

Prepare a Way for the Lord

A work of art I have never seen but which is high on my bucket list is the famous and iconic Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci in Milan. There are many stories told about it such as that it was taking a long time to finish and the prior of the monastery where the mural was to grace the end wall of the monks' refectory got impatient and tried to hurry Leonardo along. The artist flew into a rage and explained that it was taking a long time because he was finding it very hard to find someone who looked evil and sinister enough to sit for Judas and that if the prior didn't back off he would use him as his model!

Eventually Leonardo did find a really suitable wicked looking man with a history of violence and robbery to sit for Judas. When the artist had finished he paid the man off but the criminal hesitated. "I want more", he said, "This isn't even half what you paid me last time I sat for you". "And when do you suppose you sat for me before?" Asked the painter. "It was a long time ago when I was still a young man", said the other. "That time you got me to sit for the face of Christ". Then Leonardo saw that it was indeed the same man but he had become so ugly and grotesque as to be all but unrecognisable because his evil deeds had so distorted his features.

Another story tells that while Leonardo was painting the face of Jesus, he had a fierce row with a certain man. He lashed out at him with bitter words and angry threats. When the argument was over, Leonardo went back to his canvas but found he could not make another stroke of his brush. At last he realised what the trouble must be. He put down his brush and went off to find the man he had argued with and asked his forgiveness. After that he was able to return to his studio and continue painting the face of Jesus.

In the Gospel today John the Baptist appears calling for repentance and a complete conversion of heart if we are to worthily and successfully make way for the Lord to truly enter our lives this Christmas. Let us therefore really look at our lives and reflect on how we live them, and let us be reconciled with anyone we have hurt so that the life of Jesus may grow strong in our hearts once again. As Jesus taught us: "So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering."