleeing the cloister in 1630. Depicting the Saint in his habit and girdle, with raised eyes and the signs of the stigmata, Strozzi finely articulates an open book and skull silhouetted in the immediate foreground, reinforcing the meditative nature of the work.

Two other paintings show scenes from the biblical story of Christ's flight into Egypt. *The Flight into Egypt* by Jacob Jordeans and Studio is one of a number of versions by Jordeans, providing a

testament to the popularity of the composition among his patrons in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands (estimate: \$50,000-70,000); and *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* is by 17<sup>th</sup> century Flemish master Gasper de Crayer (estimate: \$20,000-30,000).

### **Archbishop Thomas Molloy**

Thomas E. Molloy was born in Nashua, New Hampshire on September 4, 1884 and spent his childhood there. In 1904, he transferred to St. Francis College in Brooklyn, after which he enrolled in St. John's Seminary. It was there he met George Mundelein, who fostered his taste in the arts and sent him to the North American College in Rome, where he was ordained on September 19, 1908.

Upon his return to Brooklyn, Father Molloy served in St. John's Chapel and in the Queen of All Saints Church before spending a year in Chicago. He then returned to Brooklyn once again, and served a spiritual director for Cathedral College and taught philosophy at St. Joseph's College for Women. On October 3, 1920, Father Molloy was consecrated Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn, in 1921 he became Brooklyn's Ordinary; and on February 15, 1922 he was installed as Bishop in St. James Pro-Cathedral.

During his tenure, the Diocese of Brooklyn witnessed significant progress – Bishop Molloy conducted a synod in 1926, dedicated Immaculate Conception Seminary in 1930, and established 90 parishes and 100 elementary schools across Long Island. In 1951, Pope Pius XII granted him the personal title Archbishop in recognition of his work as leader of the largest Diocese in the United States, with a membership of nearly 1.4 million. Archbishop Molloy died on November 26, 1956 aged 72.

**Auction:** Old Master Paintings  
May 25, 2005

**Viewing:** Christie's Rockefeller, New York  
Friday, May 20, 2005 – Tuesday, May 24, 2005

More information about Christie's *Old Master Paintings* sales can be found on [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com). [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com) provides information on more than 80 sale categories, buying and selling at auction, complete auction results, and Christie's international auction calendar.

###

*Images available on request*  
*Visit Christie's Web site at [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com)*

