

The MONTHLY

Pastor's Corner: MICHELANGELO'S FINAL JUDGEMENT

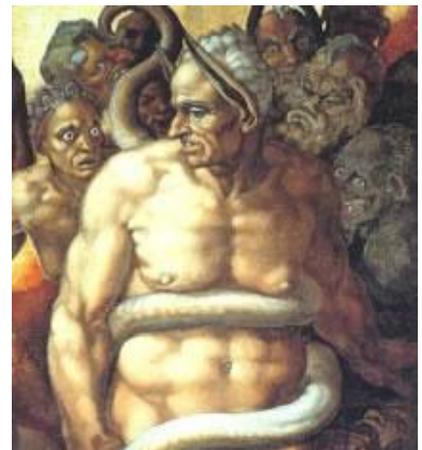


Michelangelo Buonarroti

The first St. Augustine Walking Tour was a smashing success. Those who planned it hoped 20 to 25 people would attend; over 85 did! The presentation included an overview of the original construction of the church and the two subsequent remodels. As one might imagine, there were heated discussions and strong opinions about the remodels, and perhaps there were even strong opposing views regarding the original 1950 design.

We live in a time when differing views are common, but that is expected with issues that are dear to us. Why it may surprise some of us to hear there were even strong opposing views regarding Michelangelo's masterpiece in the Sistine Chapel, *The Last Judgement*. "What!", we might say. How could anyone do anything but admire this rendering of the End Time? Well, here is what happened:

It took Michelangelo four years to paint the ceiling and seven years to complete the scene of *The Last Judgement* painted on the back wall. Things were going swimmingly well on the project until the papal master of ceremonies, a man named Biagio de Cesena, discovered that in Michelangelo's work, St. Catherine of Alexandria, modest though she may have been on earth, appeared among the saints of heaven unclothed. The prudish master of ceremonies made haste to protest to the pontiff, His Holiness Paul III. Biagio complained about the lack of sartorial care given to the striking figure of St. Catherine. This was his delicate way of saying that she was without clothes. When Michelangelo got wind of Biagio's complaint, his response was swift: with brush in hand, Michelangelo painted the figure of the master of ceremonies into that deepest, darkest abyss of the Inferno where was depicted the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Yet, one could not be certain whether it was being cast into the depths of hell or the addition of donkey ears to his caricature that most offended the sensitive Biagio. No matter, the aggrieved master of ceremonies again made haste to the throne of His Holiness. There he beseeched the pontiff to have this most uncomplimentary likeness of him removed from Michelangelo's scene of hell. Paul III, knowing the bounds of his authority, quipped, "I might have been able to have you released from purgatory, but over hell I have no power." And there the damned Biagio remains to this very day.



Biagio de Cesena as painted in
The Last Judgement