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The Ultimate Guide
to Lent



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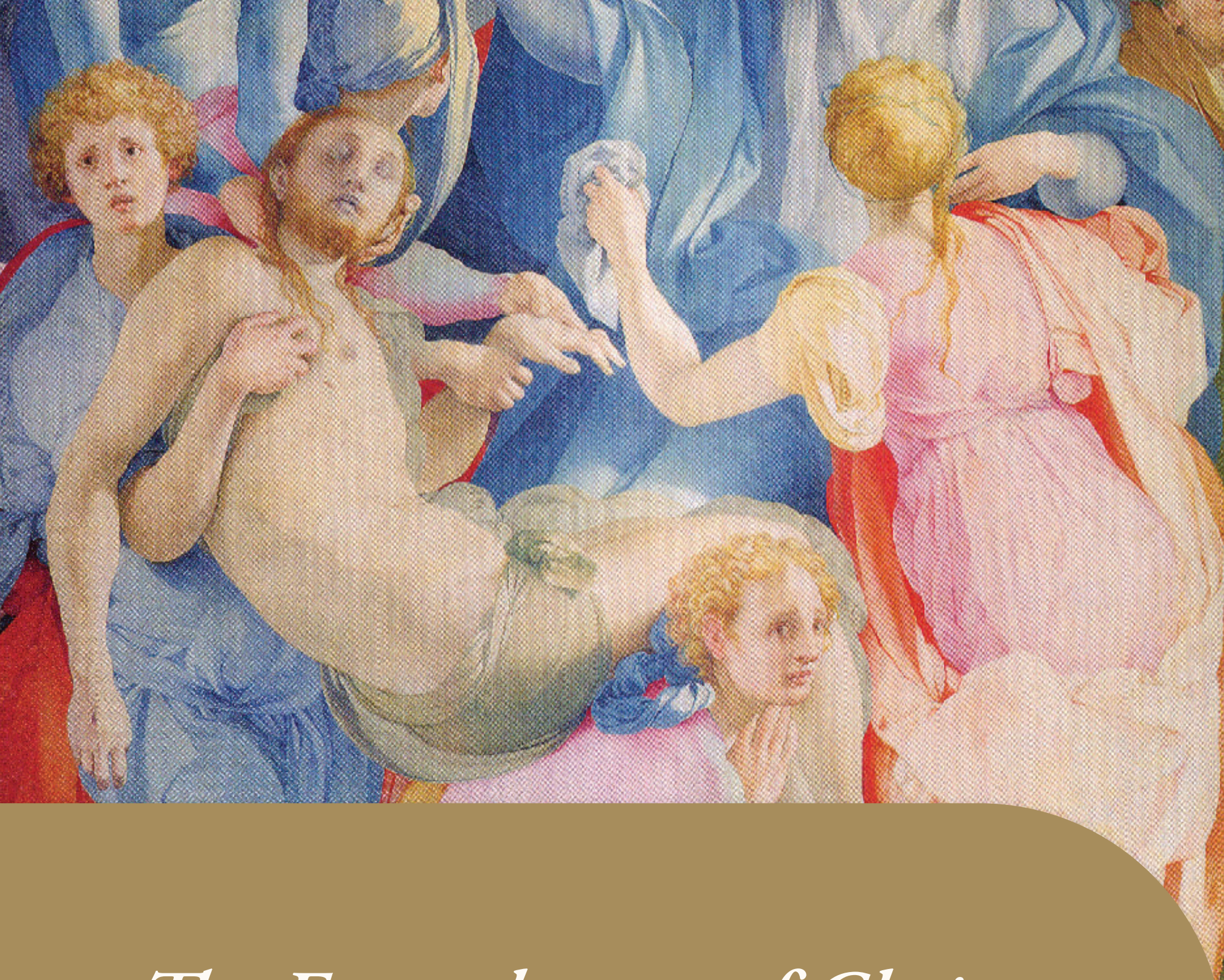
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visio divina





The Entombment of Christ

{ 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 Entombment of Christ

JACOPO PONTORMO, (1528 CE)

This week we'll take a look at Jacopo Pontormo's painting, *The Entombment of Christ* (1528 CE). It is from the Late Renaissance period (1520-1600 CE), and painted in the Mannerist style. This painting is a large altarpiece located within a small burial chapel inside Santa Felicita Church in Florence, Italy. This odd, new style of Mannerism emerged from the Renaissance, driven by the creative conscious rather than stable reality. Colors transition from deep, rich tones to garishly, candy-colored pigments. Mannerist artists reject the understanding of human anatomy and, instead, loosely construct figures with disproportionate, exaggerated bodies that hold little to no weight in space. Mannerism takes us away from reality and transports us to an otherworldly realm.



