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The Ultimate Guide
to Lent



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How to Die Well

{ a lenten lesson from mom }

BY FATHER RONALD COMBS

I think of my mother as someone who died well. As a respiratory disease slowly claimed her, and as she gradually lost her vision, Mother's faith only grew stronger. During the Season of Lent Christians are invited to sacrifice—to die to oneself. But then comes the reality of knowing that one day God will call us from this life. We will die.

For some, thoughts of death bring about fear and anxiety. However, it doesn't have to be this way. My mother showed me—and can show all of us—it is possible to die well.

Here's how:

SACRAMENTAL LIFE

Participating in the sacramental life of the Church is key. My dad took Mother to Mass every day. When she became too weak to go to church, someone from her parish would bring her Holy Communion every Sunday. Mother also went to Confession. Finally, she asked me to administer the Anointing of the Sick and Last Rites during her final hour. She died as Dad and I prayed the Litany of Saints.

PRAYER

I am certain that my mother prayed God would grant her the grace to endure. This is fundamental to dying well—to patiently endure what lies before us.

FAITH-FILLED COMPANIONS

Having a circle of faith-filled family and friends was central to my mother dying well. We nurtured her and there is no doubt that she nurtured us.

LISTENING

My mother read quite a bit. She also watched a lot of EWTN. After she lost her vision, she listened. Listening to wisdom—from God, from Scripture, from the Church, from television—was vital in Mother’s final years.

GRATITUDE

In earlier years when someone would ask how she was doing, Mother responded: Great and grateful. As her illnesses overtook her, she dropped the “great” from her catchphrase but kept the “grateful.” Gratitude to God is one more way to die well.



GIVING EVERYTHING OVER TO GOD

Mother realized she had no control over her situation, so she turned it over to God. Recognizing God is God and we are not takes a lot of pressure off us and makes us more prepared to die well.

This list is not meant to be inclusive. Add your own faith-based practices, and God bless!

WRITTEN BY FATHER RONALD COMBS

Father Ronald Combs is the Director of Health and Hospital Ministries for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. His mother, Sandy, died in 2013.



Supporting Service Workers

{ 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 ACT OF SERVICE:

Give a small gift to a service worker near you.

The sanitation workers. A janitor at your school or office. The mail carrier. The delivery driver. The server at your favorite restaurant. The men and women working in the service industry could use a little service themselves!

Think small and simple. Know you have a delivery coming from Amazon? Set out a bottle of water and a candy bar for the delivery driver. Put a note in the mailbox with a \$5 gift card for coffee for the mailman—just a small, unexpected act to say thank you to these important people. It might be hard to keep this week's act a secret, but it should be no less of a surprise!

COMPLETED YOUR SECRET SERVICE?

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



Seafood & Wild Rice

{ meat-free lenten recipe }

Seafood is a staple of the Catholic Lenten diet. And while we fully support going to your parish fish fry, here's another seafood alternative if you're in the mood to stay home and cook up something a little different.

