

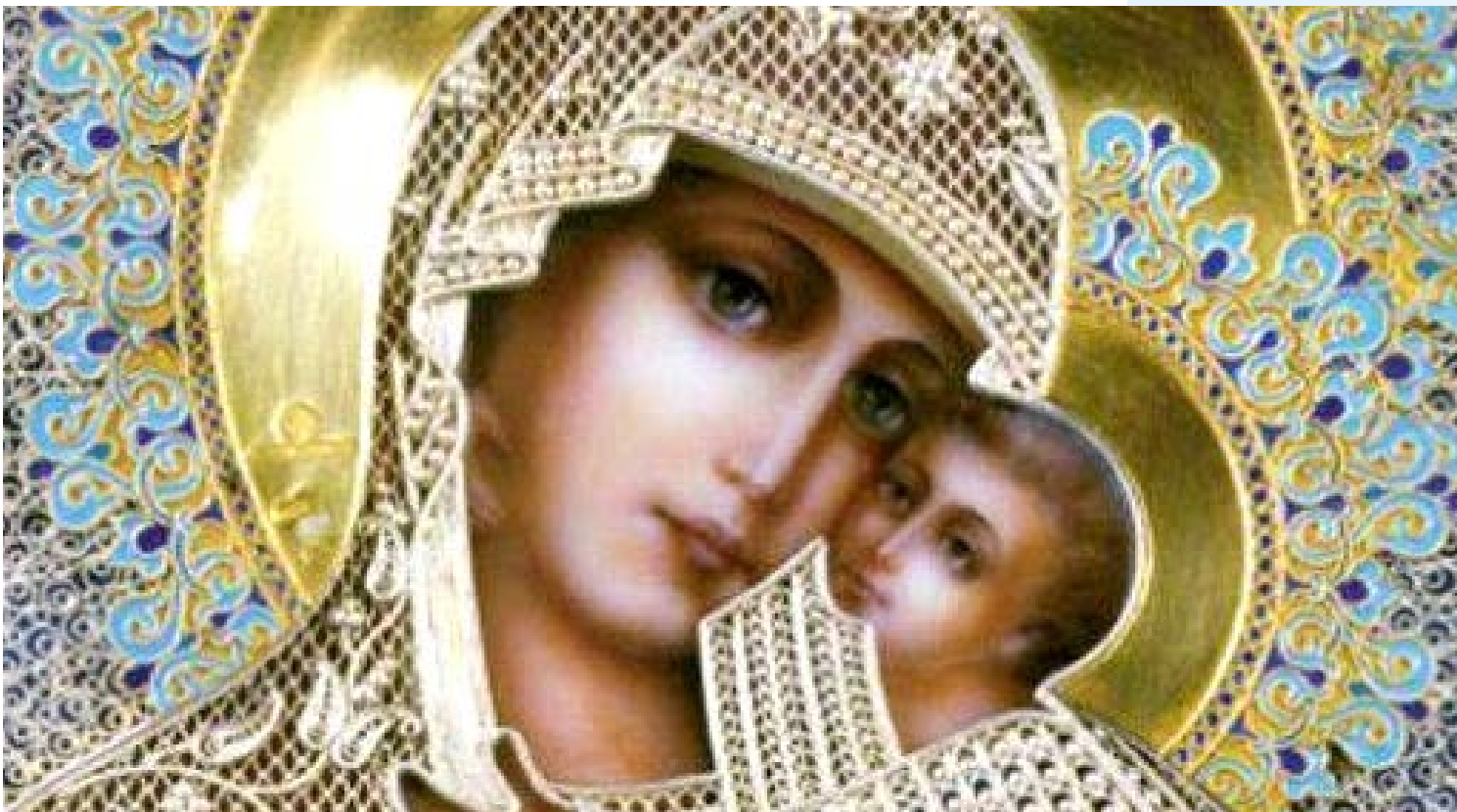
The Prayer of Gazing



With the
Icon of Our
Mother of
Perpetual Help

Bro. Dan Korn, C.Ss.R. & The Redemptorists Denver

The Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and the Prayer of Gazing



This course draws its inspiration from the works of Brother Dan Korn, C.Ss.R. For the past 20 years Brother Korn has preached missions on the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help throughout North America.

INTRODUCTION:

Coinciding with the restoration of the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in the early 1990s has been a renewed interest in devotions to Our Mother. A prominent aspect of this renewal has been the growing attraction to traditional forms of prayer and devotion associated with icons. The Redemptorists are at the forefront of this revival, instructing congregations worldwide in such devotions, including through what has been called the prayer of gazing.