The Entombment of Christ

JACOPO PONTORMO, (1528 CE)

Mannerism is characterized by the use of:

- imagination over reality
- visual dissonance
- unstable composition/figures
- figures do not hold weight in space; little to no sense of gravity
- no sense of space (no use of linear or atmospheric perspective)
- artificial, garish colors
- inaccurate, often exaggerated human anatomy
- unnatural, unrealistic, otherworldly
- movement
- emotion
- decorative

Pause here and examine Jacopo's *The Entombment of Christ*. This painting is in a style we're not used to seeing. At first glance, it may seem off-putting—because it is. Spend some time with it. It may take a moment to see the beauty and understand what the artist is trying to communicate here.

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

ART ANALYSIS

Although it is called *The Entombment of Christ*, art historians all believe something different is happening here. They have puzzled over this painting for years. Is it a lamentation (Mary and the disciples mourning over Jesus' body)? Is it a deposition (Jesus being taken down from the cross)? We don't see a cross or ladder pointing us to that conclusion. Is it an entombment? That's not clear either.

So, what *is* going on in this scene?

Let's focus on what we *can* see.

We are immediately struck by these intense **garish** colors: **unnatural** skin tones and fabric composed of **bright** shades of pinks and blues. These tones are joyful and fanciful. Adding to this **imaginative** scene, the figures themselves are **barely weighted** in space. It looks as if they are **floating** or dancing. The juxtaposition of this **dreamy** scene contrasted with the somber faces and subject pulls the viewer into the painting.

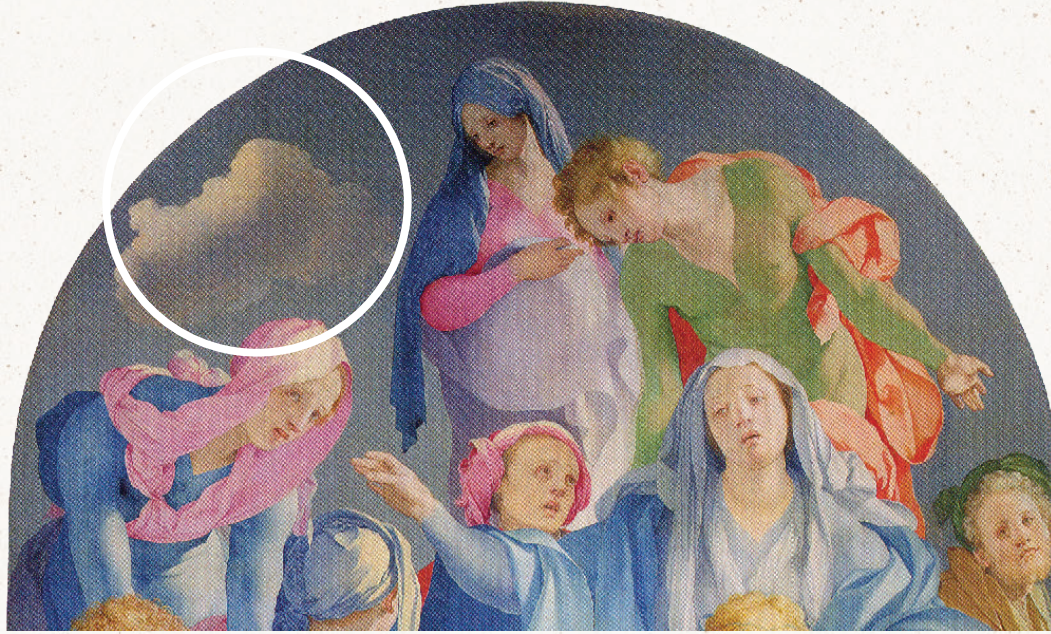
Mannerism rejects the Renaissance in many ways, but at the same time builds upon it, often looking to previous artists for inspiration. In this case, *The Entombment of Christ* looks to Michaelangelo's *Pietà*, with Jacopo's Jesus mirroring Michaelangelo's Jesus. Some historians suggest this is the moment before the *Pietà* and the two boys are lifting up Jesus' body to place into Mary's lap. However, in the *Pietà*, the figures are grounded in space, creating the geometry of a triangle, symbolic of the trinity. It exudes strength, stability and order.



The Pietà, MICHAELANGELO, (1499 CE)
Christ's body and the use of geometry inspire Jacopo's painting.

Jacopo's piece is just the opposite. There is chaotic **movement**. The composition and figures are **unstable**. However, Jacopo does use **geometry** to enhance his painting. Instead of a stable triangle, he uses a circle to pull us into this spiraling **movement**. The circle appears near the arch and travels around each of the faces, swirling your gaze into the center. And, this is interesting because Jesus and Mary are not at the center of the circle, but a cluster of hands and fabric is.

