

“The Last Supper of Steyl” - a tribute to Saint Therese and the Brothers of Steyl.

In the small museum in Steyl, the painting of the Last Supper painted by an SVD brother, Lucas Kolzem, attracts attention. The painting is a tribute to Saint Therese of Lisieux for the miracle that took place in Steyl in 1929. Both the history of the appearance of the painting and its symbolism should not be forgotten, for they can be a source of inspiration for the family of Saint Arnold.



1. The miracle

It all started with an unfortunate accident. An SVD brother in Steyl, in a moment of carelessness suffered an electric shock that left one of his arms completely paralyzed. The doctor was unable to do anything to help him. So, the Brother's only recourse was to turn to Divine Providence. At that time, devotion to Saint Therese of Lisieux was very popular. The young French nun had conquered the hearts of the faithful. Before her untimely death, aware that she was going to the home of her Heavenly Father, she promised that she would send a shower of rose petals, that is, an abundance of special graces, on anyone who sought her intercession.

Encouraged by this promise, the confreres in Steyl decided to invoke her help in a special way by placing the relics of Saint Therese under bandages on the sick man's arm. How great was their surprise when the next morning everyone saw the Brother with his arm healthy and working!

2. Tribute to Saint Therese

Brother Lucas Kolzem also joined in the thanksgiving for the miracle and decided to express gratitude in a special way, using his artistic talent. He was a professional painter, so he decided to make a painting as a tribute. He chose the theme of "The Last Supper," showing the moment of the institution of the Eucharist. Saint Therese's love for the Eucharist was one of the main components of her spirituality. She testified that as a child, when she went in a procession on the feast of Corpus Christi and threw rose petals along the path that the priest passed carrying the Blessed Sacrament, she would throw them upwards so that they touched the monstrance.

Brother Lucas commemorated Saint Therese in his painting by placing a bouquet of roses on a stool, above an inscription that reads: "The gift of Saint Therese." When we contemplate the painting, even superficially, we can see that its colors are inspired by the soft tones of this gift of the Saint.



But the painting holds more mysteries. For example, the apostles who are at the right hand of Jesus are reading and writing manuscripts in Hebrew. These are not random letters. The painter chose the text very consciously, to convey a missionary ideal in this work: the Eucharist is a gift for all humanity. The biblical quote from the prophet Malachi 1, 11: ¹¹My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty. (NIV) is on both sheets.



3. Tribute to SVD brothers



Perhaps the most interesting mystery of this painting consists in the fact that the models for the faces of the apostles were the faces of the religious brothers in Steyl. First of all the Brother who suffered the accident is sitting next to Judas (we don't know if someone "lent" his face to Judas as well).

Surely, we will have to analyze this issue further, but we can present a very significant sample. Let's look at these faces, taken from a common photograph. Are they not the faces of the apostles?





Another character that could be identified is probably Jesus himself. Possibly his face was lent to him by the same painter.

An attentive visitor will be able to see a cat under the table. The little animal with a



somewhat aggressive facial expression attacks Judas' ankle, as if he wanted to tell him: "Stop, you wretch! Do not do it! Don't betray the Lord!"

It can be assumed that the painting aroused many emotions in Steyl. Everyone would have looked at the faces, identified them, and compared the characters of the apostles and their related models from that Steyl community.

It is surprising that Brother Lucas did not choose priests as models for his painting, because thanks to the ministerial priesthood "the pure offering", the Eucharist, is celebrated throughout the world. The fact of placing the brothers next to Jesus underlines their great apostolic importance. It is obvious that without them Steyl's work will not flourish as well. On the other hand, almost 100 years ago the author stressed the value of the common priesthood of the people of God. We publish this article for the day of consecrated life to accentuate this truth.

4. An Anonymous Admirer

"The Last Supper of Steyl" was hung in the house of Saint Gregory in the brothers' dining room (when this strange division still existed in the community). The passing of the years deprived the painting of its original shine and beauty. When Fr. Manfred Krauze began to organize the small museum in Steyl around 2008, he decided to have the painting restored. But of course, he realized that might be quite expensive. The owner of the restoration workshop promised Fr. Manfred that he would prepare an estimate. Fr. Manfred was not sure he would have enough money to have the restoration done. After a few weeks, Fr. Manfred realized that the shop owner was behaving strangely, he would not say how much the job was going to cost. Then our confrere received a call: "Come and pick up the painting. It is ready." Fr. Manfred was puzzled and a little suspicious, as he still did not know how much the renovation would be. What was his surprise when he saw the renewed picture. Then the owner of the workshop explained that the day after the painting arrived at his workshop, one of his clients appeared and noticed the painting. This was a person with many financial resources, and he offered to finance the restoration of the work.

I tell this story to encourage us to value our heritage more. If an anonymous person was able to show such generosity by seeing the painting for the first time in his life, perhaps we should value our spiritual heritage much more.