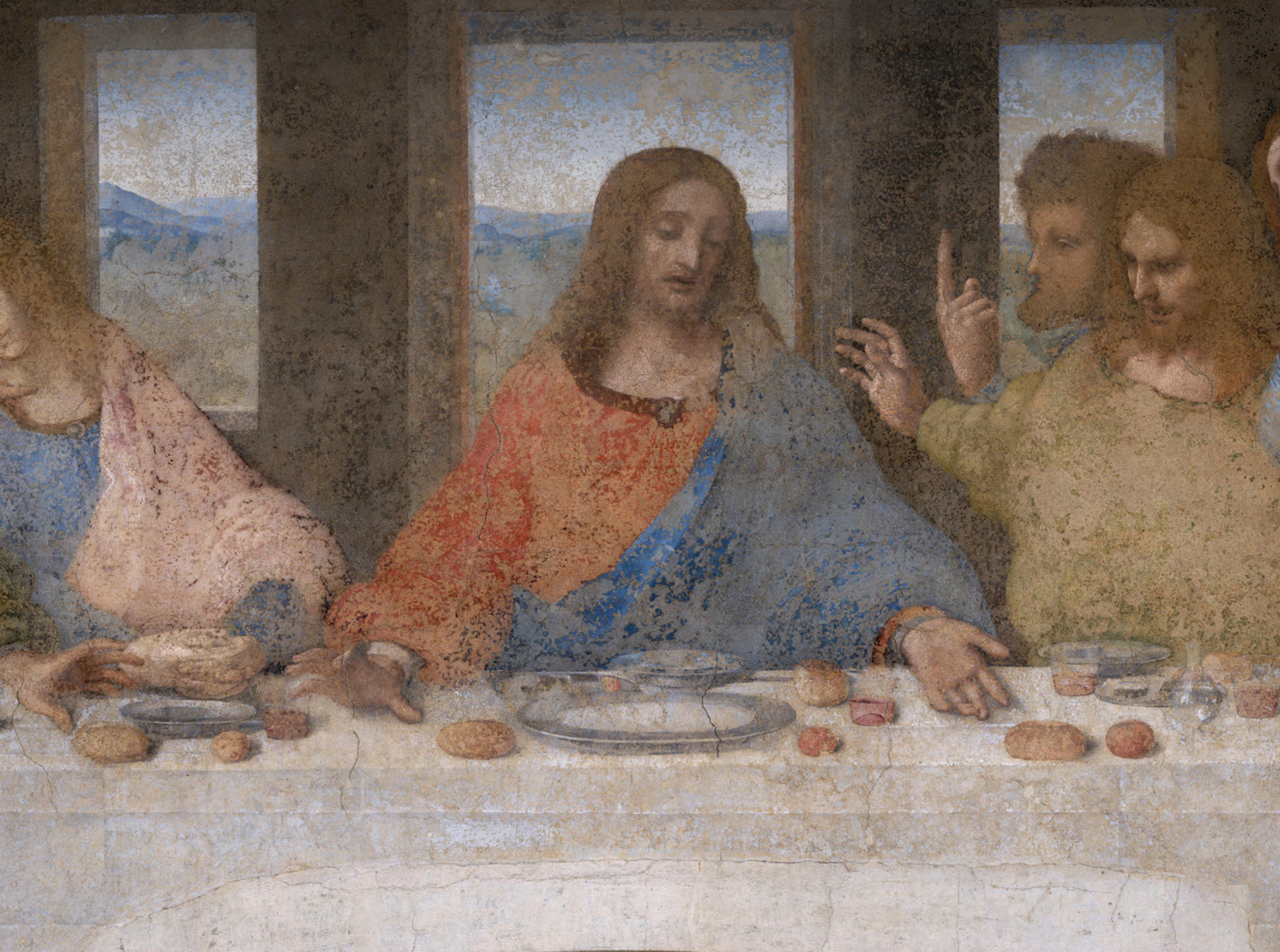
INGREDIENTS

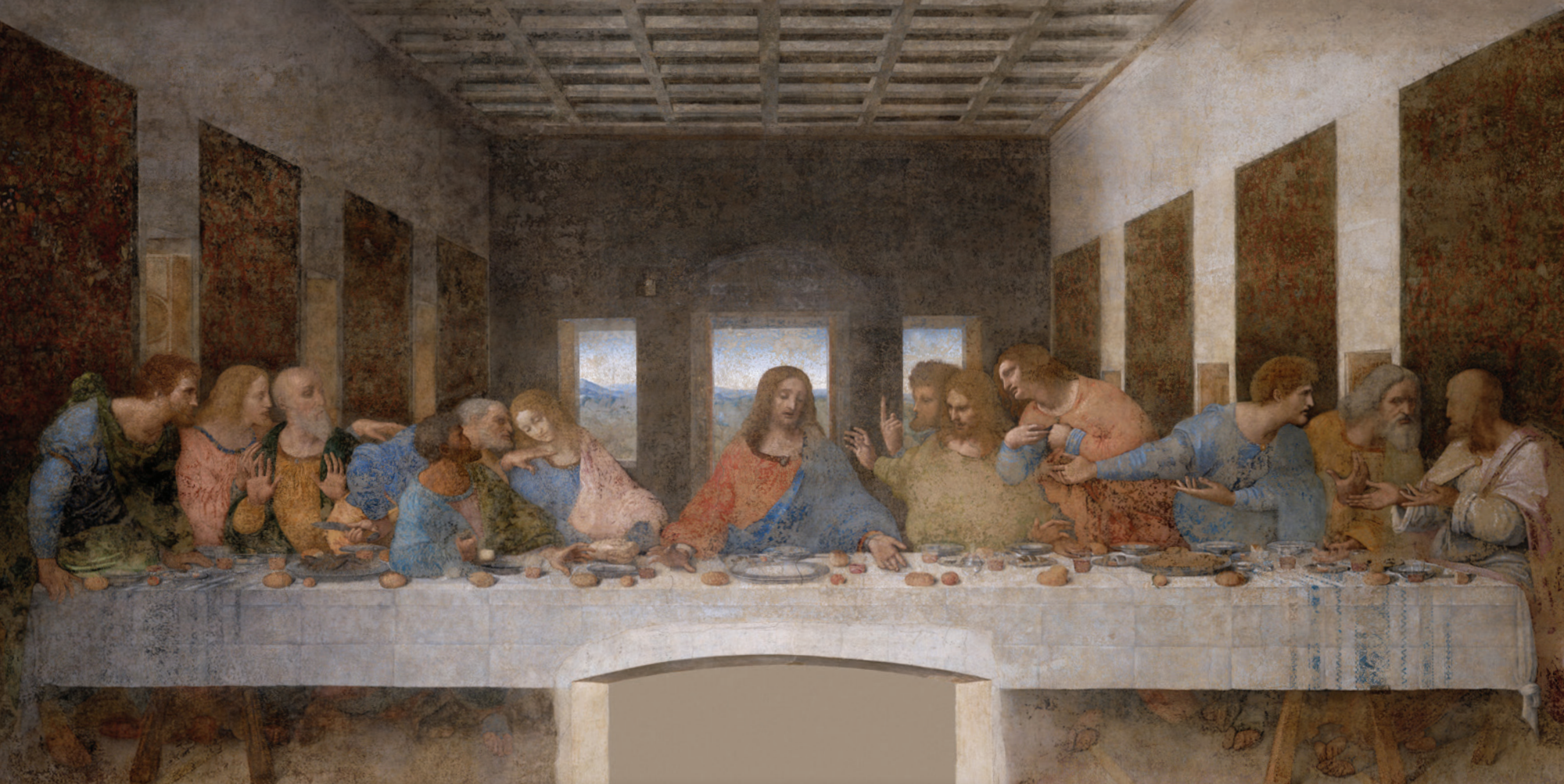
- 1 cup of uncooked white rice
 - 1 cup of uncooked wild rice
 - 2 tbsp. butter
 - 1 lb. shrimp, peeled
 - 12 oz. crabmeat
 - 1 jar chopped pimento
 - 2 small cans of mushrooms
 - 2 cans cream of mushroom soup
 - 1/2 green bell pepper, chopped
 - 2 onions, chopped
 - 2 cups chopped celery
 - 1/4 cup diced onions
-

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Prepare rice according to package directions.
3. Saute onions, celery and bell pepper in butter until soft.
4. Mix together sauteed veggies, rice, shrimp, crab, pimento and mushrooms and place in greased casserole dish.
5. Pour cream of mushroom soup over the top of the mixture.
6. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 45 minutes.
7. For the last 10 minutes, remove foil and return to the oven.

visio divina





The Last Supper

{ 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.

In college, I took a few art history classes and immediately fell in love with the way I could learn so much about the world simply by looking at a piece of art. For me, 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.

The Last Supper

LEONARDO DA VINCI, (1495-1498 CE)

This week we'll take a look at Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, *The Last Supper* (1495-98 CE). It is a tempera and oil painting on dry plaster (not a traditional fresco which is why it is deteriorating) from the High Renaissance period (1490-1527 CE), which transitions from the Early Renaissance (1401-1490 CE), creating a significant switch in characteristics.

The High Renaissance is classified by the use of:

- **One point linear perspective** (in attempts to achieve the perfect and ideally beautiful composition using geometry)

- Emphasis on **ideals of beauty** (High Renaissance artists build upon the Early Renaissance's characteristics of understanding human anatomy and making human figures look real with three-dimensional modeling and a sense of gravity. Human figures are not typical or earthly-looking, yet are still realistic but ideally beautiful. This instills the figure with a sense of transcendence and divinity. Many artists forgo halo imagery.)
- A focus on the **divine / otherworldly / transcendent**
- Figures are **not flat**. They have realistic, graceful **movement** (twisting, turning, hand expressions, complex poses, etc.)
- Figures show **emotion** and **expression**.
- **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 High Renaissance characteristics.