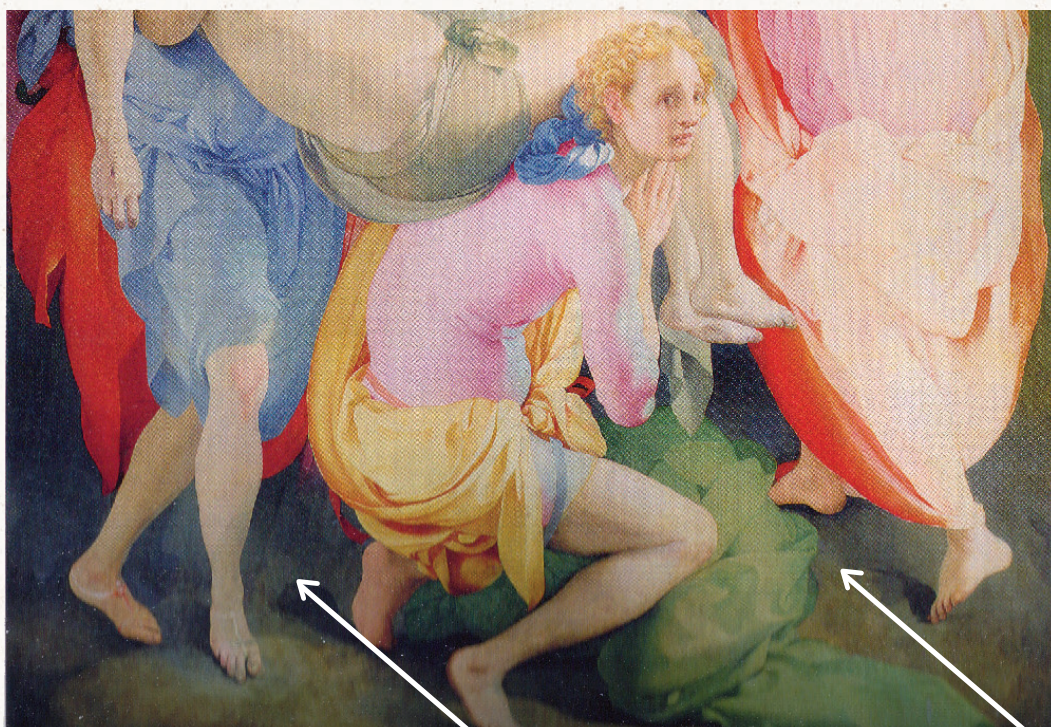




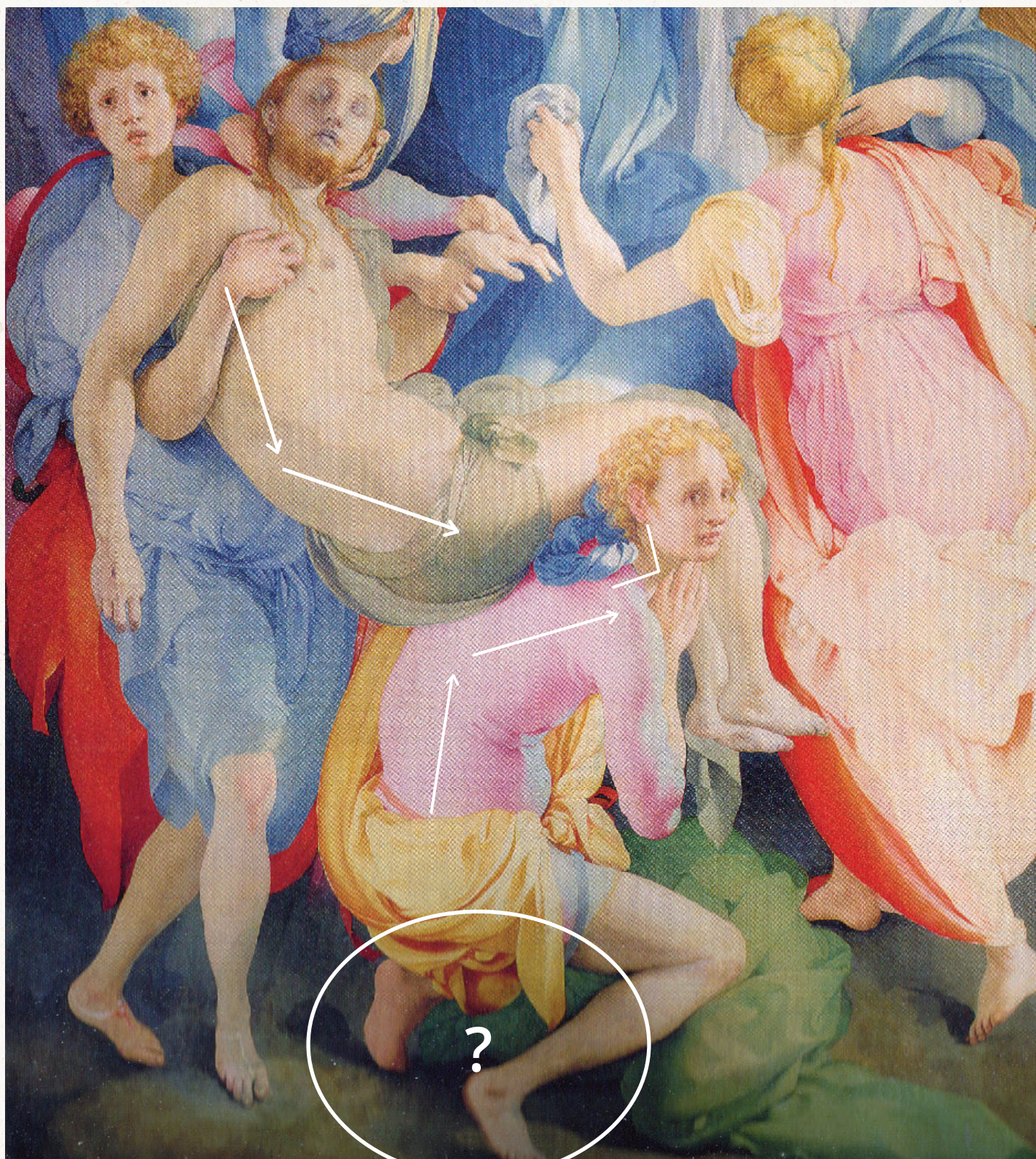
Unlike the Renaissance, the environment and perspective are **ambiguous**. There is no architecture or items to help suggest a narrative. There is one cloud in the sky and the slightest bit of incline to provide us with enough information to deduce the figures are being contained within a space.

So, we have to rely on the figures to tell the narrative.

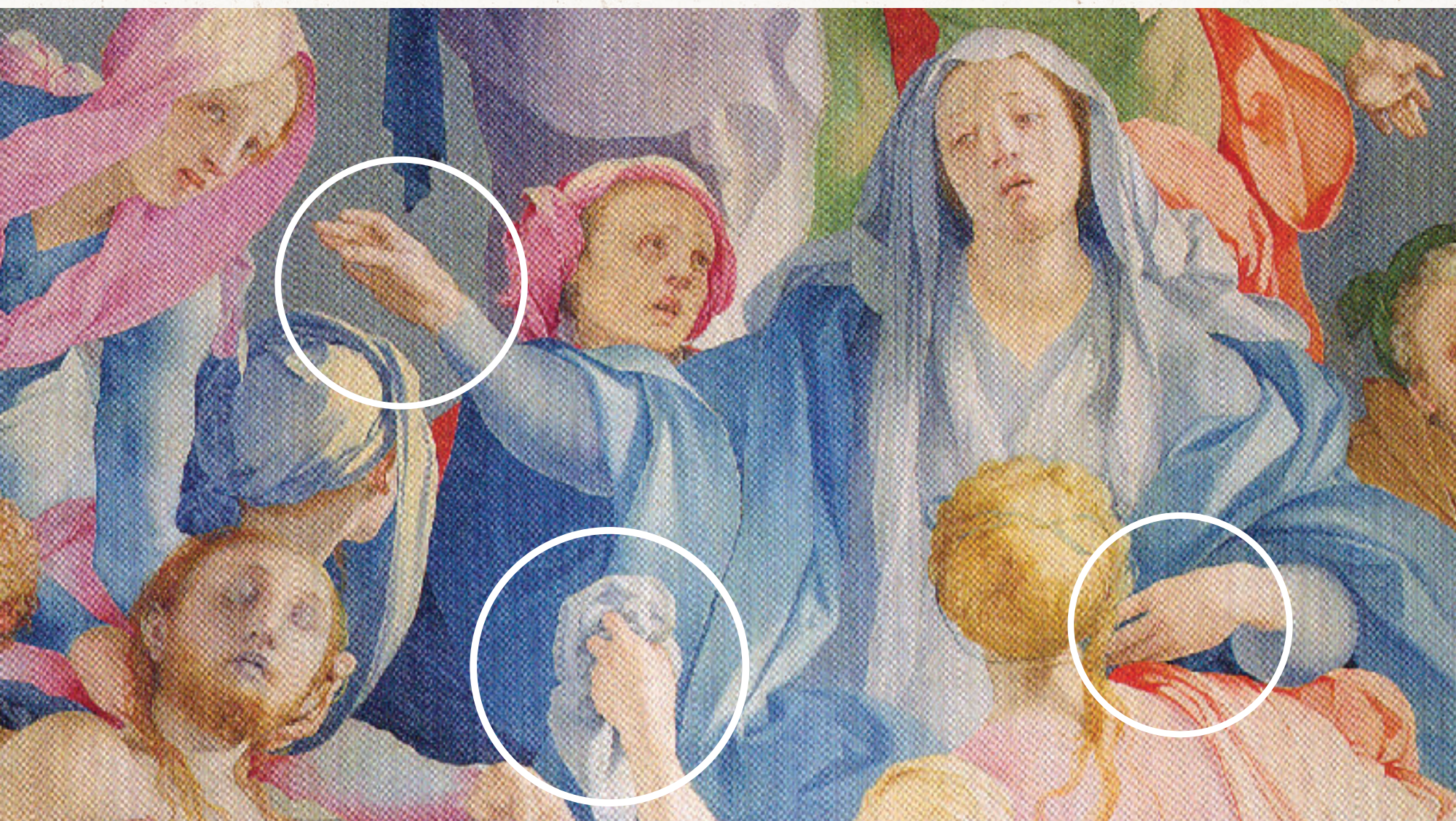
There is a conglomeration of overlapping bodies and cloth. It is difficult to see where some bodies end and begin. Jacopo doesn't make it very clear, adding to the **dream-like** state.



