

SACRED ART

EVERY CATHOLIC
SHOULD KNOW

Jem Sullivan, PhD

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TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2023938959

ISBN: 978-1-5051-2692-1

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-5051-0961-0

ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5051-0960-3

Published in the United States by

TAN Books

PO Box 269

Gastonia, NC 28053

www.TANBooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction

“Beauty will save the world,” Fyodor Dostoevsky famously said. And the saving beauty the Russian novelist pointed to was none other than the person of Jesus Christ, Who is the “image [*icon*] of the invisible God,” in the words of Saint Paul to the Colossians (1:15).

In our daily human experience, encounters with beauty in nature and in the arts can be transformative. Beauty invites, attracts, holds our attention, and moves us out of ourselves to the transcendent reality and mystery of God, the Source of beauty.

The book you hold in your hand is an invitation to discover a selection of sacred art that reflects divine beauty from the vast treasury of masterpieces conceived and nurtured by the Catholic Church across two thousand years. For centuries, the Catholic Church was the principal patron of the arts, a cultural role that is all but lost today. It is a historical fact that many of the world’s most admired and treasured artistic masterworks are Christian in theme, origin, and location. There has never been a time in history when sacred art has not found inspiration and flourishing in the Catholic tradition. From the rustic art of the ancient Christian catacombs to the majestic Byzantine basilicas, from the soaring Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages to the creative torrent of the Renaissance, from the mysticism of the Baroque to the present day, the truth and goodness of the Catholic faith has taken the form of the beautiful in an immense and enduring treasury of masterpieces.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us, “Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God—the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ, Who ‘reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature.’ . . . This spiritual beauty of God is reflected in the most holy Virgin Mother of God, the angels, and saints. Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer, and to the love of God, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier” (CCC 2502).

In offering you, the reader, guided reflections on this modest selection of fifty masterpieces* of sacred art every Catholic should know, my hope and my prayer is that the beauty you will come to know and appreciate here will draw you to adoration, to prayer, and to the love of God, the origin of true beauty, the Divine Artist of the world!

* The first thirty works offer detailed reflections, while the next twenty have brief write-ups. This list is not meant to be comprehensive or taken in any particular order (i.e., as a ranking) but rather as a curated collection of some of the greatest works of art in the Christian tradition.



The Annunciation

~ Fra Angelico ~

“[The Virgin Mary] . . . most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that ‘with God nothing will be impossible’ and so giving her assent: ‘Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word.’ Elizabeth greeted her: ‘Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.’ It is for this faith that all generations have called Mary blessed.”

—Catechism of the Catholic Church, 148



The whole of salvation history revolves around the moment of the Annunciation when the archangel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear the Son of God into the world. Few artists have captured this singular moment in the Gospel story like Fra Angelico, the gifted Dominican friar.

Fra Angelico, born Guido di Pietro, lived in the early fifteenth century, a period in art history known as the early Renaissance. He is most well-known for a remarkable series of frescoes he painted on the walls of the friars’ cells in San Marco, the Dominican friary located in the city of Florence, birthplace of the Italian Renaissance. His name, Fra Angelico (“angelic friar”), evokes the angelic quality of the figures and scenes he painted. He is an artist whose personal holiness and artistic genius came together in his creative works. In 1982, Pope Saint John Paul II named him blessed and a patron saint of artists in recognition of his saintly virtues.

In this Annunciation panel, completed in 1426 in tempera and gold, Fra Angelico invites us into the heart of the Gospel scene of the Annunciation. With serene figures dressed in brilliant colors in a splendid composition, we are invited into the drama of God’s unfolding plan of salvation radiating into our time and place.

At the center of the composition is the archangel Gabriel, robed in a pale rose robe with hands folded, conveying the inspired message recorded in the Gospel of Saint Luke. The Blessed Virgin Mary, clothed in pale rose and covered in a vibrant blue robe, sits on a low bench with her hands folded in a gesture of humility before the angelic visitor.

The receding panels of the arched ceiling, the open door, and the vacant bench draw our eyes into the scene. The skilled use of the artistic technique of perspective is meant to not only draw our eyes into the physical space of the painting but lead us into the history of salvation itself.