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

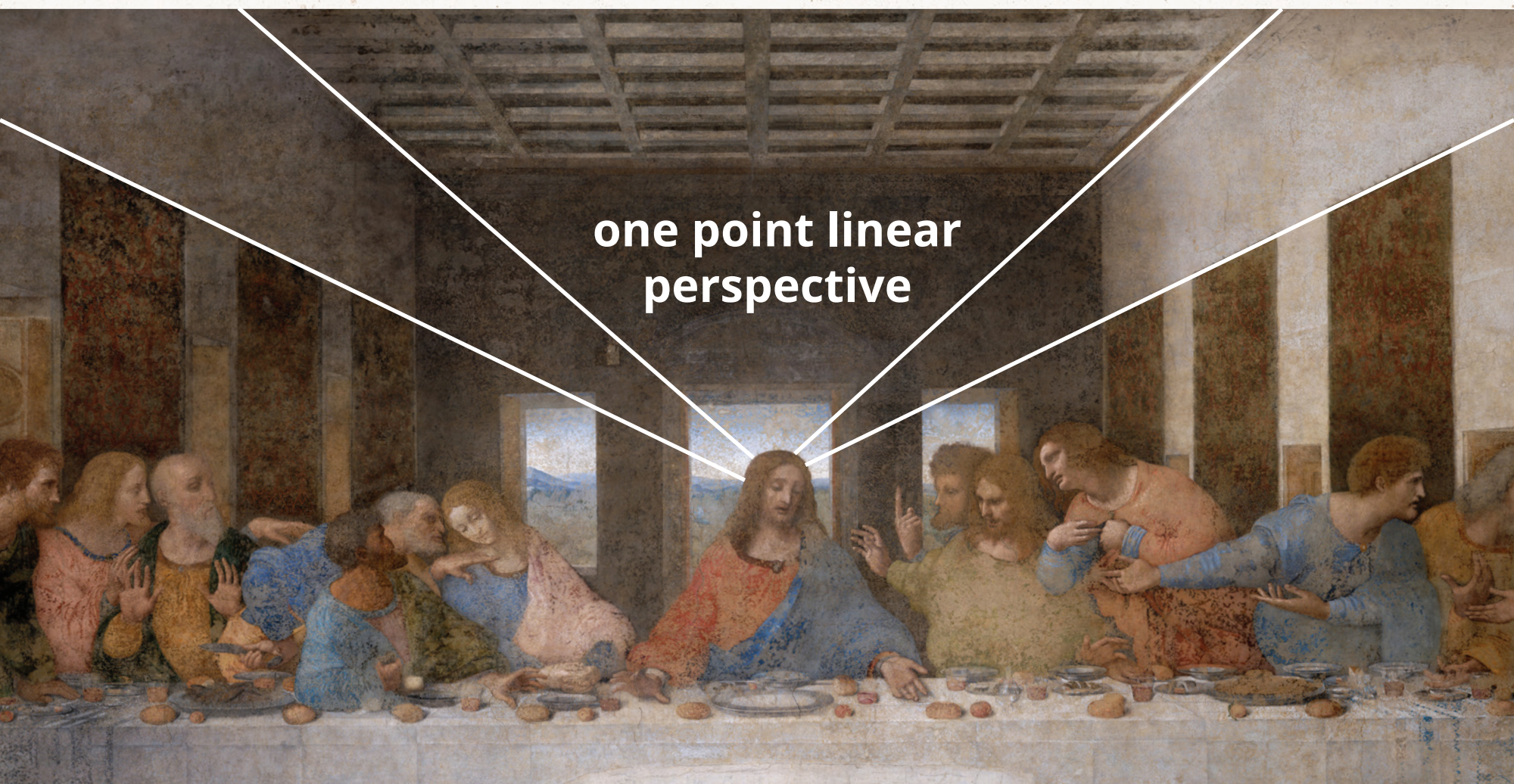
ART ANALYSIS

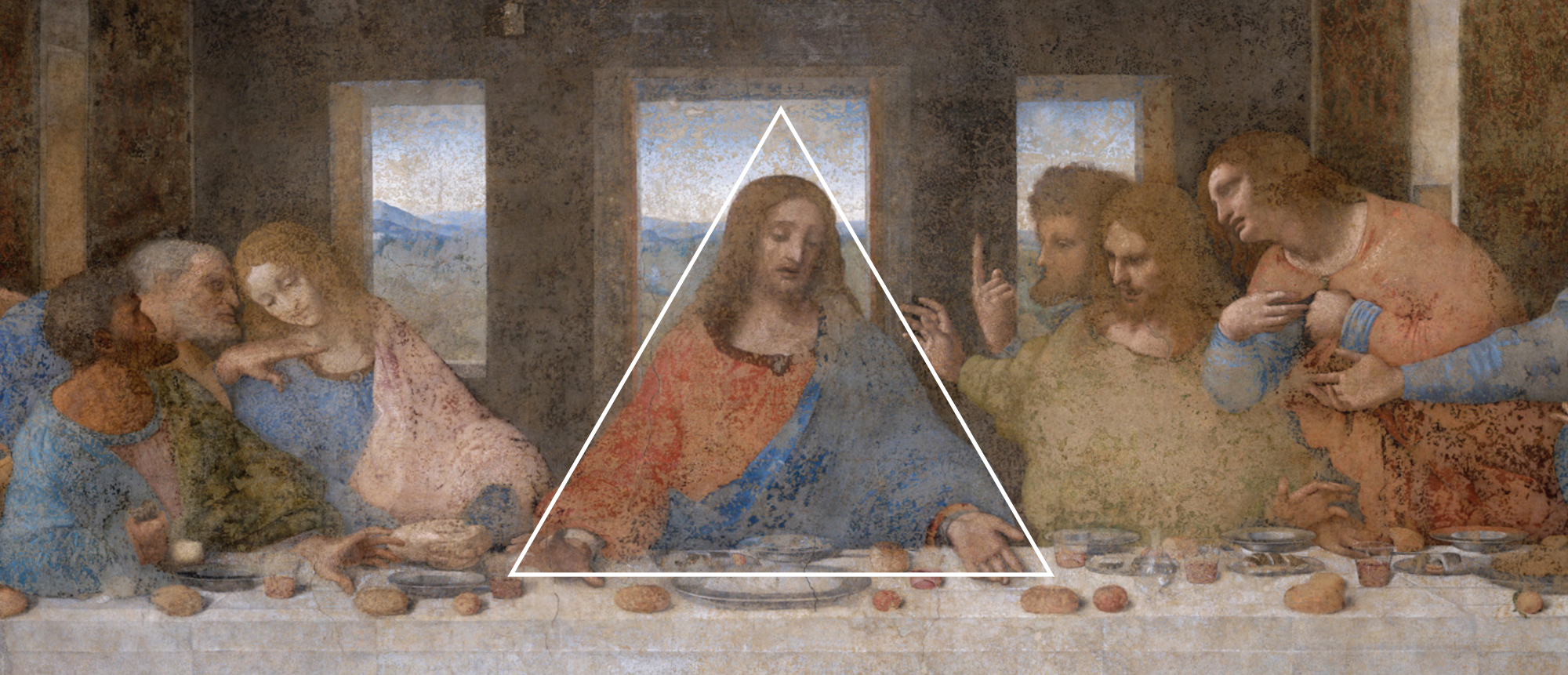
This scene depicts Mark 14:17-26, where the Twelve and Jesus have their last meal together. Jesus announces to the apostles, “One of you will betray me.” We see a range of emotion on their faces from confusion to shock to fear.

The apostles throw their hands up and, one by one, they ask Jesus with much concern, “Is it I, Lord? Surely it is not I?”

Jesus responds to them saying, “One of the Twelve, the one who dips with me into the dish [will betray Me].”

Leonardo wants the viewer to focus on Jesus and His peaceful energy radiating among the chaos. The **one point linear perspective** reinforces this. The ceiling and architecture form **diagonal lines**, creating depth. These lines point to the center where Jesus is.

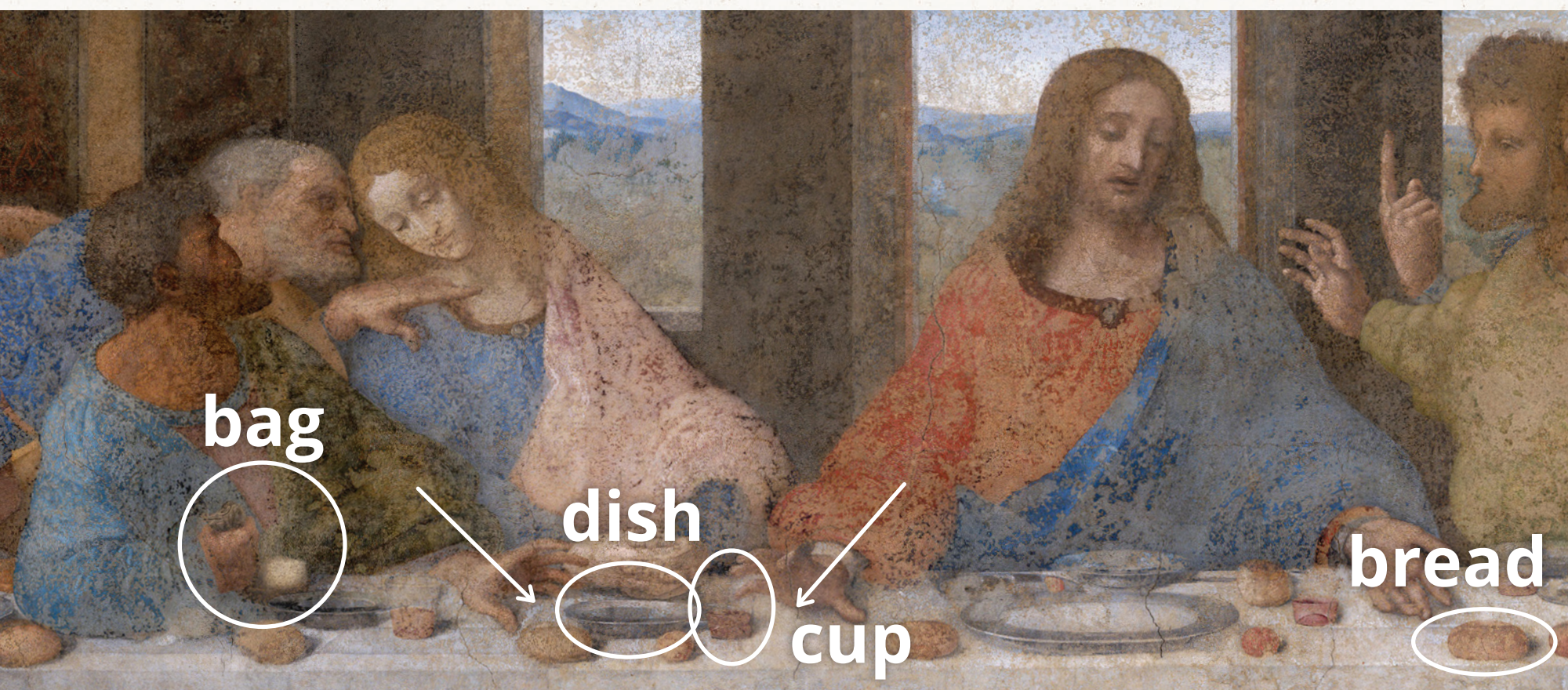




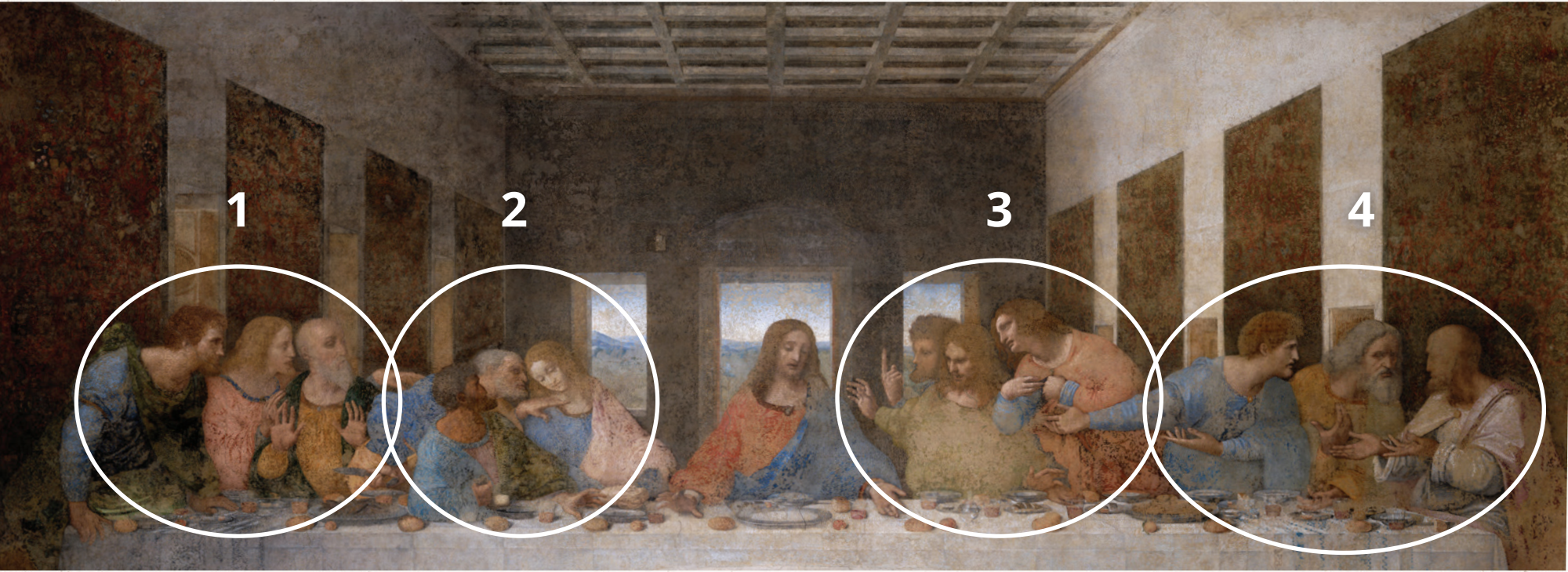
Focusing in on Jesus, His body language creates an **equilateral triangle**, symbolizing the Trinity in all its perfection. Looking at the painting as a whole, Leonardo uses the **golden ratio** to achieve **visual harmony** and **balance** to create a **perfect composition**. Leonardo paints 13 people sitting on one side of the table, but