Honing in on the figures, we see Jesus' body being held up by two boys. Christ's body looks **disproportionate**. His torso is huge compared to the rest of His body and looks incredibly heavy. The boy standing and holding Jesus under His arms, does not appear to struggle with His weight. The other boy places Jesus' weight on his shoulders and crouches on his tip-toes, also not showing any difficulty. This is a very awkward stance: Why is he standing on his toes like that? With Jesus' proportions, holding His weight like that would be **unnatural** and physically impossible. The crouching boy's torso is also **elongated** and his neck is tilted **unnaturally**.

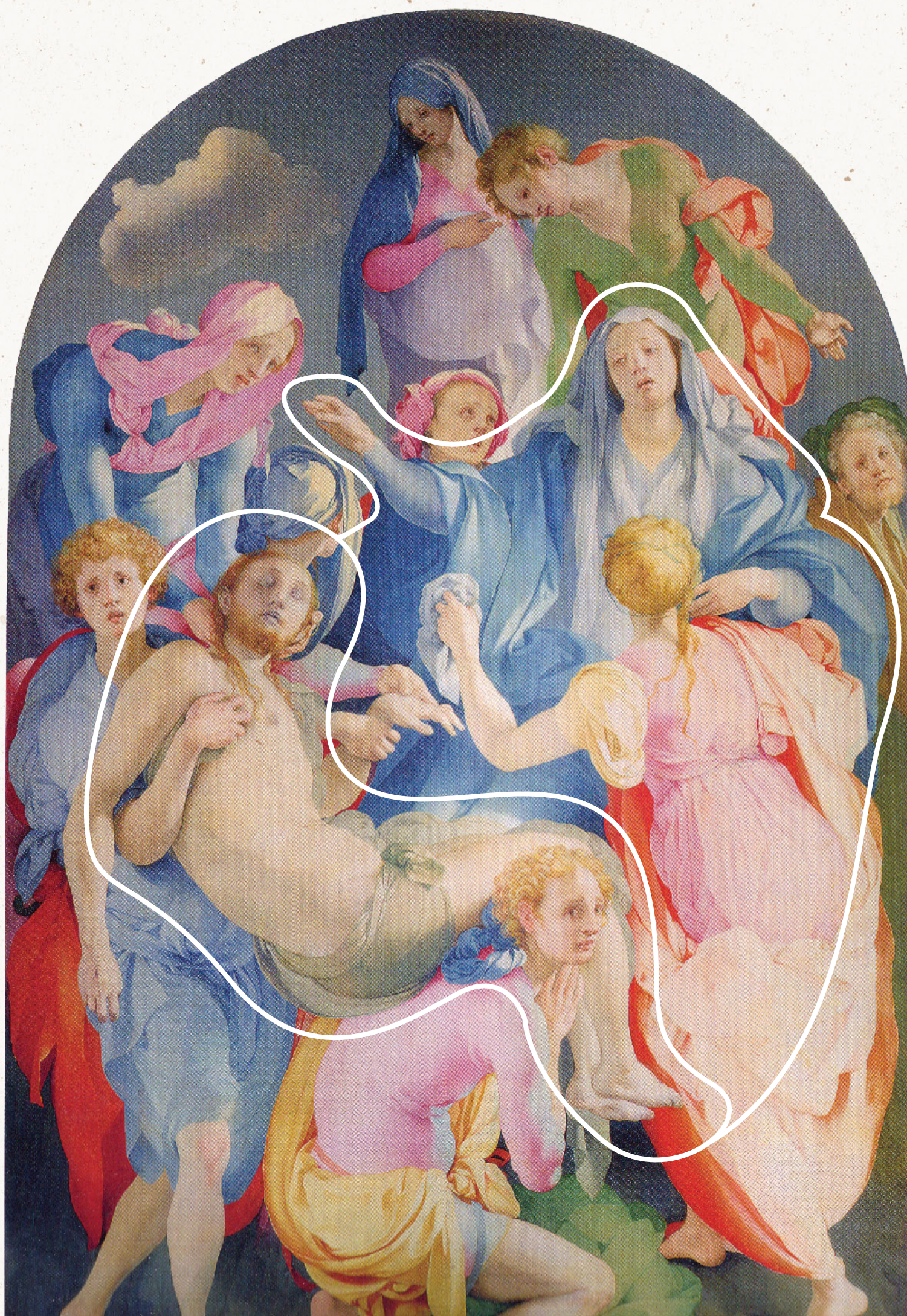


So, who are these two boys? Some historians suggest they are not just boys, but angels, which would explain why they are lifting Jesus with such ease. Others think the two angels are lifting Jesus up to Heaven, referencing a bodily ascension, or perhaps, foreshadowing one that is to come.



