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Why is the Pieta Protected By Glass?

Did you hear about what happened to the Pieta in 1972?

The *Pietà* is a famous statue by Michelangelo that depicts the Blessed Mother holding her son, Jesus, after He died on the cross. It is currently held at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City.

The *Pietà*'s display is a little unusual though. It is held in the first side chapel in St. Peter's Basilica, but, unlike most other priceless works of art housed there, the statue is shielded by a wall of bulletproof glass.

The *Pietà* wasn't always protected by glass. It wasn't until 1972, when the statue was brutally vandalized that the Vatican had to impose additional protections for this sacred statue.

On May 21, 1972, on the Feast of Pentecost, Australian geologist Laszlo Toth, who was living in Rome at the time, entered St. Peter's Basilica gripping a geologist's hammer. He approached the *Pietà* and jumped the altar railing in front of the statue.

Falsely claiming to be the Messiah, Toth charged at the *Pietà*, shouting "I am Jesus Christ — risen from the dead!" He then violently struck the *Pietà* twelve times. Toth broke Mary's left arm and hand, her nose, and struck one of Mary's eyelids. Tourists and other bystanders swarmed the statue who pulled Toth away from the statue.



The damages on the *Pietà* were significant and required several restoration efforts. Using pieces of the statue that had broken off as well as parts of Mary's back, the Vatican was able to restore the statue to reflect its original appearance.

From that point forward, the masterpiece was protected behind a glass wall to prevent future vandalism attacks.