makes it look balanced, which is a hard thing to do. This long table represents a barrier between the **viewer's world** and the world of Christ and His apostles. We cannot enter this space.

The High Renaissance is known for painting the tangible, but with a sense of the **transcendent** through **beauty ideals**. So we do not see any physical elements of the spiritual (like a halo), but the **geometry**, *mathematically*, creates an **ideal composition**, perfectly pointing to Jesus generating peace in the chaos and creating a beautiful sense of the **divine**. Some historians suggest the serene window behind Christ represents a halo.

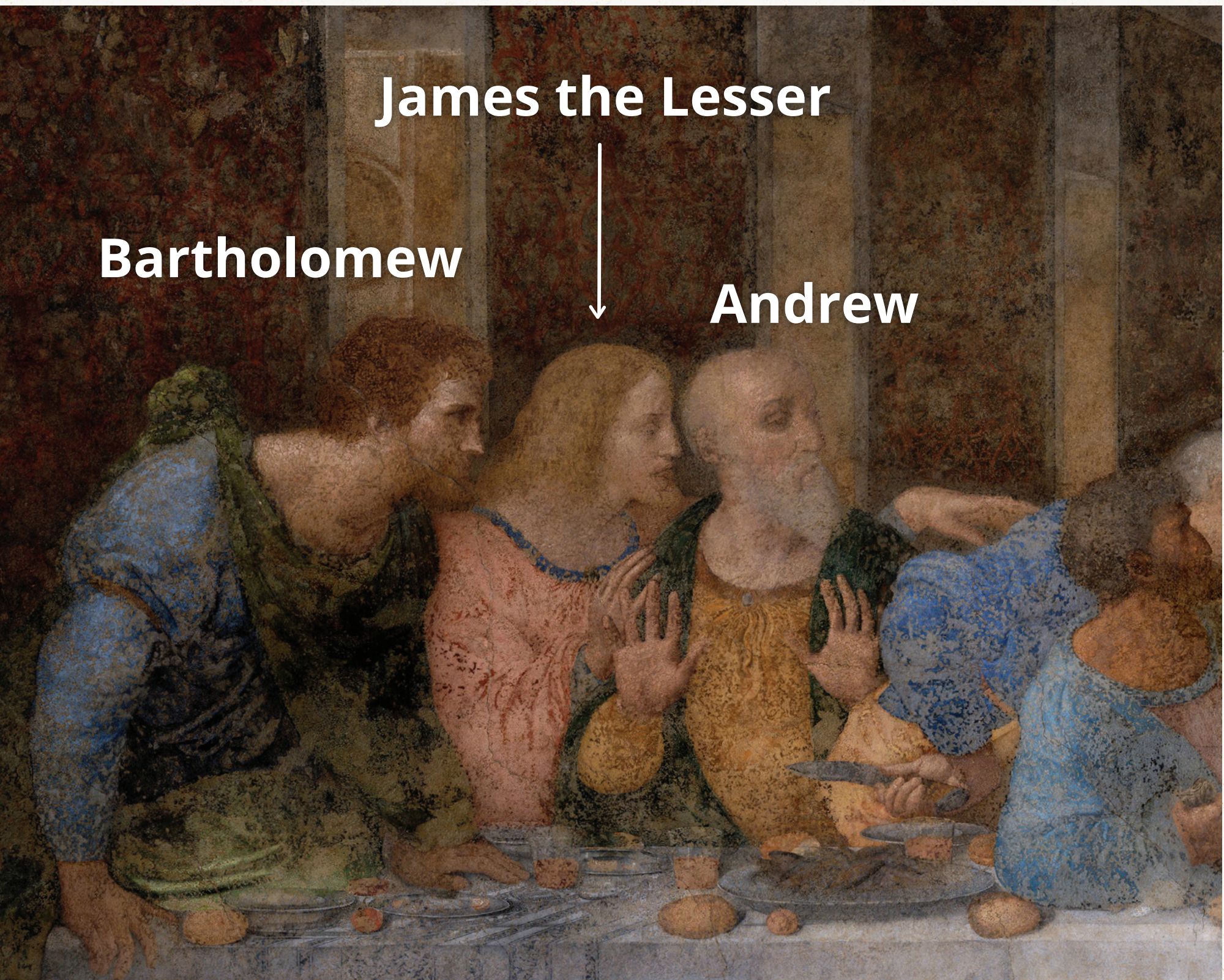
At the center, Jesus is seen reaching with His left hand for a loaf of bread, and with His right a glass of wine. This is the institution of the Eucharist. As it is written in Mark: “While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.’”



