

# Victim Adorers Of The Holy Face Of Jesus

Holy Family Carmelite Hermitage E.Carm  
Corran, Leap, Co. Cork. Rep. of Ireland.



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*"Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son..."* Isaiah 7:14

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

In a world where computer screen or iphones are open in almost every office, home or hand, the word, 'Icon' means no more than a shortcut to a computer program. But for the early Christian, the word, 'Icon' brought to mind a sacred image. This form of sacred art has existed from the beginning of Christianity.

Tradition has it that the first icon (Greek -eikōn "image") of the most holy Mother of God (THEOTOKOS or "bearer of God.") was made by St. Luke.

Yet the first True Icon not painted by human hands, was the Icon of the Holy Face of Jesus given to us by Our Lord Himself through the holy courageous woman, whom tradition names "Veronica". The name Veronica, (Vero nika) means true image.



A religious Icon then is a Sacred Image. Unlike our Western holy pictures which appeal to the eyes and stir the emotions; the Sacred Icon does not, as a norm, appeal to our outward senses. To the untrained eye, it has little beauty and many peculiarities. Yet these very peculiarities, when rightly understood, draw the mind to contemplate spiritual realities. But how, one might ask, can those of us, not brought up in the Eastern Christian tradition, begin to understand and appreciate this form of Christian art? We do so by standing before it; by reading it and by prayerful meditation before it.

## Theotokos of the Sign

A Sacred Icon, "written" by artists, can only be understood when it is "read" by the viewer. Like Holy Scripture, it is full of mystery and hidden wisdom - a window unto Heaven. Let us take for an example the miraculous Icon of *Our Lady of the Sign* otherwise known as *The Icon of the Sign*. During this

Liturgical season of Advent and Christmas, it is particularly fitting to contemplate this image which is taken from the Prophet Isaiah: *'Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son: and His name shall be called Emmanuel.'* Isaiah 7:14 In chapter 12, verse 1 of the Book of Apocalypse we read: *"And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars: And being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered."*

In Greek, the Virgin Mary is known as the "Theotokos" (Mother of God). This type of Image is very ancient, as it was already used in the catacombs of the early Christians. Today many variations of this Icon can be found, but in a traditional representation, you will usually find the following symbolism: Our Lady is directly facing the viewer with her hands raised in the 'orans' (praying or pleading) position, which was commonly used in early Christianity and Old Testament times; (e.g. Moses - Ex.17:11, and Solomon 3 Kings 8:22, D.R. Bible). This reminds us of her role as our intercessor and as mediatrix of all graces. This posture also reminds us of the gesture of the priest at Mass when he turns to the people and says: *Dominus vobiscum - the Lord be with you.* We can imagine Our Lady saying the same to us.



The gold cuffs she is wearing also reminds us of her role as intercessor. They were worn by the priests of the Old Testament and are still worn today by priests of the Eastern Byzantine Rite. Our Lady can be compared to a priest in the sense that on Calvary she offered Jesus Christ to the Eternal Father for our salvation.

Our Lady is shown with three stars; one on each of her shoulders and forehead. These symbolise her perpetual virginity before, during and after the Divine Birth and can be found in almost every Icon of the Theotokos.

Facial features are also very symbolic. Traditionally there is always an ear showing. This indicates the figure is listening, both to God and to our prayers. The small mouth and large eyes signify a love of silence, attentiveness and inner recollection. The Infant Christ Child is often depicted as having the face of a old man or an extra large forehead, to indicate His wisdom. Sometimes He is shown with two lights on His forehead to signify His twofold nature – Divine and human. His right hand is raised in blessing. His left hand holds a scroll which is symbolic of the New Covenant or Gospel and of His role as Teacher. In this icon, Christ appears in an aureole or circle representing the womb of the Virgin Mary. This reminds us of the Sacred Host and Our Lady's privilege in being the first monstrance. In the Old Testament this was prefigured by the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant. We should remember that we too are privileged to bear the Son of God in our heart and and strive to make it, with Our Lady's help, a fitting resting place for Emmanuel.