On the left, we see the opening scene of Genesis, when Adam and Eve are being expelled from the garden after they fell to the original sin of pride, refusing to live in friendship with God. But why does Fra Angelico juxtapose the scene of Genesis with the moment of the Annunciation?

Mary is the new Eve, as the Church Fathers often spoke of her. Her yes, her *fiat*, to the message of the archangel Gabriel reversed the disobedience of Adam and Eve as she became the mother of the Redeemer of the world. God's favor rests on Mary, as we see a ray of warm golden light streaming across the panel. Within the light is the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who will overshadow Mary at this blessed moment when she welcomes God's only divine Son into her heart, mind, and body. Watching over the entire scene is God the Father, symbolized by the heavenly hands extending from the sun, Who entrusts His only Son to Mary; she then bears Jesus, Who will reconcile humanity to friendship with God





The Nativity with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel

~ Duccio di Buoninsegna ~

“Jesus was born in a humble stable into a poor family. Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this poverty heaven’s glory was made manifest. The Church never tires of singing the glory of this night.”

—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 525



These words from the *Catechism* (525) focus our gaze on the mystery of that holy night when the Church’s preparations in Advent culminate in the great Christmas feast. With faith-filled joy, the Church joins her voice to simple shepherds and joyful angels whose songs of praise welcomed the newborn Jesus, Son of God, and light of the world.

Inviting wonder before the mystery of the Incarnation is an exquisite altarpiece panel titled *The Nativity with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel*. This early fourteenth-century masterpiece is a stirring visual homily on the meaning of Christmas. The work is attributed to Duccio di Buoninsegna, father of Sienese painting, credited among those who moved Italian painting from the hieratic representations of Byzantine art to realism and representation.

Completed by Duccio between 1308 and 1311, this exquisite panel was once part of an altarpiece considered to be among the most important treasures of Western painting: the impressive *Maestà* altarpiece that visually dominated Siena’s cathedral for two centuries. A large, enthroned Madonna and Child surrounded by angels and saints cover the central panel. Then, surrounding the prominent image of the Virgin Mother and Child, the painter goes on to tell, with his paint brush, the story of salvation. Duccio decorated both sides of this masterpiece with numerous small *predella* panels covered with lively drawings of Gospel moments from the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary. One of those panels that brought the Gospel narratives to life in color, line, and form was this Nativity scene.

On completing the commission in 1311, Duccio is known for his fervent prayer to the Mother of God, asking Mary to be the cause of peace for Siena and for his own life.

“The coming of God’s Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries” (CCC 522). In that light, Duccio sets the birth of Jesus within salvation history by framing the sacred moment with two prophets who announce the coming Messiah. The longings of the people of Israel for salvation, echoed in our own Advent hopes, are now fulfilled perfectly in this time of grace. For God extends definitively His hand of divine mercy by sending His own Son into the world. In the Incarnation, human history finds its deepest meaning and destiny.

On the right stands the prophet Ezekiel, slightly turned toward the unfolding scene. The scroll that unfurls from his hand heralds the future birth of a savior. On the left stands Isaiah, his prophetic words also in hand. Inscribed on his scroll is the inspired text foretelling the long-awaited fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman’u-el” (Is 7:14).

Duccio tells the familiar Christmas story in vibrant colors, with slender forms, and a blend of solemn and exuberant emotions, appropriate to the wondrous event of the Incarnation.





At the center of the composition is the Virgin Mother of God, who has just given birth to her divine Son. Her scale is twice that of any figure in the scene, highlighting her unique role in the divine plan of salvation. Mary is dressed in red and blue garments, colors that evoke the coming together of her Son's divinity and humanity in His divine person. She gathers her blue robe around her while reclining on a red cushion as she looks with tender motherly love at her newborn Son. The Virgin Mother's large scale and her recumbent pose evoke traditional icons of the Nativity.

Both Mother and Child are enclosed in a cave, an element also drawn from Eastern iconography. The only hospitality that the world offers this Mother and Child is a bare, cold cave, warmed simply by the breath of the ox and ass that watch attentively over them. One can feel the spiritual warmth of this holy scene despite the harsh coldness of its material poverty. In the lower section, Duccio includes two midwives who wash the infant Jesus, lending another ordinary human touch to this extraordinary heavenly scene.