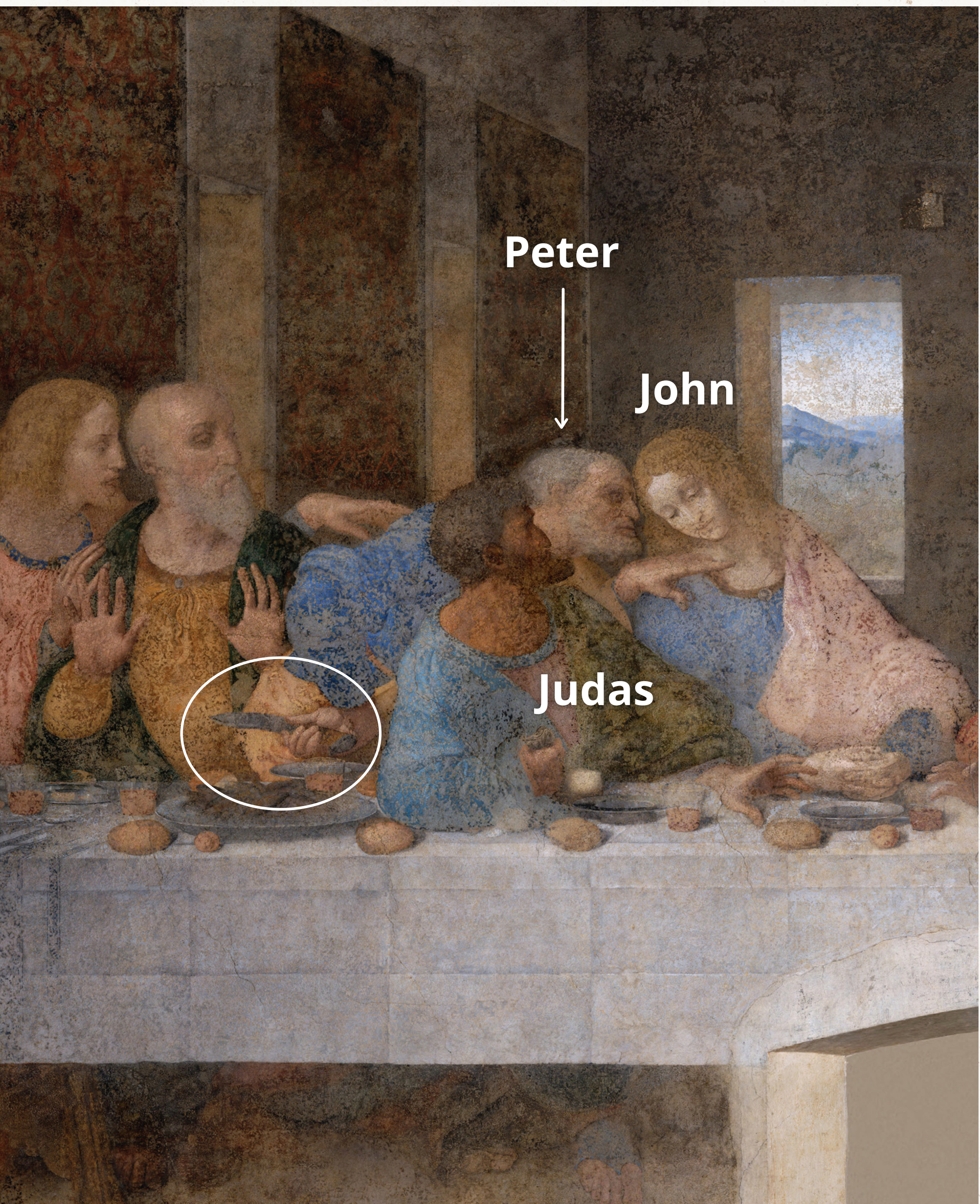
But if you focus on Jesus' right hand, He isn't just reaching for the cup, He is also reaching for the bowl. At the same time, a man is also reaching with his left hand towards that same dish: "...[T]he one who dips with me into the dish [will betray Me]." This is Judas, the betrayer. In Judas's right hand, he holds his payment (the bag of 30 pieces of silver) from the Romans for turning in Christ.



