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The Ultimate Guide
to Lent



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Being Present

{ a mindful lenten journey }

BY DR. EMILY DOWDELL, PSY.D.

Do you ever find yourself so caught up in the daily demands of life that you lose track of what matters most? Me too! You're not alone there. It can be so easy to get sucked into the vortex of the daily grind and end up disoriented, staring blankly at the fridge wondering, "What did I come over here for?"

It seems like Advent was just yesterday, but the season of Lent comes as a much-needed

opportunity to slow down and reflect after the busy Christmas season. I often use Lent to evaluate which habits are drawing me closer to God and which habits are not. Practicing mindfulness is one I'll keep around. It has helped me tune into the presence of God in my life.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

In simple terms, mindfulness is being aware of the present moment, without judgment. It's allowing reality to be what it is. From a Catholic perspective, being mindful means slowing down enough to recognize God's presence with us in and through every moment of our lives.

Simple mindfulness exercises invite us to check in with our senses and be more aware of all that is going on around and within us. When we do these exercises, we may be surprised by what we discover. In addition to learning more about ourselves, we can share what we discover with God and invite Him into whatever we are experiencing in the present.



From a Catholic perspective, being mindful means slowing down enough to recognize God's presence with us in and through every moment of our lives.

Entering such a mindful state can help us remember that God provides us with all we need (Mt. 6:25-34). This foundational security in Him can be surprisingly easy to forget. We might be tempted to think it all depends on us or fear that He may not follow through. These fears are likely coming from past hurts when people we relied on let us down. Mindfulness can help us put these thoughts and feelings in proper perspective and address our deeper hurts and desires.

THE HERE & NOW

We are easily tempted to worry about what comes next or dwell on what we could have done differently on a daily basis. However, in focusing so much of our attention on the past or the future, we are distracted from the very moment where possibility becomes reality—the “here and now.”

I’m a mom of three boys, ages four and under, and practicing mindfulness has helped me become a more responsive parent than I was when I started. I am more aware of my own reactions and orient myself more

quickly to their needs. And I can tell when things are off track because I can sense when I am distracted or reactive. I take those signals to mean it's time to reorient myself to God.

JUST FIVE MINUTES A DAY

So, this Lenten season, I invite you to try something new. Take five minutes each day to check in with your body, mind and soul. Notice any tension in your body. Tap into each of your senses and observe your inner world. Be curious about your experiences and share them with God. Notice how God might be moving in your life and in the world around you.

For a deeper dive into how mindfulness can be practiced from a Catholic perspective, check out *The Mindful Catholic* by Gregory Bottaro, Psy.D. It is a great resource with practical exercises that you can use to cultivate this deeper awareness of God's loving presence in and around you.

WRITTEN BY EMILY DOWDELL

Emily Dowdell, Psy.D. earned her Doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from the Institute for the Psychological Sciences (IPS) at Divine Mercy University, in Arlington, VA. She previously studied Theology and Philosophy while obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree in Multimedia Communications from Franciscan University of Steubenville, OH. She lives in Cincinnati with her husband and three boys.



Peace & Quiet

{ the fiery furnace }

BY DOMINICK ALBANO

Catholic Mindfulness is like taking the spiritual classic, *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence and living it rather than reading it.

It's a chance to focus on the present moment. With young families, it's easy to focus on "what's next"—the practices, the projects, the grades— but Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:34, "Do not worry about the things of tomorrow. Today has enough worries of its own."



1. PICK A TIME

Find 15 minutes to set aside for you and your family.



2. ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS

Try to avoid technology and bedrooms.



3. CHOOSE YOUR LEADER

We've written this activity to be led by mom or dad, but it can just as easily be adapted for others such as aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandpas or beloved guardians.



4. SPREAD OUT

Have each kid grab a pillow, carpet square, or something similar to sit on. Make sure everyone spreads out.



5. CREATE YOUR SPACE

The whole family should sit comfortably in their own space, but criss-cross applesauce on the floor is the rule of thumb.

BREATHE

Mom or dad should ask everyone to close their eyes then lead the family through six deep breaths.

Teach everyone how to breathe in for a count of six, hold the breath for a count of four, then breathe out for a count of four.

Open with the sign of the cross.

READ

The adult should read aloud. Read slowly, calmly and clearly.

“King Nebuchadnezzar had a golden statue made which he set up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. A herald cried out: “Nations and peoples of every language, when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, dulcimer, harp, double-flute, and all the other musical instruments, you must fall down and worship the golden statue which King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship shall be instantly cast into a white-hot furnace.”