Sitting close to the Virgin Mary is Saint Joseph. To this saintly guardian of the Redeemer was given the singular blessing of being in closest proximity to the mystery of Christ's birth. So Duccio places Joseph close to Mary, deep in wonder and awe as he ponders the unfolding of God's marvelous work. On the cave rooftop, an exuberant host of angels gather around the Virgin Mother and Child. Some angels raise their eyes to heaven with joyful melodies of praise to God. Other angels lean over the roof curiously, straining to catch a glimpse of the Divine Child. Still other angels announce to the simple shepherds that the good news of salvation is at hand.

God's desire to reconcile all of creation to Himself is fulfilled perfectly in the birth of Jesus. In the face of this greatest of divine gifts, the Incarnation, what is the most appropriate human response? How are we to respond to the mystery of Christmas?

Each of Duccio's figures in his luminous Nativity scene radiates faith, hope, and love in the presence of Christ's birth. God takes human flesh in his Son Jesus so that, in Him, we might be clothed once again with the dignity of the children of God. For this marvelous exchange made possible by the incarnation of God in human history, our fitting response in faith is to join the chorus of Duccio's angels in a hymn of Christmas praise—"O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord!"

The Last Supper

~ Leonardo da Vinci ~

“At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet ‘in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.’”

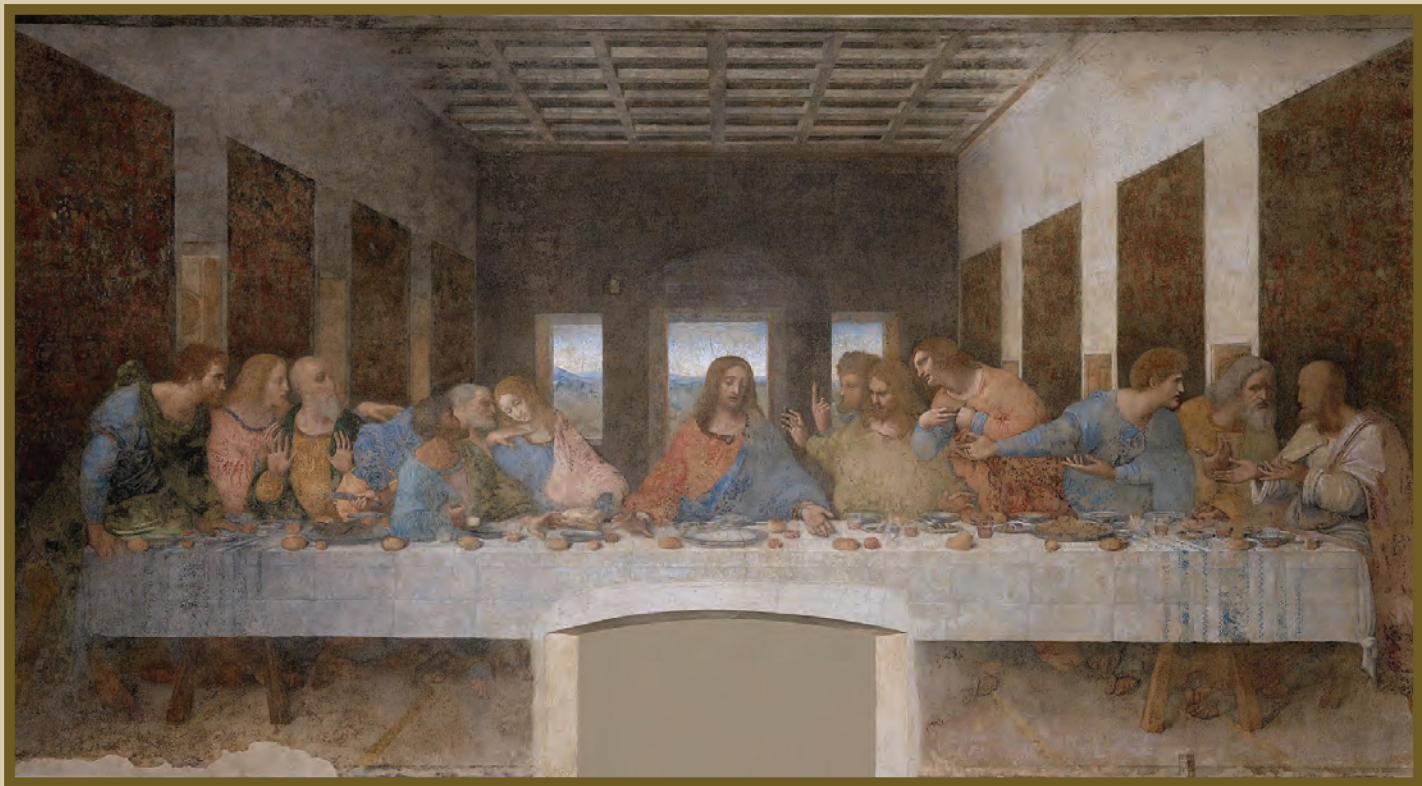
—Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1323



