

Meditation 5

JOHN 19:23-27

Meditating with Icons: Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Part I

23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four shares, a share for each soldier. They also took his tunic, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down.

24 So they said to one another, "Let's not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it will be," in order that the passage of Scripture might be fulfilled (that says): "They divided my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots." This is what the soldiers did.

25 Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.

26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son."

27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

"Those that love Mary call her Mother. It could be said that there is no other name to call her, since she brought us to life on Calvary when she offered her Son for our redemption" (St. Alphonsus, *The Glories of Mary*).

It was once said that ". . . the only graces Mary doesn't give are the ones we don't ask for."

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY OF THE ICON

Our Lady of Perpetual Help icon is also known as The Virgin of the Passion because it deals with Mary's role in the passion and crucifixion of Jesus. The history/story of it involves an unknown artist, a repentant thief, a curious little girl, an abandoned church, an old religious priest and a Pope. Are you ready for the adventure, a walk through history? On a surface level it seems like a complicated, confusing and intricate story. Seen "from above", however, it is a simple, straight line drawn through human history. Now let's put our hand into our Lady's as she takes us each on this incredible adventure!

Notice everywhere this icon was . . .

In the shrine of Crete

In the sea during the storm

In the bedroom of the Roman family

In the church of St. Matthew

In the hidden private chapel

In the church of St. Alphonsus, where it is to this day.

It was a channel of miracles and greater devotion to our Blessed Mother. Through this image, Our Lady wanted and wants to help her children and she wants to help us, too!

SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE ICON

Our Lady of Perpetual Help icon is an authentic expression of Byzantine art. As all icons are, this is a **window to the mystery of God**. Through this window, we can contemplate the kingdom of God, Heaven! The purpose of this style of art is not to show a beautiful scene or person but to convey a beautiful, spiritual message.

An icon makes present what it is representing. It is a meeting point between the mystery of God and the reality of humanity.

An icon is fruit of prayer. While painting an icon an artist is always in an atmosphere of prayer and penance. He or she thinks about and prays for all those who would pray before this image. For this reason and for many others, **an icon is an object of meditation; it is created to foster contemplation.** Let us open ourselves up to receive the graces and the gifts that are meant for us thanks to the prayers and sacrifices offered up by the iconographer.

The Orthodox Council of 869-870 had this to say about icons: “What the Gospel proclaims to us in words, the icon also proclaims and renders present in color. It is a sacramental of a personal Presence.” An icon is much more than a form of teaching or an aid to prayer, **it is an object of veneration.** It challenges each of us, revealing itself in the silence of a face-to-face encounter. We must listen to it so that it may manifest the Word.

Jesus is the PERFECT ICON = IMAGE OF GOD. Each one of us is called to be an **icon of Jesus**. Our mission as mentors-to-be is to help people be holy **so that the real image of Jesus can become visible in their faces, in their prayer, in their daily lives.**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS TO HELP DURING YOUR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION WITH GOD:

1. How is my relationship with Mary? Is she prominent in my daily life? Do I pray the Rosary daily? Do I spend time with her? Do I honor her in any way? How can I talk to my children, grandchildren, friends, spouse about our Blessed Mother? What can I do to increase my devotion and love for her?
2. In the history of this icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, our Blessed Mother so clearly shows the hand of God and her hand in everyday occurrences, i.e., in an incredibly miraculous voyage across the sea to Rome, in a converted thief's dying wish, in a family's decision to take down a picture from their bedroom wall and place it in a church, in an unusual recreation with brothers of a community, etc. Where have I seen you, Lord, in my daily life and activities? And our Blessed Mother? The saints? The angels?

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS:

1. Plan to speak with my spiritual director about how my relationship with our Blessed Mother is going.
2. Spend some time with the image of OLPH in quiet, restful "contemplation."
3. Pray a more focused Rosary today in Mary's honor.