At that point, some of the Chaldeans came and accused the Jews to King Nebuchadnezzar:

“O king, live forever! There are certain Jews whom you have made administrators of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have paid no attention to you; they will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up.”

Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and sent for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were promptly brought before the king. King Nebuchadnezzar questioned them: “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you will not serve my god, or worship the golden statue that I set up?”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar, “There is no need for us to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If our God, whom we serve, can save us from the white-hot furnace and from your hands, O king, may he save us! But even if he will not, you should know, O king, that we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up.”

Nebuchadnezzar's face became livid with utter rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times more than usual and had some of the strongest men in his army bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and cast them into the white-hot furnace.

But the angel of the Lord went down into the furnace, drove the fiery flames out of the furnace, and made the inside of the furnace as though a dew-laden breeze were blowing through it. The fire in no way touched them or caused them pain or harm. Then these three in the furnace with one voice sang, glorifying and blessing God.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was startled and rose in haste, asking his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" "Certainly, O king," they answered. "But," he replied, "I see four men unbound and unhurt, walking in the fire, and the fourth looks like a son of God."

Then Nebuchadnezzar came to the opening of the white-hot furnace and called: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out.” Thereupon Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent his angel to deliver the servants that trusted in him; they disobeyed the royal command and yielded their bodies rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.”

Taken from Daniel Chapter 3

SAY

Have you ever felt pressured to do something you didn't want to do, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Have you ever been angry like King Nebuchadnezzar? Have you ever been afraid of what might happen to you if you do what is right?

When the three faithful men in the story were thrown into the fiery furnace, God turned the inside of the furnace like a cool, calm place, and none of the fire could hurt them.



The fire *in no way*
touched them or
caused them pain
or harm. Then these
three in the furnace
with one voice
sang, glorifying and
blessing God.

Use your imagination and pretend you're in that furnace now. See the fire as it swirls about you and listen to the flames roaring around you. But you feel a cool breeze on your face and you know that Jesus is with you.

Just like in the Bible, Jesus is always with us, even in the scariest of times. We might not see Him or hear Him, but He can bring peace if we turn to Him.

When you feel angry, afraid, or feel pressured, remember you can always close your eyes, talk with God, ask Jesus for peace and He will walk with you.

Close with the sign of the cross.



Cheese Grits

{ recipes for lent }

BY JESSICA RINAUDO

When it comes to eating meatless recipes for Lent, we like to get creative in our home. One of my favorite ways to do that is making breakfast for dinner. Sure we forgo the bacon and sausage, but we get to fill our plates with other breakfast staples like biscuits, eggs and, my personal Southern-girl heart favorite, cheese grits.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/2 cup of grits
- 7 cups of water
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 lb. grated sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 eggs
- 1 tbsp. Worcesetershire sauce
- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 1 stick of butter
- Tobasco sauce to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Boil 7 cups of salted water.
3. Add grits, cooking until thick.
4. Add in all additional ingredients, stirring to blend evenly.
5. Pour into a casserole dish.
6. Place in oven and bake for 45 minutes.



To Find Each Other Again

{ a story of hope }

BY DENIS AND JEAN EGAN

Our marriage started out like a dream. We had a house, good jobs, hopes for children and a seemingly bright future.

But our dreams were not coming true, and one cold, blustery day, our bright world crashed. Divorce papers arrived.

I sobbed. We went to see a counselor, but we quit after two counseling sessions. When we sought help at our Catholic church, they recommended

we attend a marriage retreat weekend called Retrouvaille. We pleaded with each other and with God: “What went wrong?” We prayed. And then we finally agreed to attend the marriage retreat and follow-up sessions.

That weekend retreat cracked the massive walls we built between one another. After three years of misery, we learned to safely communicate, understand ourselves, and to look through the eyes of the other. We glimpsed reflections of ourselves in couples who shared their stories of hell, healing, hope and resurrection. The strong examples and support of the community there demonstrated the strength and grace of the Risen Lord in their marriages. We wanted to seek that same intimacy with God. We thirsted for a transformed marriage.

Retrouvaille gave us the roadmap, but we had to continue the journey. Laser-focused priority reordering allowed us to put God first, then each other, family and work. We protected that order. We cleaned house and cleared the thickets of our relationship that jeopardized our journey.



Laser-focused
priority reordering
allowed us to put
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We followed that roadmap all the way to the mountain top. Progress came from the daily, initially awkward, practice of using new tools and adhering to our scheduled time together. We practiced and perfected respectful communication, intentional affirmation, appreciation, dialogue, conflict resolution and forgiveness.