When Leonardo da Vinci painted a large mural of the final meal of Jesus with His disciples on the wall of the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, between 1495 and 1498, he was creating an artistic masterpiece that would be greatly admired by his contemporaries and generously praised for generations to come. Leonardo lived in the second half of the fifteenth century, born in the city of Florence, where he would receive his early artistic training. He worked in Milan for most of his life, until he moved to Paris toward the end of his life. His brilliant artistic gifts attracted many students who sought to imitate his skills. Among his most well-known works is his *Mona Lisa* and *Last Supper*, which established his reputation as one of the artistic geniuses of the Italian High Renaissance, along with Michelangelo and Raphael. A true Renaissance man, Leonardo's many artistic talents led to many masterpiece creations in paint, drawing, sculpture, and groundbreaking scientific and engineering inventions.

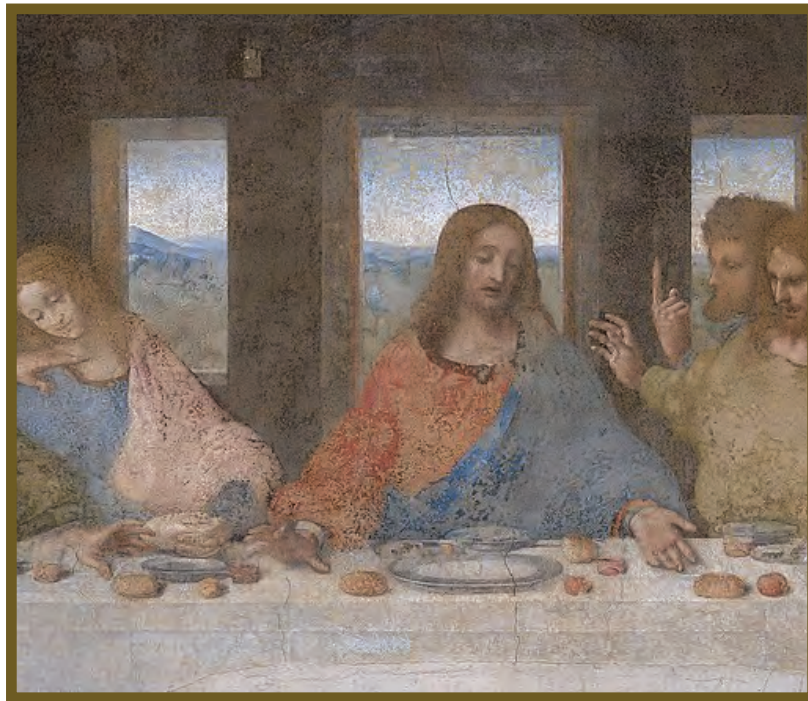
In his *Last Supper*, Leonardo moved away from conventional depictions of Jesus with the apostles sitting around a table, depicting certain apostles from behind. Instead, Leonardo paints all the disciples facing forward so that we see the range of emotions on each of their faces. The composition gathers the apostles in groups of three with Jesus at the center. This triangular composition draws our eyes to the face and head of Jesus at the top and the disciples around that center. The three windows behind Jesus open into a wide landscape leading our eye into the mystery of this scene. The strong receding lines in the ceiling and the side panels create the illusion of a three-dimensional space that invites us into the room of the Last Supper.

