

The painting "The Last Supper" by Otmar Alt tells us about the moment when Christ announces to his disciples: 'One of you will betray me!'

Bright and radiant, enveloped in a sun crown as if emitting a light, Jesus sits at the table surrounded by the 12 apostles.

12 apostles in four groups of three!

A hidden code? No - Otmar Alt uses these figures as symbols, like invisible signs.

12 is the multiplier of the two holy numbers 3 and 4!

Our Christian image of God is based on the number 3: God Father, Son and Holy Spirit - three characteristics immanent in God, three persons who in a secret way represent three aspects of God.

This number three is four times (!) contained in the figure 12.

Four - {his number describes all four directions and thus the whole world.

And taking **three times four** is a symbolic way of linking heaven and earth, the divinity and humanity!?

In the church Santa Prassede in Rome on the hill of Esquilin, only a few metres from Santa Maria Maggiore, there are wonderful mosaics, among them a mosaic of a woman, Theodora. A bishop of the early church. Yes, a bishop.

The Catholic Church was then far more progressive than it is today!

Theodora is depicted with a **square** and **blue** halo!

Why square? Why blue?

In the imagery of the Middle Ages, persons who were still alive when the painting was produced were sometimes represented with a square halo.

In Christian symbolism, blue is the divine colour, the colour of God's presence. It is the colour of faith and devotion. And it stands for eternity and truth.

Most of the viewers have their problems with this Christ as painted by Otmar Alt.

They do not like his nose!

We all know phrases like "Looking down one's nose at someone"

But also

"You should rather care about the things under your very nose".

So why the blue tip of the nose?

To Otmar Alt, this is the colour of the reflected water, the reminder of Jesus' miracle of salvation.

In his opinion, this miracle is part of the Last Supper because it is a premonition or the knowledge of Christ's coming resurrection. Most of us know this story ...

Christ who walks on the water and controls wind and waves.

"And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God." (Matthew 14,25-33)

Now you know the secret of the blue tip of the nose!

And how did Otmar Alt place the disciples around the table?

The first group of three to the left of Jesus are, from left to right

Jesus' favourite disciple John: He is sitting very quietly. He is no traitor. He is at peace with himself.

Next to John stands **James the Younger**, speechless with fright.

Andrew whispers into his ear to ask if he knows more.

the second group of three, on the right of Jesus, are

Bartholomew stunned, rests his arms on the table and

Matthew, who asks angrily "Can it be true what Jesus just told us?"

And **Judas**, behind Matthew. Petrified. "Oh God, what have I done."

The third group of three, on the right, shows

Philip, who incredulously asks those around him: "This cannot be really true, can it?" and **James the Elder**. He looks at everyone, uncomprehendingly. Who could commit this treason?

Thomas looks up to the sky and asks God to stop the traitor!

The fourth group of three shows, from right to left

Thaddeus. He cannot believe what he hears and asks Simon "What now?".

Simon the Canaanite is angry and searches for explanations and tries to understand the unfathomable.

and

Peter. Full of temperament on other occasions, he only stands by, silently. Who on earth could betray Jesus?

When Christ takes his leave, he asks: "Please let me stay with you",

"I even am prepared to die for you!"

"You want to die for me, Peter?"

asks Christ.

"I tell thee: the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me."

And what else can be seen in Otmar Alt's painting?

Does anything else strike you? For instance

the raven? This is meant to be Otmar Alt himself, Otmar Alt the painter of ravens, as he calls himself.

And what has the Devil got to do in the picture?

The Devil acted on behalf of God and was commissioned to make Judas a traitor so that God's salvation plan could be fulfilled!

Or do you think Judas had a free will and could have acted differently?

And the dove? This was painted by Otmar for Karin and myself. No, it is not what you think.

It is the dove with the crippled legs that, ever since the opening of the Kemenate, has lived in the courtyard and sometimes even in the Kemenate itself. It is not always well liked by the helpers and the visitors because it sometimes even sits on the picture frames and shits on the paintings - quote!

As Otmar Alt saw how Karin and I love this ridiculous creature which bears its handicap bravely without complaining and which we supply with water and food when we are in the Kemenate, Otmar Alt painted this dove into the picture. Is that not wonderful?

Or the burning candle?

This is the everlasting light which in the synagogues reminds us of the permanent presence of God.

As Otmar Alt painted it with a cross on the lamp shade, this is an encrypted reference to the self-sacrifice of Jesus: "The light is still burning. It will be extinguished in the hour of death to be rekindled in the Easter night."

And the lamp with the cross on its roof reminds us of the everlasting light burning in churches, and thus of the presence of Christ.

And what could be the meaning of the two live lambs?

Christ knew this evening that he was destined to be sacrificed as our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5,7). And it also is an encrypted picture for Jesus as "the good shepherd" (St. John 10,11). (Jochen J. Prüsse)