This course draws its inspiration from the works of Brother Dan Korn, C.Ss.R. For the past 20 years Brother Korn has preached missions on the Icon throughout North America. In 2015, in an effort to make these teachings available to a wider audience, Brother Korn published *Embracing the Icon of Love*. The course is in particular

an elaboration on Part Three of Brother Korn's book in which he discusses various prayers and exercises including the prayer of gazing.

We also owe a depth of gratitude to Fr. Gregory Mayers, C.Ss.R. who has worked tirelessly to restore the ancient Catholic tradition of contemplative prayer.

St. Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists, was a master of practical, affective spirituality. He is widely credited with having revived the practice of prayer and the use of meditation by ordinary Catholics in the 18th Century. It is in the spirit of St.

Alphonsus that we offer you here some of the fruits of our study of the Icon. We hope as well that you will find this course to be infused with our love and devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help. We pray that this course will be a springboard for your deepening devotion to Mary. May you always open your heart to her. Through her, all things are possible!

Course Structure

The course consists of five sessions or days of instruction on the prayer of gazing before the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. The first three sessions are primarily devoted to the actual practice necessary to quiet the mind and develop a receptive spirit for prayer. The last two days deal with the symbolism of the Icon and its significance as a vehicle for prayer and contemplation. Each day begins with an Introduction to the lesson at hand, followed by Assessment Questions that will orient you to the day's materials. The heart of each lesson is the Reflection section which follows. It serves as an in-depth guide to the day's primary topic. Finally, there is a Practice section that offers progressive instructions on the prayer of gazing.

We estimate that the first three sections of each lesson could take as little as 15 minutes. We encourage you to then dedicate 20 minutes daily to the quiet prayer of the Practice section.

This course is intended as a practical guide for developing a prayer practice of gazing on the Icon. It's important to give this process time to develop and integrate into your overall prayer life. Just the process of finding and fostering a space and time of quiet in your day will take strong intention and persistent effort. For this reason we encourage you to do the course in a slow and deliberate manner.

We suggest that you repeat each lesson of the course two or three times before moving on to the next day's lesson. Alternatively you might prefer to go through the five lessons of the course and then repeat them two or three times over a period of weeks.

The goal of this course is to create the foundation for a regular or daily routine of devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help through the prayer of gazing. We hope you will find these lessons to be a useful tool for that purpose.

WHERE TO GET A COPY OF THE ICON

If you do not already have a print of the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, we encourage you to obtain a medium-sized or large print of the Icon that you can gaze on during this course. There are a number of online sites that sell prints of the Icon. You might also find through Google Images an image of the Icon that you can print off on a home printer.

You can also purchase a print of the Icon from Liguori Publications.

Or you can download the image from our [site here](#); once on the site simply right click the image and save to your computer.

LIGHT A CANDLE

Finally, we encourage you to go online to our site dedicated to Our Mother of Perpetual Help and [light a virtual candle](#) before you begin this course. It is a powerful way to set and strengthen your intention to both complete and benefit from the course.

Thank you, and may God and Our Mother of Perpetual Help bless you on this journey!

Becoming Quiet

Icons are windows into mystery. When we look into an icon with faith and devotion, we can feel a sense of being drawn into a living presence.

—Bro. Dan Korn, C.Ss.R., *Embracing the Icon of Love*

INTRODUCTION:

Icons are more than pretty pictures. Dionysius the Areopagite called them “visible representations of supernatural things.” That’s to say that in an icon we are presented with more than an aesthetic experience. A sacred icon emanates the invisible presence of God. When we pray before the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help—as we surrender our self-preoccupation and become truly still—love for Christ and his Mother will awaken in us. The countenance of the icon will shine forth and radiate to our heart. This is more than mere symbolism or reflection.



“The icon is not just a reproduction of biblical scenes; it is, rather, their spiritual manifestation in the persons represented in the icon.... It is more than just an ordinary representation or a souvenir of events or persons from the past. It makes present that which it represents; it is a meeting point between the mystery of God and human reality.”

—*Meditations on the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help*, Marek Kotynski, CSsR, pp 22-23)

The prayer of gazing before an icon is a powerful form of contemplative prayer. Prayer is descending with the mind into the heart and standing in the presence of God. Thus gazing devotedly on

an icon is truly the practice of praying. In this course we will suggest ways to enter into a dialogue with Our Mother of Perpetual Help. The icon is perhaps the most widespread Marian image in the world, and it testifies to the fact that God was the first to love us, to choose us, and to reveal Himself to us in His immeasurable mercy. It is He who comes forward to meet us in this Icon through the intercession of Mary (pg. 35-36, Kotynski). We will also discuss how to understand the symbolic and sacred nature of this Icon, as well as some aspects of the contemplative practice most helpful in embracing this profound form of prayer.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

Before we delve deeper into the icon, it may be useful to review our current efforts at prayer and reflection. Use this assessment as a reference point, and as well, a tool to bring greater awareness to your prayer efforts. It may be that you have no prior experience with contemplative prayer, let alone the prayer of gazing before an icon. That's ok. Actually that's one very good reason for taking this class. There are many opportunities in your daily life for reverence and prayer, and you may be surprised at how often you actually do engage in prayer. Prayer and contemplation are ways of cultivating a receptive, open heart and body to the movement of the Spirit in our lives.