Leonardo da Vinci captures the dramatic moment when, on the eve of Jesus's passion and crucifixion, He shares a final meal with His disciples. At that meal, Jesus reveals to them that one will betray Him. The master artist evokes the emotional drama that unfolds among the disciples who respond to Jesus's prediction with a whole range of human emotions: fear, disbelief, love. Every disciple is in motion, gesturing with hands and movement, as they each respond to the announcement of Jesus. Judas, the betrayer, sits at the front of the group, to the right of Jesus. He reaches out to a plate in front of Jesus while clutching a purse in his right hand. He is the only disciple to press his elbow into the table, and his head is placed at the lowest vertical level of the entire group.





In this masterpiece, Leonardo went beyond the traditional methods of fresco painting to experiment with new techniques and materials as he applied tempera paint directly to the stone wall. His innovative techniques caused severe deterioration to the painting beginning in his own lifetime, leading to many attempts to conserve and restore the painting over the centuries. During World War II, in August 1945, the Allies bombed the city of Milan, and da Vinci's magnificent mural miraculously survived the destruction of the convent in which it resides. His work to this day invites viewers to take our place at the Eucharistic table, where we may receive Jesus's divine gift of love in every age and place.



The Annunciation and Expulsion from Paradise

~ Giovanni di Paolo ~

“The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates ‘the fullness of time,’ the time of the fulfillment of God’s promises and preparations. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the ‘whole fullness of deity’ would dwell ‘bodily.’”

—Catechism of the Catholic Church, 484



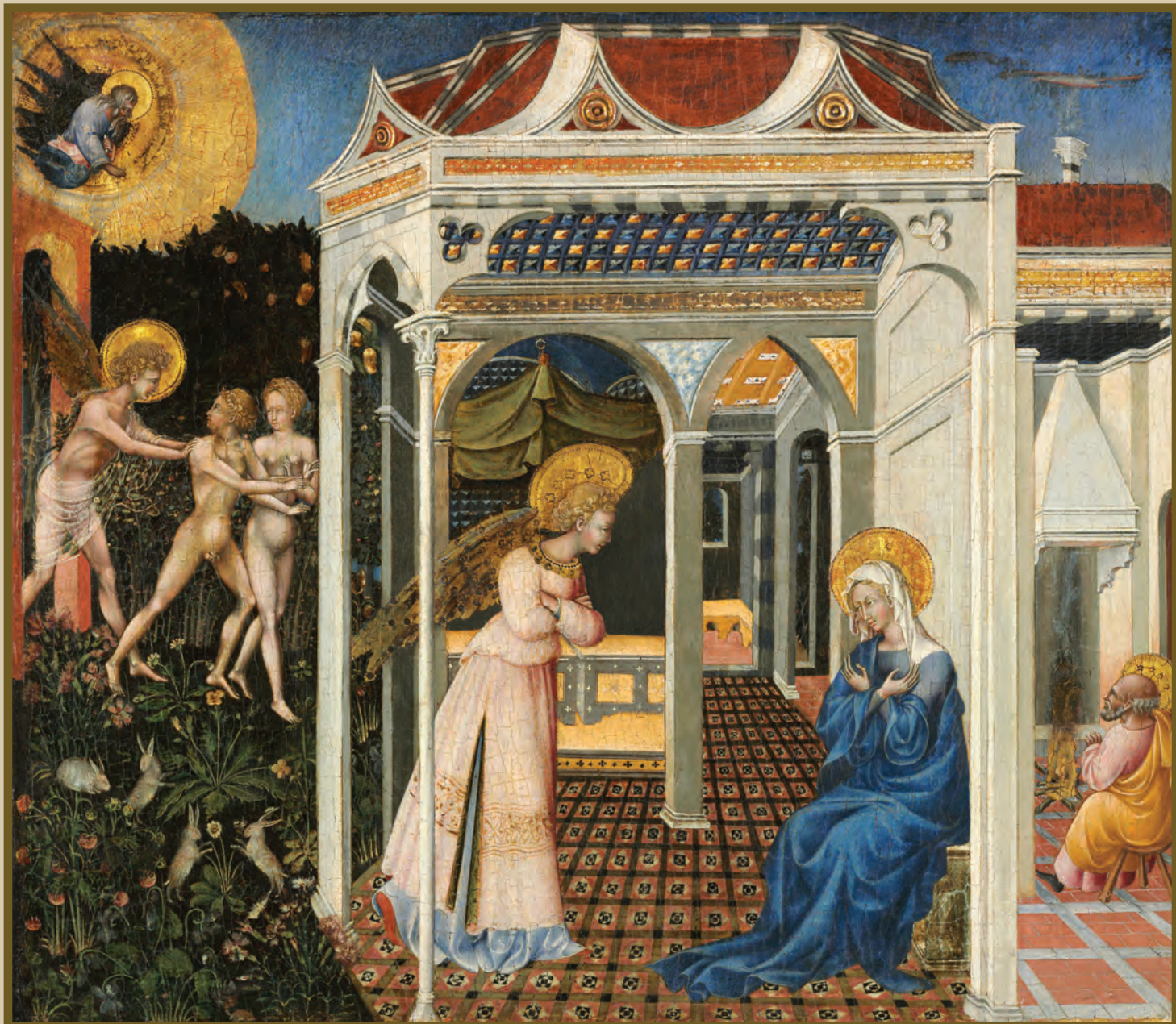
The mystery of the Annunciation is evoked in an artistic masterpiece titled *The Annunciation and Expulsion from Paradise*. This exquisite work of Giovanni di Paolo di Grazia was completed in the early fifteenth century (around 1435). Rendered in tempera, it is believed to be one of five predella panels that once made up the lower section of a large Sienese altarpiece. The painter worked mostly in the city of Siena, Italy, and came to be recognized as one of the most renowned painters of the fifteenth-century Sienese School. He was a prolific artist and manuscript illustrator whose work was influenced by many Sienese master artists of the time.