With Christ's dying love for us as our compass in faith, we rebuilt trust and love. And, slowly, our marriage transformed from ashes to emerge in beauty.

That initial hard-worn path led us to establish a Retreat Center and bring Retrouvaille to our area. In our parish, we became catechists, assisted in youth, pre-marriage and outreach ministries. Now in our 47th year of marriage, our children and grandchildren bless us. We babysit, bicycle, travel, pray and serve.

And to think 44 years ago, we could have never dreamed or imagined this. We continue growing in gratitude and awe of our marriage, ministry and for the glory of our good Lord!

WRITTEN BY DENIS & JEAN EGAN

Denis and Jean Egan are parishioners at the Our Lady of Light Family of Parishes in Centerville. They retired to Bellbrook, OH, in 2017 from Michigan to be closer to family. Denis volunteers to build and award adaptive bikes to special needs children and veterans. Jean lectures at St. Francis, is a member of Our Lady of Light MMP Cenacle (Ascension) and Marian Holy Spirit (St. Joseph, First Friday) Prayer Groups. Together they cycle Ohio trails and love to travel and care for their three grandchildren.

visio divina





Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee

{ visio divina }

BY EMMA CASSANI

You may have heard of *lectio divina*, “divine reading,” where we read and pray through scripture. *Visio divina* is similar, but means “divine seeing.” When practicing *visio divina*, we look at and pray through sacred art.

Art is its own beautiful, powerful language.

The language of art can be cultivated and expanded with knowledge and practice. Each week this Guide will provide you with some tools to help you better understand art's language.

Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee

REMBRANDT, (1633 CE)

This week we'll take a look at *Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee* by Rembrandt (1633 CE). You may be familiar with this painting, as it was one of the 13 works of art stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston on March 19, 1990. Sadly, it remains an unsolved mystery and the empty frame awaits the return of its painting. It is an oil painting from the Baroque period, which is classified by the use of:

- **tenebrism** (intense contrast of light and shadow)
- **realistic scenes and natural, earthbound figures** (less focused on the spiritual world, more focused on what is tangible; of this world)

- **geometry**, use of **diagonal lines**
- **movement**
- **foreshortening** (an illusion of **breaking the space** between the viewer and the painting, so one might feel as if they're in or a part of the art itself).

Pause here and examine the painting.

Think about what the artist is trying to tell you through these baroque characteristics.

Made a guess? Great. Let's break it down.

ART ANALYSIS

This scene depicts Mark 4:35-41, "On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, 'Let us cross to the other side.' Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up.

Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion.

They woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Quiet! Be still!' The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, 'Why

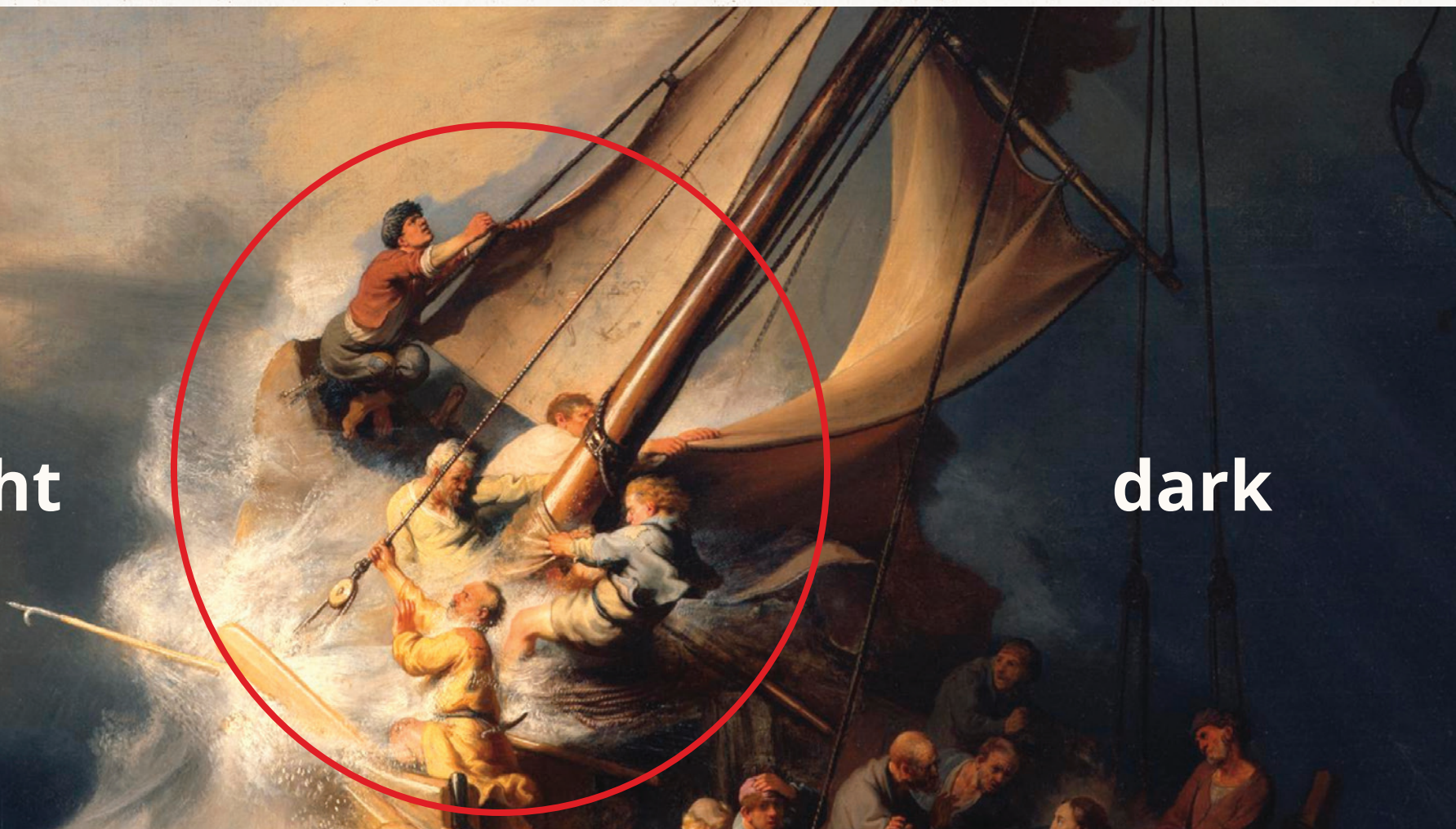
are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?'
They were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?'"

This painting is so **alive** and chaotic. You can see the wind filling the sails, ropes snapping and flying, water spraying, clothes billowing and a huge wave pushes up the left side of the boat forcing the apostles to hold on for dear life. Through the **movement**, we can see how powerful and terrifying this storm is. It's as if you can hear the crashing waves, booming thunder, howling wind, flapping fabric and the cries of the apostles. You can almost feel the harsh wind, rocking boat and the sea's mist. The scene feels **real**.

Sunlight breaks through the clouds on the left side of the canvas. Rembrandt **illuminates** this side of the boat because he wants us to