The next recognizable figure is Mary, who is clothed in blue, gazing in sorrow down at her Son. Her arms **float** up in the air as if she's about to faint, or is already fainting. The woman in pink with her back facing us rushes to Mary holding a cloth like she is going to wipe Mary's tears or sweat, drawing similarity to St. Veronica. Her hands are at the center of the painting, maybe denoting that the focus of the painting is caring for Mary and her Son.

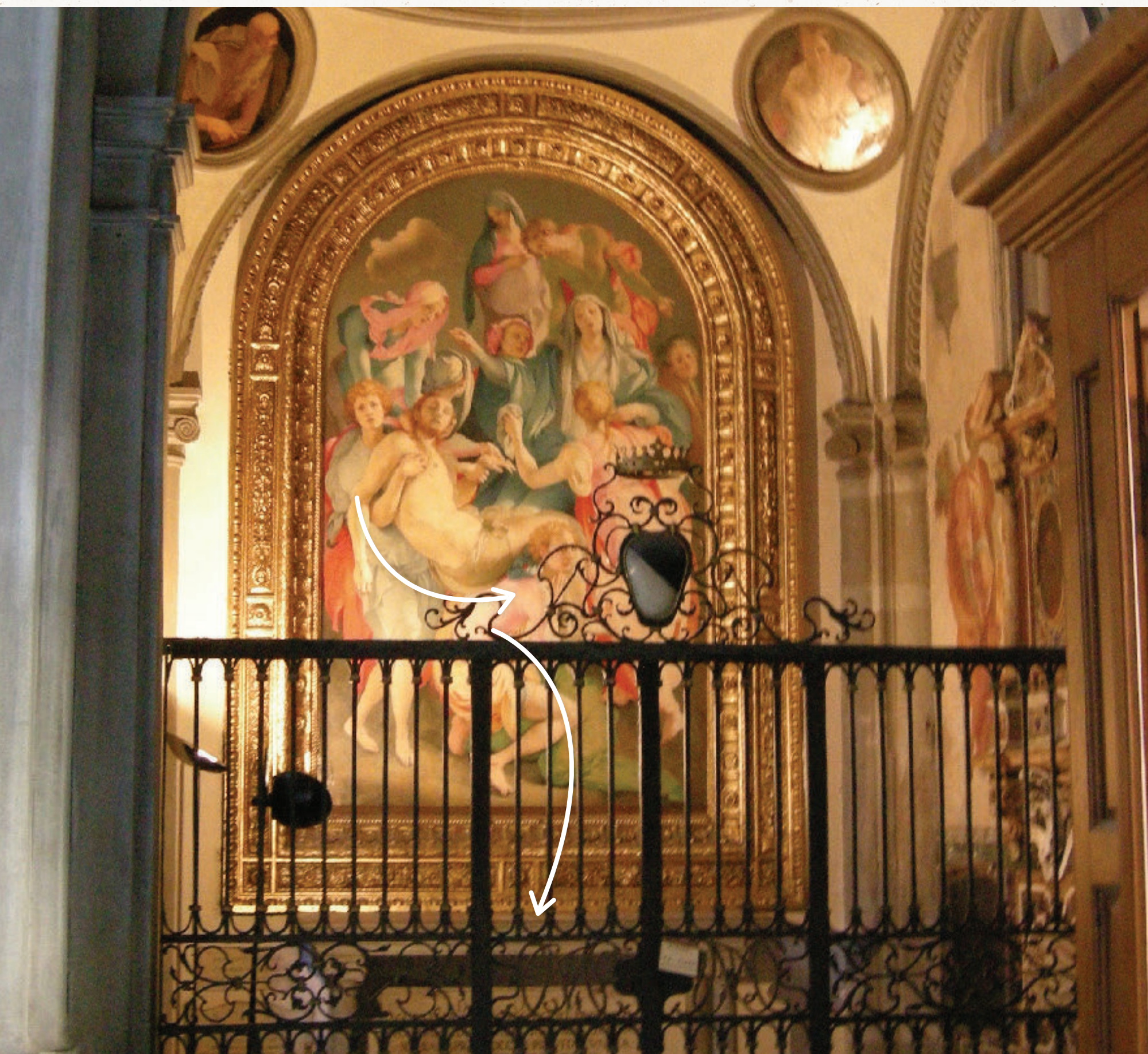
Again with the **proportions**, Mary looks like a giant compared to everyone else. She and Jesus are *massive*. As the largest figures, our attention is drawn to them. Through their **unnatural** size and **inaccurate proportions**, Jacopo is communicating that: *Yes, Mary and Jesus are human, but they are **otherworldly** and **supernatural**. They can defy the natural world.*



The rest of the figures are unknown. They appear to mainly be a group of women rushing to Mary's aid. However, there is a man off to the right side who appears to be detached from the scene, looking straight at the viewer. He has curly, pale blond hair and is clothed in earthy tones of dark green and ochre. This is believed to be a self-portrait of Jacopo Pontormo. The colors he wears emphasize this **visual disconnect**, creating contrast against the **pastel hues**. Jacopo is communicating that he is a part of our world and that the rest of his painting acts as a window into the beyond, the **supernatural**.