At the center of the composition, we see the momentous scene recorded in the opening chapter of Saint Luke’s Gospel (Lk 1:26–38), when the archangel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is to become the Mother of God. With hands folded in reverence for the sacred message being carried, the archangel Gabriel approaches with golden wings and a halo and clothed in a robe of pale red. The Virgin Mary, seated on a low chair and dressed in a richly folded robe of deep blue, also folds her hands in a gesture of humility, while inclining her haloed head to the angel’s words. Both figures are enclosed within a richly decorated space. The interior is covered with a patterned floor tile with lines that recede into the distance, creating the illusion of depth. Our eyes are drawn into the painting through this use of linear perspective, among the notable artistic recoveries of the Renaissance. But why has the artist juxtaposed in one scene two distinct moments of salvation history—Creation and the Annunciation? What deeper meaning lies in the visual link that places these two biblical scenes side by side?

The patterned floor tile moves one back not only into the painting but into salvation history itself. The artist’s use of perspective leads the eye back into biblical time to the moment of the expulsion of Adam and Eve by the angel of paradise at the gate of the Garden of Eden.

By placing the scenes of Genesis and the Annunciation side by side, the artist invites the viewer to contemplate the Annunciation within the whole of salvation history. Human history is about to be redeemed as the extended hand of God, in the upper left corner, links the couple exiled from paradise and the seated figure of Mary.

Adam and Eve’s pride, disobedience, and loss of friendship with God are now reversed in Mary’s humble yes, her *fiat* to the Word made flesh. The Annunciation is that graced moment when human pride is overcome by graced humility. Mary is the New Eve, as noted by the Fathers of the Church. With her *fiat*, expulsion and alienation from God are not the last word on the human condition. Now, Mary’s yes is the pivotal word reconciling humanity to God. From then on, Mary’s yes is the believer’s first word of faith before the mystery of the Incarnation.





A carpet of green grass, tiny flowers, and birds and rabbits call to mind the season of spring, when the Annunciation is celebrated each March 25 in the Church's liturgical calendar. On the far right, we see Saint Joseph warming his hands over a fireplace, evoking the season of winter, when the birth of Christ is celebrated nine months later, on December 25. From left to right, the painting encircles the viewer in the Church's liturgical cycle. In a single scene, salvation history and liturgical time are drawn into one all-encompassing reality of faith.