*Iconic Monstrance, Our Lady of The Sign – Ark of Mercy at St. Stanislaus, Chicago*

The figure of Christ is indicated by a cross within His halo, bearing the letters ΩΟΝ (omega, omicron, nu), abbreviation of the Greek words for “I AM WHO AM”. (cf. Ex 3:14). The letters IC XC are short for *Jesus Christ*. Our Lady is similarly indicated by the letters ΜΡ ΟΥ, meaning *Mother of God*.

Often you will find cherubim on either side of Our Lady. This recalls the *Mercy Seat* of the Old Testament *Ark of the Covenant* and where the presence of God was manifested every year to the high priest. Our Lady is the new *Mercy Seat* within Whom the glory of God was made manifest to all men in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The production of icons is a mode of prayer; they come from prayer to be used in prayer and worship. In the Eastern Rite they are part of the Church's preaching and part of the Church's prayer. The true iconographer prepares for the work of icon-making with prayer, fasting and study. He/she imitates in a very small way God's work of creation. We read in the book of Genesis 1:1-3 : *“In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said: Be light made. And light was made.”*

This is why, in writing an icon, the artist starts with the darker colours and slowly step by step adds the brighter colours, thus building up the light in imitation of the order of creation. The finished icon is light. "God from God, Light from Light.." Because a Sacred Icon is an Image of Heaven where there is true light, it does not have shadows falling from standing figures as in a landscape painting. Nor does one see light in the eyes.

## Man Is an Icon of God

Holy Scripture says that we were all created in the image (in Greek, icon) and likeness of God. Given what we know of ourselves and others, it was not very long before we stopped reflecting this image of God and got the boot from the Garden of Eden. And it was not just Adam and Eve but you and I who have damaged this image and likeness creation. We retain the image of God – we can say that the image is a "given". It is the stamp on us as humans, a stamp that we cannot undo. The image is a given but because of sin this image is marred. It doesn't operate the way it was intended. We are no longer like Him. This can be seen in that we do not do the things we should do but rather we do the very things we do not want to do. But Jesus Christ, who is Himself the express *Icon of the Father*, (cf. Col.1:15), has come to us in love to restore in us the image of God. Christ came to give us this tremendous revelation that God so loved us as to give us the possibility of becoming truly sons of God. If we could only embrace this great truth, we would be certain to find joy and purpose in life. As the image of God we are created and now restored, according to the scriptures, through the cross, to reflect God to everyone and every created thing.



*Illustration 1: Romania Moldovita Monastery - Mary asking for construction of a Monastery*

Space does not allow us to go into details on the mystery of the Icon. Yet hopefully our readers can begin to appreciate a little better why the Christian Icons are so sacred: not because of their appearance and appeal in themselves, but because of the deeper mysteries of our Faith which they represent and attempt to draw you to contemplate. May *Our Lady of the Sign* obtain for you all a blessed Christmas and draw you to an ever greater love of her Dive Son - the source of all peace and happiness!

# THEOTOKOS OF THE SIGN

Isaias to King Achaz  
A sign from God foretold,  
Awaited by the Israelites  
And patriarchs of old.

“Behold,” said he, “A Virgin shall  
Conceive and bear a Son,  
Emmanuel shall be His name.”  
Christ was the promised One.

Prefigured by the golden ark,  
At last this Virgin came;  
The sign for which the Jews had longed,  
And Mary was her name.

King David danced before the ark,  
In praise and jubilation:  
And John the Baptist also danced,  
At Mary’s visitation.

The ark of the old covenant,  
Prefiguring the new,

Contained the law and Aaron’s rod;  
The jar of manna too.

These symbols were fulfilled in Christ,  
The Image of our God;  
He brought new law, became the Bread,  
And took the priestly rod.

The new ark of the covenant,  
The long awaited sign,  
We recognise in Mary, who  
Became His sacred shrine.

The tabernacle housed the ark,  
In times which have passed by;  
Each soul is now a dwelling place,  
To house the Lord Most High.

So echoing King David’s words,  
“Arise O Lord,” we pray;  
“With Thy new ark, with Mary, come  
Into our hearts today.”

## Hermitage News

August – During Vespers one evening, we received a surprise visit from Rev. Fr. Isaac Mary Relyea, USA., and Fr. Michael Buckley. Fr. Relyea encouraged us to begin a Rosary Novena.

