

*The Last Supper*, by Brian Whelan

art selection and comment by [John Kohan](#) in the [February 26, 2020](#) issue



How to depict the 12 disciples has long been a perplexing problem for illustrators of the Last Supper. Artistic convention established that Peter should be presented as a curly-haired senior. John was often a beardless youth, leaning against Christ. Judas might be seated at the wrong side of the table, carrying his pouch with thirty pieces of blood money. But the remaining nine have come down to us in centuries of sacred art as a lineup of look-alikes. Brian Whelan, a London-born Irish artist, now living in the United States, has found a whimsical solution for the who's who dilemma, inspired by his love of Celtic and English medieval art, where the sacred need not always be solemn or the holy without humor. In this view over Christ's shoulders at the motley gathering in the Upper Room, Whelan has marked each disciple with emblems associated with their life, martyrdom, and patronage of groups and guilds. Peter, for example, displays the keys of the kingdom. Thomas holds a T-square as the favored saint of architects. Bartholomew flashes a flaying knife as patron of butchers and tanners. A money bag is grasped by Matthew, the tax collector—not Judas, as you might expect. The betrayer of Christ has ominously spilled the saltcellar in imitation of Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece. These first followers of

Christ might have been rough and not always ready, but seen here through the Savior's loving eyes they will be adequately equipped, each in their own way, to fulfill his Great Commission.