Mary's immediate response to the archangel's words is one of fear and doubt that would naturally accompany such an announcement. But this message is different, for it brings the fullness of Divine Revelation. Soon Mary's natural fear is overcome with supernatural grace. And through her yes, the Word of God comes to dwell in her.

At the Annunciation, Mary teaches the Church—and every Christian—how to hear the Word of God: in openness, expectation, and trust. As her fears and doubts turn into joyful trust and deep faith, Mary shows us how to become a bearer of God's living presence in the world.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35) are the words announced by the archangel Gabriel. The Mother of God bows her head to incline the "ear of her heart" to the Word of God. The artist evokes in visual form the truth that Mary is the first Christian disciple, one whose life was so totally and inwardly seized by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

Mary also teaches the Church—and every Christian—how to pray. Her receptivity to God's word and openness to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit is the pattern of fruitful Christian prayer. From the New Eve, we learn to listen attentively and respond humbly with childlike trust in God through prayer. This is why Mary is the model *par excellence* of the spiritual life, for her entire life embodies the Christian vocation to prayer.

In this artistic masterpiece, we are given a visual catechesis on the human response to God in faith through the offering of life's joys, uncertainties, fears, and anxieties. As Saint Thomas Aquinas notes, when Mary uttered her yes, she did so "in the name of all human nature." In Mary's yes at the Annunciation, we find our yes, our faith in the revelation and promises of God. "What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ" (CCC 487).

To contemplate the Annunciation is to stand in awe before the Incarnation, the centerpiece of Christian faith. We are led to wonder at the mystery of Mary's unique role in salvation history, the divine humility by which God enters human history in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Church's sacraments and liturgical seasons that make present the mysteries of faith even now.

Color, line, light, and form draw us to fix our gaze on Christ, Whose birth is announced, and Whose incarnation reveals the fullness of divine love.

We do not see Christ physically present in this painted image, but we "see" Him with the "eyes of faith," announced by the archangel Gabriel and humbly received in the mind, heart, and body of the Virgin Mary. With the eyes of faith, we move, like Mary, from pondering to prayer to a resting of the mind and spirit in the saving mystery of the Incarnation.

Guardian Angel

~ Giancinto Brandi ~

“From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession. Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.”

—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 336



The *Catechism* teaches that every person is surrounded by the protection and care of spiritual beings created by God to serve God’s plan of salvation. We know them, of course, as angels. As we go about our daily lives, we are confident that God watches over each person with the gentle loving care of a heavenly Father through the ministry of the holy angels, most specifically with the guardian angels.

To believe in the existence and intercession of the angels is an important truth of the Catholic faith. In this painting, the Italian artist Giancinto Brandi offers a visual reminder of the existence and role of the guardian angels given to each baptized Christian to protect and to guide them on the path of life. As the psalmist prays, “For he will give his angels charge of you / to guard you in all your ways. / On their hands they will bear you up, / lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Ps 91:11–12).

The seventeenth-century painter Brandi became a well-known artist of the Italian Baroque era who worked mostly in Rome and Naples. His paintings decorated the chapels of many Roman churches where they can be seen today. Many of his paintings depicted the Blessed Virgin Mary and the virtues of saints, whose holiness was offered to the faithful for their imitation and encouragement in the Christian life.

In the upper part of the painting, we see a host of winged chubby angels who hover and move in a cloud-filled, heavenly space. The artist paints them in a dramatic swirl of movement indicating that these angelic beings are energetic, actively carrying out the mission that God entrusted to them.

Below the heavenly hosts of angels is one guardian angel depicted as a young, winged spiritual creature clothed in swirling robes of pale blue, pink, and gold. With his firm right hand, he holds a young child’s hand, leading him on the path of life. With his left hand, the angel points to heaven, our eternal destiny.

Guardian angels guide each person to that heavenly place of loving unity with God in the presence of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Mary, the holy angels, and the communion of saints.

The role of the guardian angels is clear: they are spiritual beings created by God to serve as God’s messengers of divine light, guidance, and protection. We do not see our guardian angels, but they are with us at all times, bringing the radiant light of divine wisdom and divine protection into the ordinary moments of our daily lives.

