

Crucifixion of Saint Peter

The choice of this theme should be traced back to the desire of Pope Paul III to attest to his role as the successor to St Peter, a position that was being undermined at the time by the accusations put forward by the «Protestant» orders. According to the Scriptures, St Peter was crucified head downward, since the apostle did not consider himself worthy of dying in the same way as the Savior. However Michelangelo found a way to straighten the head of the Prince of the Apostles, making it the focus of the entire composition. His penetrating gaze shakes the observer and invites him to bear witness against the crime that is being carried out before his very eyes. There is no violence in the execution. What we see instead is the implacable fulfillment of a destiny fixed long beforehand. In this work the artist showed himself to be increasingly shaking off certain traditional rules and ideas, and solutions are already present that were to become typical of Mannerist painting, such as the aerial view, the half figures in the foreground, and the multiplicity of vanishing points.