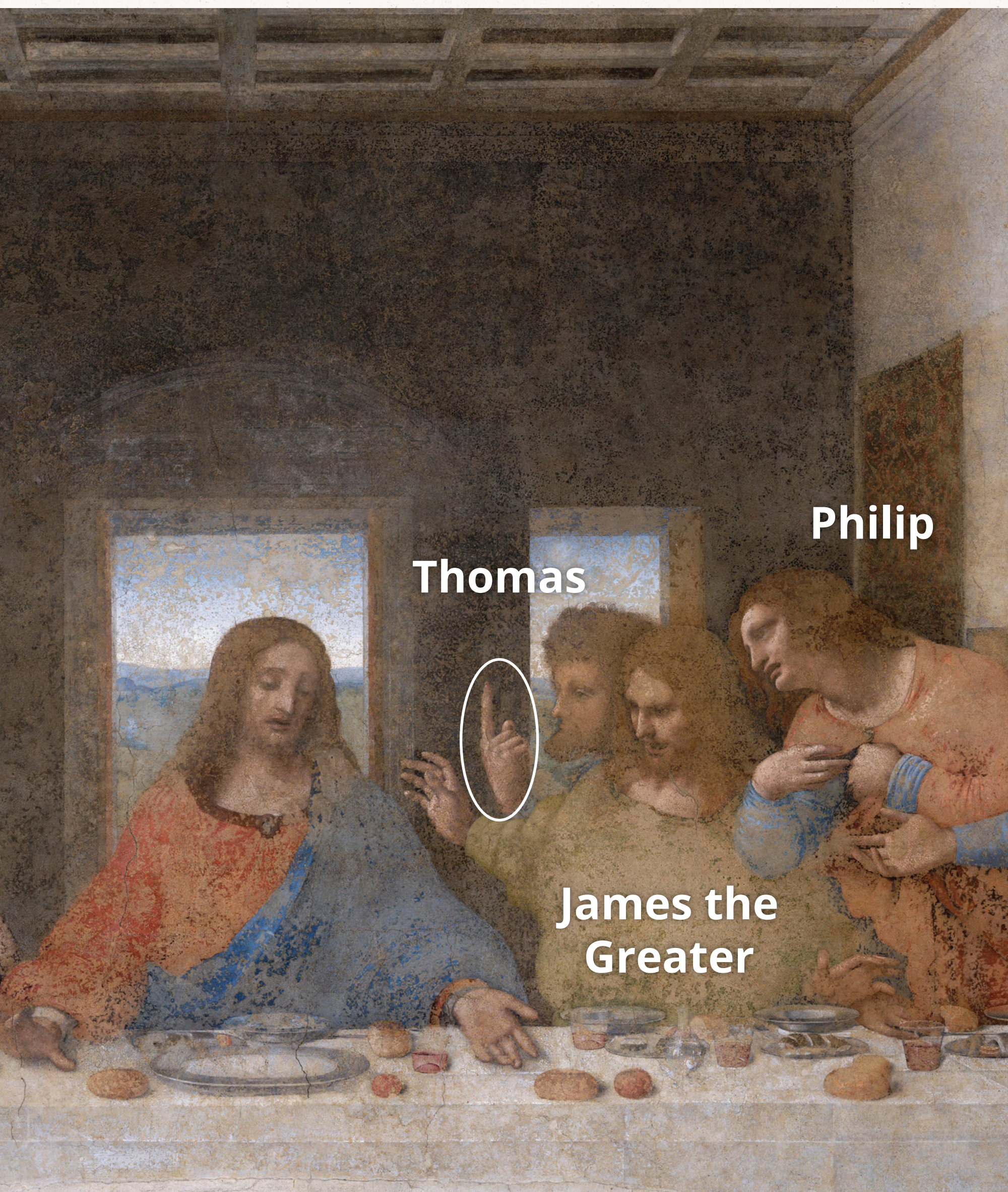
Now, looking at all the apostles. The apostles are **not flat**, but grouped and overlapping each other with **complex poses** and **emotions**. They are arranged in four groups of three. It's visually interesting and creates drama. From the left, we see the first group of three: Bartholomew, James the Lesser and Andrew, holding his hands up like he's innocent.



The next group features Peter with a knife behind his back ready to fight for Jesus, Judas Iscariot **twisting** his neck (foreshadowing he will later hang himself), and John who glances down, looking passive.

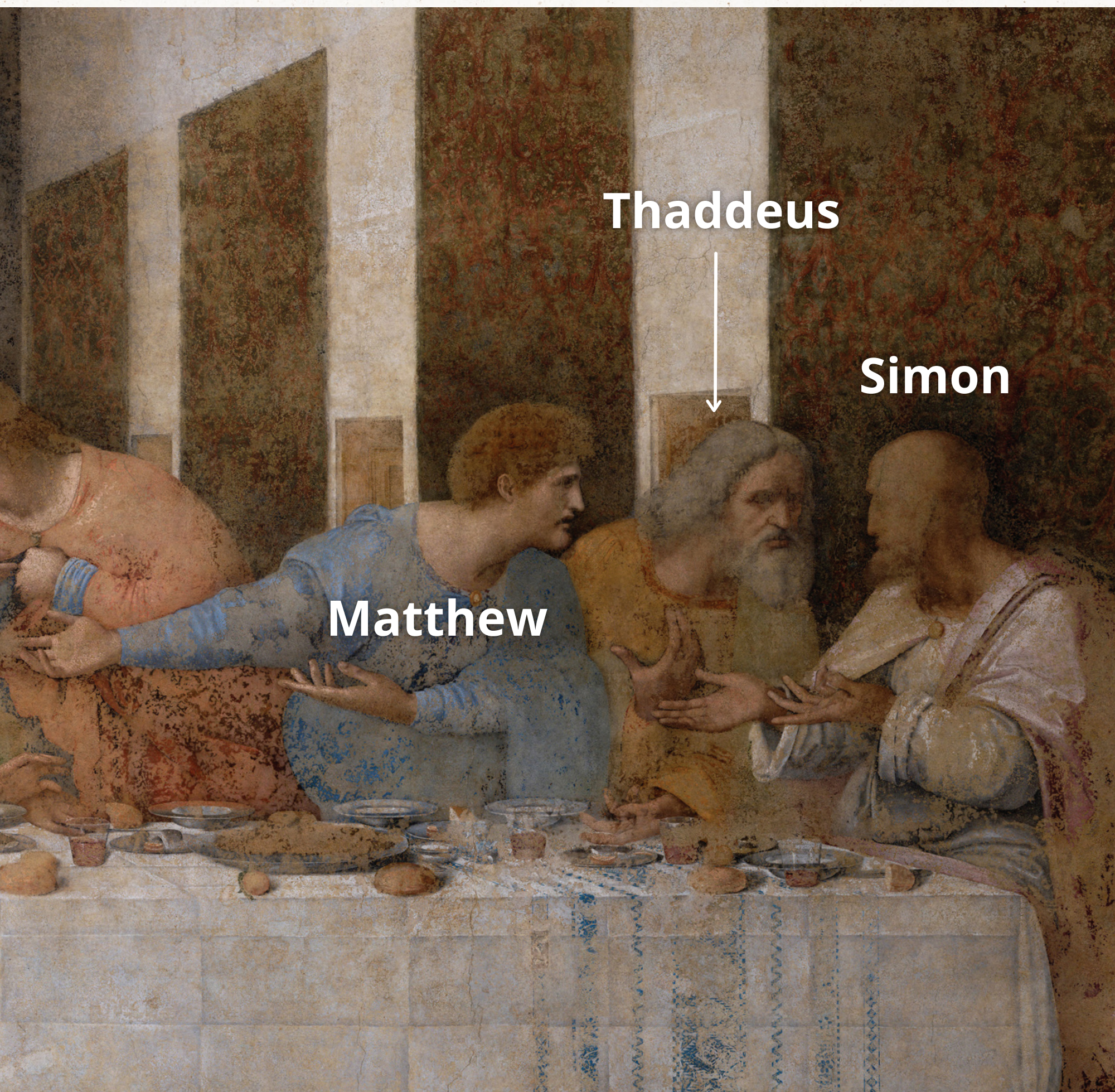


The next group shows Thomas, James the Greater and Philip. Thomas points his finger up towards the heavens asking, “Is this in God’s plan? One of us has to betray You?” This gesture also foreshadows the moment when Thomas doubts Christ’s resurrection and plunges his finger into Jesus’ side.