What's more interesting is where this painting sits in the chapel: directly above an altar. During the time this painting was created, Martin Luther was gaining in popularity. One of his major beliefs that contradicted Catholicism was that the bread and wine were simply symbols. But, how Jacopo paints the boys holding Jesus' body, it looks as if they are **breaking the space** and lowering Him onto the physical altar inside the chapel, as if saying the Eucharist *is* Jesus' body. Moreover, Jacopo paints himself as a figure in the painting, as to say he is personally reaffirming the validity of the transubstantiation and this biblical narrative.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

1. At Mass, when the priest blesses the bread and wine, it becomes Jesus' body, blood, soul and divinity. It is no longer just bread and wine, but it is the Eucharist. It *is* Jesus.
 2. Jesus and Mary are earthly beings and supernatural beings.
-

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is your initial feeling when viewing this piece?
 - This painting is known to have a multitude of interpretations. What is your personal interpretation of this painting?
 - How do you think God is speaking to you through this painting?
 - Do you struggle believing in the Eucharist?
-

PRAYER

Say a prayer in thanksgiving for the ability to connect with God through art and beauty. Repeat a few times: "Jesus, I believe. Help my unbelief."



Redemptive Suffering

{ becoming an offering for others }

BY DAVID AND KRISTY KISSELL

It was 11 a.m. on a Saturday morning and our son, Carson, was starting to wake up. As a 15-year-old teenage boy, he slept late every now and then, but that Saturday morning was different.

Carson had been dealing with a severe eye abrasion, like a paper cut, from three days earlier. It was still so painful he had to keep his eyes closed. Entering his room, we hoped he would wake feeling better and able to open his eyes.

“How’s your eye feeling, buddy?” we asked. “Still the same, still hurts, can’t open it,” he responded with great frustration.

This was the start of day four of Carson “being in the dark.” Our hearts sank as we sat on his bed trying our best to console him.

Eye abrasions are just one of many physical issues that come with a condition called *Epidermolysis bullosa*, also known as EB. Both Carson and his younger brother, Kolbe, were born with it.

EB is characterized by extremely fragile skin and recurrent blister formations. Because the skin essentially doesn’t know how to remain attached when friction occurs, it affects all areas of the body, including internally. It has required numerous surgeries and hospital stays over the years for our boys. To be very candid, EB is a

debilitating disease: Carson and Kolbe have never lived a day without feeling some type of pain.

As parents, the most difficult part of living with EB is seeing our boys suffer and realizing there is nothing we can do to take away their pain. Saturday morning was one more reminder of this reality, but it's a cross we've carried for nearly 16 years.

“You have to give EB to the Lord; prayer and the Sacraments are the only way you’re going to get through this.”

Early on in Carson’s life, our pastor offered us this advice. We grew up Catholic, experienced



different forms of prayer and received the Sacraments throughout our childhood and young-adult years. We didn't, however, fully grasp how much we needed God's grace until Carson was born.

Receiving the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion as frequently as possible, praying together as a married couple and family, and keeping an open heart to trust in God's healing power was the only answer to our suffering.

EB required us to quickly learn how to pivot between parenting and love with a gentle heart, physically and spiritually. Carson was the gift who intensely led us to a deeper relationship with Christ and His Church, showing us the way to truly believe and live the prayer, "Jesus, I trust in you."

REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING

offering up our days as a prayer for others

We often listen to the Holy Family School of Faith Rosary podcast in which Dr. Mike Scherschligt sometimes talks about suffering.

His insight is one we strive to live every day:

“What you did not choose, do not like, and cannot change... accept with trust and offer with love for the needs of others.”

Offering up our days for others, especially the hard days, is a powerful form of prayer. When we do this, we prayerfully unite our suffering to Christ on the Cross and simply do the best we can—with whatever God permits to come our way each day. In those times of great



DR. MIKE SCHERSCHLIGT



What you did
not choose, do
not like, and
cannot change...
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with *love* for the
needs of others.

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suffering, like those “eye abrasion days,” we are closest to Christ.

Sixteen years into this journey God placed us on, we are still seeking, listening, trusting and striving to witness and persevere in our suffering, all the while giving thanks and glory to God for all He continues to do in our lives.

*Therefore, let those
who suffer according
to God’s will entrust
their souls to a faithful
Creator while doing
good. 1 Peter 4:19*



Skip a Meal, Give a Meal

{ 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

Skip a meal, give a meal.

This idea is pretty straightforward: instead of going out to eat or cooking a big fancy meal for dinner, make yourself a really simple dinner—think rice and beans, tomato soup and grilled cheese, that sort of thing—and then give a meal to a neighbor, fellow school family, or friend of the family.

You can put together a lasagna or casserole that you deliver to their house, or you can buy them a gift card to a local restaurant or pizza place so they can go out to eat. Either option is great! The important thing is making a small sacrifice on your end (eating simply) so they can have a night off and relax.