Belief in angels has always been part of the Catholic tradition. Both Sacred Scripture and the Tradition of the Church speak of the existence and role of angels in the world. Saint Augustine taught that the word “angel” points to their role as divine messengers, and not their nature. They are spiritual in nature in that they are non-physical spiritual beings. As





purely spiritual creatures, the angels possess intelligence and will. And they serve Jesus Christ, Who is at the center of the entire angelic world, for they are *His* angels, or messengers of God's saving plan. Throughout His earthly life, Jesus was surrounded by the adoration, praise, and service of angels, beginning with the announcement of His birth at the Annunciation all the way to His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Throughout salvation history, beginning with the creation of the world, we find many biblical stories of the role and presence of angels. They announce God's saving plan and protect the people of God from physical and spiritual dangers. Each year on September 29, the Church celebrates the feast of the Archangels: Saint Michael, prince of the heavenly hosts, Saint Raphael, messenger of God's healing, and Saint Gabriel, who announced to Mary at the Annunciation that she would be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit to bear Jesus, the Son of God, into the world. Still more, on October 2, the Church celebrates the feast of the Guardian Angels.

Growing in understanding and faith in the intercession of the angels, we give thanks to God for the particular guidance and protection that He offers to each one of us through the presence of our guardian angels on the journey of life.



The Last Supper

~ Vicente Juan Macip ~

“At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed, our Savior Jesus instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood.”

—Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1323



In the context of a Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus gave His disciples the supreme gift of His own Body and Blood by which He would be present to us in every time and place and for all eternity. Saint Luke describes the pivotal moment at the Last Supper when Jesus “took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after supper, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:19–20).

This sacred moment is captured by the sixteenth-century Spanish painter Vicente Juan Macip, or Juan de Juanes, as he came to be known. With vibrant colors and the beauty and movement of figures, he invites us to sit at the table of the Last Supper when Jesus institutes the Eucharist for our salvation. Juan de Juanes was a master Spanish Renaissance artist whose work was influenced by the Italian master artists Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci. He completed this altarpiece for the church of San Esteban in Valencia, Spain, sometime between 1555 and 1562. At this time, the unity of the Catholic Church in Europe was being challenged by the Protestant Reformation. As the reformers challenged Catholic doctrines on the sacraments, artists like Juan de Juanes began to highlight the biblical foundations of the seven sacraments, as in this masterpiece painting.

At the center of the composition, we see the serene figure of Jesus seated with His disciples at a table covered in what resembles a white altar cloth. A glass flask of wine and loaves of bread placed around the table are visible signs of the Passover meal. The gentle face of Jesus is framed by an arched doorway leading the eye beyond the room into a natural landscape. All around Him the disciples are shown in various stages of response to Jesus’s actions. The entire scene is alive with movement as our eyes travel from the disciple on the outer left kneeling with folded hands in prayerful adoration to the disciple lifting both hands in a gesture of prayer. To the left of Jesus is John, the beloved disciple, who leans close toward Jesus in rapturous worship. To His right, one disciple reminds another to fix his gaze on Jesus, while the disciple with his back turned to us seems to move in surprise.

On the far right of the table, the artist places Judas, clothed in a bright yellow robe and holding a moneybag. His frame is twisted with greed as we see his name etched on his seat. This disciple’s head is the only one not framed by a halo, for he is about to give into a great temptation, to betray his master and Lord Jesus for a few perishable pieces of silver.

At the beginning of the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples as an example of sacrificial love, and commanded them to do likewise. Now Jesus holds up the sacred bread of His Body in His right hand, while His left rests over His heart. Then He will take up the Passover cup in blessing as He announces the new covenant that will be sealed by His suffering, death, and resurrection.





The Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life,” notes the *Catechism* (1324). Everything in the life of the Church, and in our lives as disciples of Jesus, flows from and leads to the Eucharist. After blessing bread and wine and sharing it with His disciples, Jesus tells them to repeat His actions and words until He comes again in glory. When we receive the sacred Body and Blood of Jesus, we are privileged to partake of the sacred memorial of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection by which we are reconciled to friendship with God.

At every Mass, we are invited to take our place at the sacred table of Jesus’s gift of Himself in His Body and Blood given and poured out for the world. For this divine gift we can only respond in faith and in “Eucharistic amazement!”