The last group exhibits Matthew, Thaddeus and Simon. They are all looking at each other, perhaps blaming one another. Their faces are confused and their hand gestures are passionate; it is quite comical.

Leonardo was interested in trying to reveal the soul of each figure through their physical body language. So much can be communicated through the body without having to say a word.



Thaddeus



Simon

Matthew

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

1. Jesus is the new covenant.
 2. Finding peace among the chaos is part of the human experience.
 3. God created each of us, body and soul, in His likeness. Our bodies are an outward expression of our souls.
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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is your initial feeling when viewing this piece?
- What about this painting helps bring the Eucharist to life for you?
- This painting portrays the variety of intentions and emotions behind each apostle. Which apostle do you most identify with and why?



PRAYER

Say a prayer in thanksgiving for the ability to connect with God through art and beauty. Thank Him for His sacrifice and pray that you may more closely align your actions to God's will.

*Art at the Cathedral Basilica
of St. Peter in Chains.*



Powerful Promises

{ the seven sorrows rosary }

BY CARL BROWN

Math is not my strongest subject, so when I discovered that there is a Seven Sorrows Rosary, my first thought was, “How can it be that different from the traditional, five-decade rosary?” The traditional (or Dominican) rosary is five sets of 10 Hail Marys. The Seven Sorrows rosary is seven sets of seven Hail Mary’s. So 50 Hail Mary’s versus 49 Hail Marys. So I wondered, “What’s actually the difference? One Hail Mary?”

Then I prayed the Seven Sorrows Rosary and something felt different. What was it? Was it that Mary was the central figure of each scene, whereas the Dominican rosary switches between Jesus and Mary?

Was it that there were only sorrows instead of cycling through Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious with an occasional Luminous mystery?

Then I started thinking about each of the sorrows: Mary hearing the prophecy of Simeon; the Flight into Egypt; the Loss of Jesus in Jerusalem. And in these scenes I could see my life. First deciding to live as a Christian, and then realizing the challenges that would bring. I had to go outside my comfort zone as a Christian. And sometimes I wondered, “Where is God in my life?”

That’s when I started to see how much I could learn from Mary. Now she seems much closer, much more relatable, much more my Mother.

*Stained glass
window at
Holy Rosary,
St. Mary's.*



WHAT ELSE IS IN THESE SORROWS?

Mary having to watch her Son suffer. Mary having to watch the world attack the Body of Christ. Mary holding Jesus while looking at the enemies of Christ, yet loving them as she loves me.

These were scenes I could see playing out around me. My son was sick and suffering. *Why, Lord?* I could see the world attacking the Church, the Body of Christ. *Why?* I could start to see that those who I thought were enemies of Christ were actually victims of the culture of death. Could I love these people as much as Mary loved the chief priests and the Roman soldiers?


I had a lot to learn from Mary.

THE PROMISES

Then I learned about the promises. When Mary gave the Seven Sorrows Rosary to St. Bridget 700 years ago, she gave promises to those who reflect on these sorrows.

- “I will grant them peace in their family.”
And as we prayed together, we experienced peace.
- “They will be enlightened about the Divine Mysteries.” *I started to understand Jesus better.*
- “I will console them in their pains.”
Our whole family started to experience a profound level of consolation from God.

As we experienced these promises and grew in appreciation for Our Blessed Mother, our whole family wanted to share these new “treasures of grace.” This led me to write a book about the Seven Sorrows, and to pray it at our parish every week. Eventually my wife, our son and I developed a half-day event to share this on a deeper level with others.



*Pieta at St. Joseph
Church, Dayton.*

In less than six months I've spoken in over a dozen parishes in four states. In the next three months, we'll share this half-day conference five times.

One thing I invite you to do now is to add the Seven Sorrows Rosary into your daily routine and see what the Blessed Mother has in store for you!

WRITTEN BY CARL BROWN

Carl and his wife have six children and live in Cincinnati. After graduating from the University of Dayton, he worked as a sales and marketing consultant for 20+ years. While attending a funeral, he picked up a prayer card of Our Lady of Sorrows. From there he discovered the treasures of the Seven Sorrows Rosary and wrote the book, *Something You Can Count On*.



Peace & Quiet

{ mindfulness for catholic families }

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 (or the adult leader) should ask everyone to close their eyes, then lead the family through six deep breaths.

Instruct everyone to breathe in for a count of six, hold for a count of four, then breathe out for a count of four.

Begin with the sign of the cross.

READ

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

Jesus got into a boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but Jesus was asleep.

His disciples came and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

He said to them, "Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm.

Then he got up,
rebuked the winds
and the sea, and there
was great calm.



The men were amazed and said, “What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?” Matthew 8:23-27

SAY

When do you feel afraid? Jesus’ disciples—many of whom were fishermen who spent years and years on the sea—were terrified that the waves were going to pull them down under the water.

Close your eyes and think of all the things that make you afraid. Think of how it feels to be scared. Let those feelings wash over you like the waves washing over the side of the boat.

Think about your fears for five seconds.

five



four



three



two



one

*b r e a t h e
and relax.*

Now, shake your body like you're on that boat with Jesus' disciples being thrown about by the wild waves. Shake your arms, tilt your head from side to side, bounce up and down. Tumble in the waves for five seconds.

five



four



three



two



one

*Now be still,
b r e a t h e
and relax.*

Be still.

Know that Jesus is with you and He is in control. Focus on this moment. The still and quiet of this room. You are surrounded by people who love you. There are no waves and there is nothing to fear. Let the calm wash over you.

Take a deep breath.

one — two — three — four — five — six

Hold it.

one — two — three — four

And breathe out.

one — two — three — four

Breathe in.

one — two — three — four — five — six

Hold it.

one — two — three — four

And let it out.

one — two — three — four

And one last time, breathe in.

one — two — three — four — five — six

Hold it.

one — two — three — four

And let it out.

one — two — three — four

Whenever you feel afraid, try to focus on Jesus and the present moment. Storms always come at some point or another. Everyone experiences waves of fear at some point in their lives. But if you stay focused on the present moment and remember that Jesus is with you, that He is in control, you will know that you do not need to be afraid.

Close with the sign of the cross.