



From the Pastor's Desk:

Although I am away this week and will not be able to join you for the Feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, I wanted you to know that my prayers to Our Lady are with you all this weekend. I call your attention to the "sandal" hanging off the foot of the Child Jesus. It portrays the Christ Child obviously having leapt into Mother Mary's arm for protection from danger. The beauty of an Icon such as this is that it is painted while the artist is in deep prayer and reflection. The child runs to its mother in times of danger and in time of seeking comfort. We are Mary's children and like Jesus we are called to seek protection in the arms of Mary, our heavenly Mother. Her perpetual protection and help are a gift of her Son, why not take continual advantage of this great gift.

Look carefully and see the details of the art. Religious art is meant to be a profound reflection of the infinite power of God working in the life of those who choose to follow Him and who, like Mary, say "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Your Word."

SYMBOLISM OF THE ICON OF PERPETUAL HELP

"Just as Eastern art had a great influence in the West, so the Western influence was felt in the East, especially in the 12th and 13th centuries. Art is ever influenced by popular piety, and at that time there was great emphasis placed on the human nature of Jesus. Devotion to Our Lord's passion and to Our Lady's dolours [sorrows] occupied people's devotions to Christ and His Holy Mother. Two strong influences in this direction were the great saints of that time, St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Francis of Assisi.

This emphasis was felt largely in the East through the Franciscan friars evangelizing in the eastern Mediterranean. One artistic manifestation of it was the emergence of the class of icons called *Cardiotissa*, from the Greek word *kardia*, meaning heart. *Cardiotissa* means "having a heart" or showing sympathy and mercy and compassion. In them the face of Our Lady appears full of sorrow, yet supremely dignified in her contemplation of the sufferings of her Son. His passion is represented by angels holding instruments of His passion, most often the cross, the lance, the sponge, and the nails. Icons of this type in Russia were called *Strastnaya* (from the verb to suffer).

The Our Mother of Perpetual Help icon is of this type. The angels holding the instruments of the Passion have their hands covered with a protecting veil as a sign of reverence in handling sacred objects. In some Eastern rites, for example the Armenian, the deacon has his hand covered with a silken veil when he carries the gospel book. And in the Roman Rite, the priest covers his hands with the humeral veil when blessing the people at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

"The Child Jesus is shown with an adult face and a high brow, indicating His divine Mind of infinite intelligence. As God, He knew that the angelic apparition was prophetic of His future passion. Yet in His human nature as a small child, He is frightened and runs to His Mother for protection. Our Lady hastily picks Him up and clasps Him to her bosom. This action is indicated by the fact that the Lord's right foot is nervously curled about the left ankle and in such haste that His right sandal has become loosened and hangs by a single strap. Further action is indicated by the way the Child Jesus clasps His Mother's right hand with both of His, holding tightly to Our Lady's thumb.

Our Lady is clothed in a dress of dark red which was long reserved in the Byzantine world for the Empress alone, indicating the Queenship of Mary. We know that reddish purple was considered the noblest color in the ancient world. Recall that Our Lord said "Those who are clothed in purple and fine linen are in the houses of kings."

"Some commentators on color claim that bluish purple became the color of penance in the Western Church (during Lent and Advent) because purple is a combination of blue and red. The blue reminds us of heaven, to which we wish to arrive by our penance, and the red recalls martyrdom, because all penance requires a dying to oneself, especially mortifying inordinate desire for food and pleasure. The archangels Gabriel and Michael were tunics of purple since they carry the instruments of the passion and death of Christ. IN the usual Byzantine style, the figures of the icon are identified with abbreviations of their names. In this icon Mary is designated by her chief title to glory: Mother of God.

"Thus the picture of the Mother of Perpetual Help is a traditional Byzantine icon of Our Lady, but modified by the medieval softening of features in *Cardiotissa* style, touching the emotion and showing an action story proper to this art form. Our Lady's face is of unspeakable majesty and calm and yet her large eyes, partly closed, express ineffable sorrow and sympathy. Our Lady is not looking at Jesus, but rather to us, her adopted children, as if to express compassion for us in our fears and sorrows."

May God +bless you and yours now and forever,

Father Anthony