It would be hard to deliver a casserole or lasagna secretly, but if you go the gift card route you

get bonus points if you deliver the gift card
anonymously!

COMPLETED YOUR SECRET SERVICE?

Let us know how it went on **Facebook** and
Instagram: @thecatholictelegraph



Creole Style Veggie Rice

{ meat-free lenten recipe }

Love casseroles, but want a meat-free option? Try out this veggie loaded version for a delicious, homecooked meal to warm your bones and stick to your ribs on a Friday evening.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup diced celery
- 1 1/2 cups chopped onion
- 1/2 cup green onions, chopped fine
- 1/2 cup chopped bell pepper
- 1/4 cup parsley, chopped fine
- 1 stick butter
- 1/4 cup diced pimentos
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 1 10 oz. can of cream of mushroom
(or celery) soup
- 1/2 cup cubed Velveeta cheese
- salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375.
2. Saute celery, onions, green onions and bell pepper in butter until tender.
3. Add cream of mushroom (or cream of celery) soup, parsley and pimentos. Heat until hot.
4. Add rice, salt and pepper, cooking for five more minutes.
5. Pour into a two quart casserole dish.
6. Sprinkle with bread crumbs and dot with Velveeta cheese.
7. Bake for 10 minutes (until cheese is melted).



Venerate

{ the spirituality of relics }

BY MATT HESS

Bodily remains. Pieces of historical artifacts. People kneeling and praying before small glass cases.

Current culture might relegate relics to medieval superstition that our modern sensibilities should avoid, but the Church still venerates the relics of the saints whose witness to holiness and intercessory prayers are of merit for the faithful.

The Church teaches that the saints, especially the Mother of God, are guides who serve to get us safely to the loving embrace of our God. Here are four reasons venerating relics can strengthen our faith.

I. GOD WORKS THROUGH CREATED MATTER.

Catholics love creation! It's part of how our Lord comes to us in our sacraments. At Mass, our Lord transforms simple bread and wine into His Body and Blood. At our baptisms we were cleansed from Original Sin and entered into the family of God by using humble water. It makes sense that God would still use our created bodies after we have passed to lead others to Himself.

2. RELICS HELP US GAIN RESPECT FOR THE HUMAN BODY.

Our current culture does not see the body as a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. How much more care would be shown to our fellow men and women if we looked at people as tabernacles where God is found? Even after death, the Church wants us to honor the body.

3. RELICS MAKE PRESENT OUR ANCESTORS IN FAITH.

Saints were real people. They had struggles, joys, interests, friendships and a relationship with God. Each saint is a unique example of how we can use our individual gifts to serve the Church. Having the bones, or a rosary, or even an image of a saint is a reminder that if they can turn the ordinary into extraordinary, then so can we!

4. RELICS REMIND US WE ARE CALLED TO HEAVEN.

Being created in the image and likeness of God means we were not made for this world. Relics are a reminder that created things break down and the earthly body ultimately decays. Our hope rests in the belief that we are destined for the eternal.



The Archdiocese of Cincinnati is blessed to have several parishes and chapels that house relics. In Maria Stein, OH, one of the largest relic collections in the United States is made available to pilgrims and guests for veneration. During this Lenten season allow the inspiration of the saints, witnessed by their holy remains on earth, help to draw you nearer to our Lord.

WRITTEN BY MATTHEW HESS

Matthew is the Director of Ministry at the Maria Stein Shrine of the Holy Relics in Maria Stein, OH. He enjoys reading papal biographies and cross-stitching with a cup of tea in his free time. Matt and his fiancé, Rachel, are preparing for their wedding which is slated for this summer.



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 the breath 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.

He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disciples recalled the words of scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me."



Take these out
of here, and
stop making
my Father's
house a
marketplace.

At this the Jews answered and said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews said, “This temple has been under construction for 46 years, and you will raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. John 2:13-22

SAY

Do you ever get angry? That’s ok. So did Jesus! Jesus shows us in this Bible passage that it is ok to get angry sometimes, if we are angry for a good reason and we know how to control that anger.

That’s the hardest part about being angry: making sure we don’t let our anger make us do something wrong. Anger can sometimes feel overwhelming, but Jesus shows us we can still choose the right thing even when we are angry.

The next time you're angry, take a moment to breathe, focus on the present moment, and ask Jesus to be with you in your anger. Let's practice now.

Keep your eyes closed and imagine how Jesus felt when He saw all those people disrespecting His Father's house. Clench your fists and squeeze your eyes shut and bite your down hard, just like you do sometimes when you're angry. Squeeze as hard as you can for five seconds...

five



four



three



two



one

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

Now, take three deep breaths.

Take a deep breath in for six seconds.

one — two — three — four — five — six

Hold for four.

one — two — three — four

Breathe out for four.

one — two — three — four

Now, again.

And now, for a third time, deep breath.

Taking a couple of deep breaths to center yourself and invite Jesus to be with you in your anger is a great way to make sure you remain in control of your anger.

Close with the sign of the cross.