2nd Sept – We began a 54-day Rosary Novena to Our Blessed Lady that she would enlighten us as to our future location, and grant us all the necessary means to purchase land and construct a Monastery.

4-6th Sept – Rev. Fr. Tiago of St Joseph, O.Carm, visits us for the 1st time and offers Holy Mass (Carmelite Rite), in our Oratory.

25th Sept – Rev. Fr. MacDonald, our (former) chaplain, was turned away from Cork airport and refused entry to Ireland.

October – Taking advantage of the winter rains and the extra space in the pre-fabricated building (while we still have it on site), we interrupted our

usual daily novitiate class in order to teach our very enthusiastic and talented student, Sr. Anne Marie, the sacred work of Icon (painting) writing. We are happy to take commissions for small family Icons. However, please understand that the writing of an Icon is labour intensive and materials are costly. The materials used in each Icon are according to traditional requirements. Wood, linen, rabbit skin glue, gesso, egg tempera, gold leaf etc. Please allow 2-3 month for a commissioned icon.

Another warning letter from local County Council Planning department. They give us extended three months to remove our buildings. (Christmas).

25th October – We concluded our 54 day Rosary Novena. Last August, during our novena to St. Joseph, three American journalists came to visit our Hermitage. This week, they published a YouTube Video, entitled *“The Carmelite Hermits Need Your Help”*. Thanks to this short video, 27 benefactors (mostly from USA), responded to our appeal. Our Lady is thus pleased to show her maternal care for us. We offer our sincere thanks and daily prayers for the support of these three American ladies, Bree, Stefanie, and Catalina and all our benefactors who continue to assist us. **Please, if you are able to make a similar appeal Video to highlight our urgent needs, and share with your FB and Twitter friends, or indeed any other way to help us raise funds, we would be most grateful.**

November – A beautiful three day conference and Holy Mass given to us by Fr. Tiago of St Joseph. O.Carm



Dear friends and benefactors,

We are eternally grateful to you all for your support to us in the last year. We say a special thanks above all to our overseas benefactors in the U.S.A., G.B. and Australia who continue to assist us. We frequently receive enquiries from potential candidates who wish to come to try their vocation with us. Like the fair daffodils in Robert Herrick's poem, "To Daffodils" we say .."We have short time to stay with you, (Ireland), We have as short a spring"...

Local County Council planning section continue to send us threatening letters to remove all our buildings.

Many of you know by this stage that Fr. Edward MacDonald has made a decision to move to New Zealand. He is sadly missed by us and others here in Ireland. Yet we are confident that God, Our Heavenly Father, is taking care of all our needs. We read in Holy Scripture at this time of Advent:

*"Behold I will send my angel, who shall go before thee, and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared."* Exodus 23:20

In all our trials and difficulties, Fr. MacDonald alone has shown true charity by standing by our little Carmelite Community. While others are governed by human respect and fear, Fr. MacDonald alone has shown himself to be a faithful and loyal friend to us even as St. John the Beloved was to Our Lord to the end. Weighing all things in the balance and reading the signs, it does seem to us that our best option would be to move our Carmelite Community to New Zealand in 2019. The faithful there have also encouraged us.

As you know, there is normally a great loss in the selling and purchasing of property. Unfortunately even after we sell all our buildings, we still do not have nearly enough funds to purchase a house with land in New Zealand. We need urgently to raise funds so as to move abroad and purchase suitable property for the building of a Carmelite Monastery. Our future and the growth of our Carmelite Religious Community, depends on your generous support. Thank you in advance for any generosity that the Christ Child might inspire this Christmas. Please help us make 2019 an astounding year of progress for Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Her daughters. An extra special gift from you this Christmas will be received as a singular blessing from the Infant Lord and repaid by the Nun's holy prayers for all your needs.

We wish all our friends and benefactors a very blessed Christmas and prosperous New Year 2019.

Mother Irene of the Holy Face. E.Carm

Carmelite Sisters, West Cork

## HOW TO HELP US?

- ✓ **By your prayers**, especially that Our Lord will send us good vocations, courageous “Veronicas” to wipe and honour His Adorable Face and make reparation for poor sinners.
- ✓ **By your generosity**: bank transfer made payable to **Mother (Sr.) Irene Gibson**

**NSC: 903998**

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