

Tattooists

by [Capers Limehouse](#) in the [September 9, 2008](#) issue

Are these Christian tattooists
in the paper any stranger—Simon Stylites spent
a life standing on a stone pillar, sixty feet up—
did not come down for cramps or winter rain.

Could I survive the Sacred Heart with “Hail, Mary,
Full of Grace” across my arm, or
the crucifixion in three colors
against my sternum between my breasts.
Needles to skin over
soft tissue is less painful,
but flesh is grass and sags—
art lasts best close to bone.

No stranger than hair shirts,
hundreds of needles for hours, for days, even years,
to get the complete St. Michael on my shoulder to the writhing,
twisting dragon down my leg.
Or my whole life to get the Last Supper
with Stations of the Cross, and the proper text—
Jesus’ words in red—
covering every inch of skin, eyelids,
lips, nose, between fingers and toes,
while invisible capillaries
under the skin carry the images
molecule by molecule
into the living catacombs of bone.