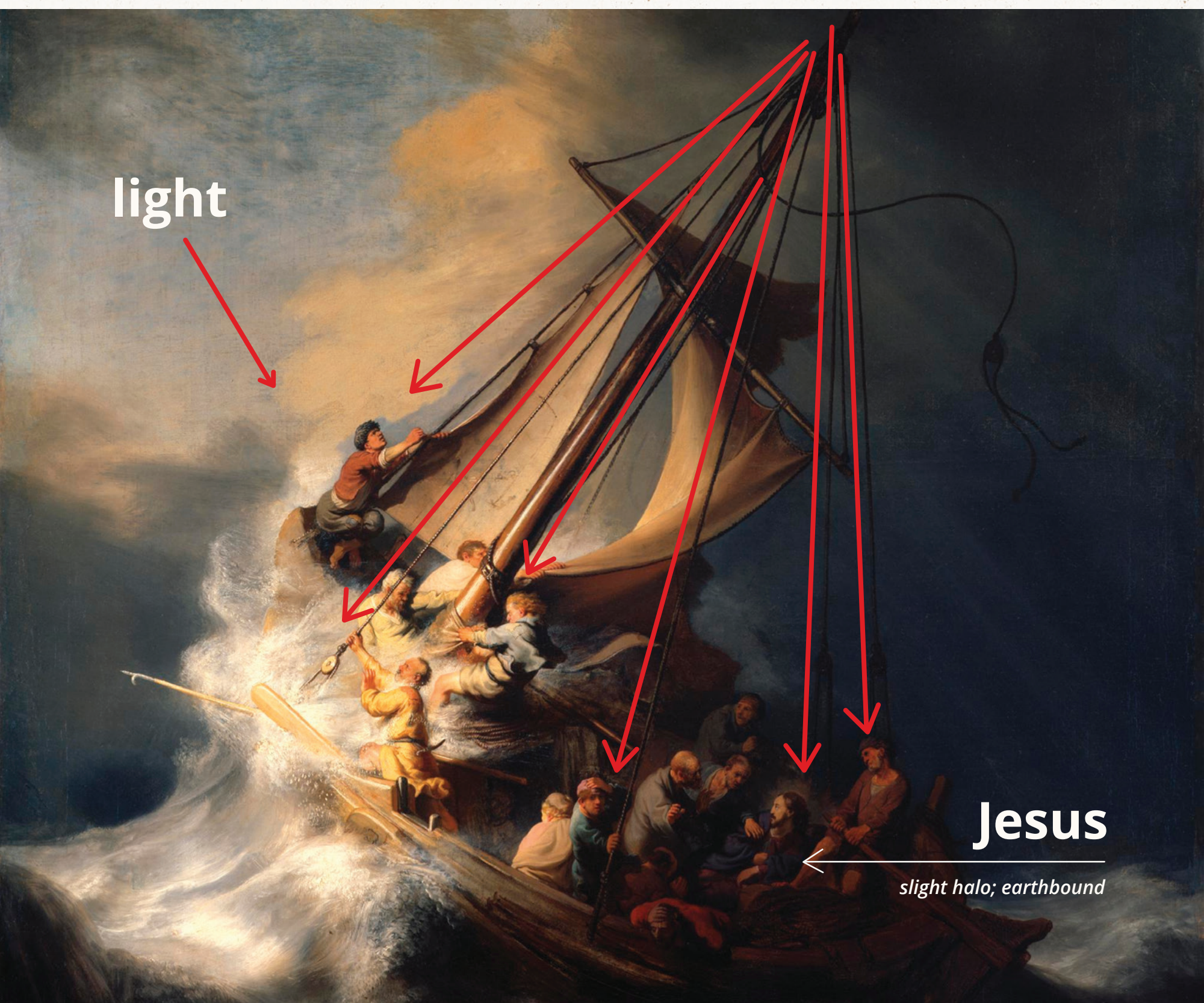
light

dark



focus on the apostles' fear and questioned trust in Jesus. These apostles are scrambling trying to save the boat. Jesus and the other apostles sit on the right side of the boat in the **darkness**, only slightly illuminated. The apostles near Jesus seem a little more at ease. The **dramatic darkness** of the sea and sky reiterate the seriousness and terror of the storm.

Notice the **geometry** in the painting; there are lots of **diagonal lines**. Each rope extending from the cross-shaped mast points to different areas, allowing your eye to scan the whole scene. You also might notice that



the boat is misshapen. The dimensions are not realistic and the angles and perspective are off. Rembrandt painted the boat like this purposefully. He wanted the ship to stay centered with a **diagonal composition**, allowing all the figures to be seen. So, he distorted the ship's dimensions to his liking.

If you count all the people in the boat, you'll notice there is an extra man among Jesus and the 12 apostles. Following your eye down one of the mast ropes, he is seen holding onto the rope and his hat while looking straight at the viewer, **breaking the space**. Historians believe this to be a self-portrait of Rembrandt. Looking straight at the audience, Rembrandt asks the viewer, "*What would you be doing?*"



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

1. Human beings are powerless against the majesty of nature. We cannot navigate through the storms of life alone; it is impossible. We must rely on God.
 2. Amid the storms, Jesus is always there for us and ready to guide us through.
 3. There is hope even in the darkest of times.
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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is your initial feeling when viewing this piece?
- If you were on the boat with the apostles, what would you have been doing?
- What are the storms in your life?
- Do you struggle with giving control over to God?
- Do you lose your trust in Jesus when something bad happens? How do you regain that trust?



PRAYER

Say a prayer in thanksgiving for the ability to connect with God through art and beauty.

Ask Jesus to take control. Ask Him to guide you through and calm the storms in your life.



See & Appreciate Someone

{ secret service }

Lent is a season of almsgiving, and while we typically think of almsgiving in terms of financial gifts, it also includes acts of service.

We invite you to engage with this season by giving alms in a whole new way. Add some surprise and delight to the world around you with secret acts of service.

Each week we will give you a simple service challenge to fulfill some time during the week.

THIS WEEK'S SECRET ACT OF SERVICE

Write a simple note of appreciation to a family member, coworker or teacher.

Everyone desires to be seen and appreciated. Leave an anonymous note letting someone in your circle know how great they are doing and how much they are appreciated. If you really want to up the ante, you can include a small gift card as a token of appreciation.

COMPLETED YOUR SECRET SERVICE?

Let us know how it went on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#): *@thecatholictelegraph*