

The "last supper" by leonardo da vinci

[Art & Culture](#), [Artists](#)



Leonardo da Vinci has always been far in front of his time showing an extreme ingenuity and innovation in all his deeds. Practically all paintings of the artists contain an immeasurable amount of symbolism and multiple hidden meanings. His works give the viewer the opportunity to feel the new ways of perceiving the world through Leonardo's works, to see the visual record of his time and surroundings. The gracious and delicate presentation in Leonardo's paintings expresses the beauty and a complicated mystery.

Leonardo da Vinci's creativity never knew limits. His paintings possess puzzling symbols which scientists still try to interpret, however, each new finding only causes more confusion as Leonardo's symbolism is often controversial and quite baffling. The " Last Supper" was being painted during 1495-1498 and the original is now located in the church Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan.

The " Last Supper" is best explained (from the subjective point of view) in the best-selling book of Dan Brown " The Da Vinci Code". The author is trying to show us all the mysteries the painting possesses: Who betrayed Jesus? Can it be true that Jesus had a wife? What if one of the apostles is a woman?! These and many other questions are hidden in this unique work of art. Judas' hand reached out to Christ while Peter is holding a knife as if to protect Jesus. The body of Christ forms a perfect triangle - a symbol of man's and woman's origin, according to some scientists, and - Neo-Platonic attributes which were once opposed to Christianity but later on became associated with it, - according to others. Leonardo's symbolism is overwhelming - it is everywhere, even in simple, for the first time, things. His works entice

people with the enigma hidden in them and, in my opinion, will always be one of the most difficult to guess mysteries in the world of art.

Leonardo did a magnificent job on this painting which depicts the determining supper which lead to his crucifixion. The faces of the apostles around him depict the whole range of emotions when Jesus tells them that he knows that one of them will betray him. They are afraid, surprised, grieved, and affectionate towards their great leader. He aptly shows with the touches of the paint the treacherous motives and hatred of Judas Iscariot who would be the one to sign a death sentence for Christ. Judas is well identified by his greedy stretch of the hand towards the plate simultaneously with Jesus as well as his hold on a purse with the money which he was given for his betrayal of Christ. However, the facial expression of Jesus is emotionless. He knows what he knows and this knowledge is the mystery for anyone else. Leonardo's ability to transfer this whole range of feelings with easiness and accuracy is striking.

The apostles as if say with the emotions on their faces and body language: How can this be possible? Did we hear it right? Long-bearded St. Andrew's hands are lifted up as if showing the deep astonishment of a kind-hearted, simple man; Bartholomew at the left end half-rose eagerly listening, with his lips slightly parted - a sign that he is impatient to know more information; St. James Minor put his hand on St. Peter's shoulder expressing a great deal of doubt towards the news. Peter, on the other hand, hold a knife which prophesies that he would sever the soldier's ear in an attempt to safe Jesus'

life. Leonardo's effectiveness of transmitting the details with a great deal of casualness shows his well-trained skilfulness.

The main subject of the " Last Supper" is the final meal before Judas says to the authorities where to find Christ. The two events are memorable in the painting particularly: Jesus tells his followers " One of you will betray me," and each of the apostles reacts according to the special inclinations of his personality. Leonardo presents Philip who asks " Lord, is it I?", as was written in the Gospels, and Christ answers, " He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me". These are the exact moments which were represented in the painting. It is clearly seen how Judas and Christ reach sat the same time towards a plate that lies just between the two of them, and Judas' defensive withdrawing.

Jesus Christ gave his blessing to the bread and wine and told his apostles " Take, eat; this is my body", " Drink from it all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins". These two phrases are the founding elements of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The representation of the body positions of the apostles and Jesus also plays a very significant role. If to believe Dan Brown, the meaning of the painting would be much more astonishing from the one the scholars ascribe to it. Christ's body forms an equilateral triangle. The arching pediment below which Jesus sits shapes a circle that could ideally enclose the mentioned triangle. The perfection of the geometric forms reveals the interest of the Renaissance artists in Neo-Platonism which dates back to the Ancient Greece and Plato's depiction of " The Cave" that stressed on the lack of perfection of

people's life on earth. For Greeks, perfect geometry reflected the ideal life in heaven, however, da Vinci used this element to commemorate Jesus as the incarnation of heaven on earth. Through Neo-Platonism, Greek philosophy revived again in the Christian theology which seems to be quite controversial.

An interesting thought concerns the landscape beyond the room's window: Leonardo has depicted paradise which can only be obtained through Christ.

All apostles are located as four small groups of three persons with the three windows per each group. This number three is frequently referred to the Holy Trinity in the paintings of the Catholic art. On the other hand, the number four plays a crucial role in the classical art (for example, the four virtues of Plato).

Leonardo da Vinci's depiction of the final meal of Jesus with his followers was not the first attempt to outline the importance of that moment. Andrea del Castagno's as well as Domenico Ghirlandaio made their versions of the "Last Supper" in 1447 and 1476 correspondingly. Their representation is typical for the epoch of the Early Renaissance. The application of linear perspective together with elaborate forms such as the sphinxes (only in the Castagno's depiction) on the opposite ends of the bench as well as the marble paneling diverts attention from the real spirituality of the event.

In Leonardo's "Last Supper", the simplification of architecture in combination with the elimination of redundant and disturbing details amplify the true spirituality. The arching pediment and window even create a halo-

like impression. Because all characters of the painting are crowded together, the table serves as a certain barrier which separates the spiritual heaven from the earthly world of the viewer. The perfection of details in da Vinci's work is very well thought-through. Unusually, however, Leonardo's stress on spirituality leads to the fact that the painting becomes even more naturalistic than the religious depiction of Castagno and Ghirlandaio.

Michael Ladwein referred to the words of Rudolf Stein, the philosopher, who called the " Last Supper" to be the most important artwork which revealed the true meaning of the existence on earth. Despite the continuous remarks by the skeptics who disagree with such strong emphasis on the significance of the painting for the human life, these words cannot be undermined. The " Last Supper" is truly a magnificent creation which hides in it many mysteries that bother the minds of scholars, and reveal the unknown before angles of the history of the whole generations. Leonardo da Vinci possessed a personality which did not correspond with his contemporaries - his knowledge of various aspects of science, art, philosophy, and religion were much deeper than the modern human being can comprehend, therefore, the message his paintings carry obtains even greater importance and urgency to be discovered and correctly understood.