- How much time do you spend daily in spiritual readings or quiet reflection?
- Do you at times find yourself spontaneously praying for someone or some situation in your life?
- Do you sometimes glimpse something in nature, e.g., a flower or a sunset, or perhaps the smiling face of a child that leaves you with a quiet feeling of reverence?
- Are you familiar with the practice of lectio divina as the Living Word of Christ?
- Do you have a habit of using short, fervent prayers throughout your day?



- When you enter into contemplation, how difficult is it to find within yourself a place of quiet stillness?
- Do you often feel distracted or find it difficult to concentrate in the course of your day?
- How do you deal with the inevitable stream of thoughts and anxieties that occur as you try to still your mind in contemplation?
- As you consider the practice of gazing with the icon, what feelings and expectations does this bring up?

REFLECTION:

Gazing is a very human act. How often have we stopped what we're doing to simply stare out the window at a swaying tree or a passing cloud? (An act that could once easily land us in trouble as we sat in our grade school classroom.) As we gaze at a distant scene of mountains or a seashore we can enter into a moment of prayer. If we take the time, it can easily penetrate our soul and serve as a brief window into the timeless.

When we pray and gaze before an icon in faith and devotion, how much deeper will the exchange of energy and divine presence become!

This divine energy should be understood in a mystically physical sense: The countenance on the icon shines forth and this radiation enters and illuminates our spiritual center, our heart. This icon [of Our Mother of Perpetual Help] presents the mystery of Jesus's Incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection and the effects these mysteries have on us. (Embracing the Icon of Love, Br. Daniel Korn, CSsR, p 11)

As Brother Dan makes clear, when we gaze upon the Icon in an attitude of prayer, we enter into an intimate exchange with Christ and Mary that also transforms us through the profound Mystery of Christ's Passion and Resurrection. Through this act, all of creation is likewise transformed. It is this process that brings healing and strength to our lives.

Below are detailed a series of stages that can help us prepare for the prayer of gazing with the icon. You are encouraged throughout this course to set aside about 20 minutes each day to repeat these steps.

PRACTICE:

1. Find a quiet place in your home where you can hang or view a picture of the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. If space allows, you might create a small shrine to her that you can sit or kneel before. It's most important that the space be quiet, allowing you to relax and be present with the Icon.
2. Take a moment to become still. Be attentive to your breathing. Breathe God in and out.
3. If you have preceded this period of contemplation with a scripture reading or meditation, be attentive to what you are feeling as a result of the reading and reflection. You might want to express your thoughts and feelings privately to God before proceeding.
4. Now release your thoughts to God so that you are no longer actively engaged with them. As thoughts pass through your mind try not to dwell on or entertain them, but allow them space to float free of your mind.
5. Make sure the icon is at eye level. If you have a Bible, you might open it to the Gospel of Luke. Gently place your hands on the written word and slowly allow your eyes to gaze on the icon.
6. Simply gaze with soft eyes on the Icon. Perhaps your attention will be drawn to Mary's eyes or her hands. Allow this process to unfold with soft attention. To gaze is to fix attention, but in a relaxed manner. In a sense you are "relaxing" into the picture, or perhaps allowing the picture into your heart. Allow God into your heart through the Icon. You do not need to direct or be active in your attention.
7. You might also or instead choose to close your eyes and be-

come aware of your breathing. As distractions come into your mind, gently acknowledge them and let them go. Become aware of your desire to be with God at this moment. Ask God to help you let go of whatever may distance you from God's closeness. Rest in this silence, letting distractions fade away. Thoughts will enter your mind, but do not entertain them. If a particular thought persists, or you find your mind wandering, open your eyes and gently bring your attention back to the Icon. You might also reach out to Mary and Christ with a simple word such as "love" or "God." Close your eyes again and let the silence again surround you.

8. After a period of time, open your eyes, or if you chose to keep your eyes open, slowly bring your gaze back into focus and attention. You might feel on this day or future days that you have had a wonderful experience, or conversely, that you felt absolutely nothing and your heart was closed. Whatever your experience, be merciful to yourself. You can easily fall into the judgment that you are "succeeding" or "failing" to pray properly. However, the prayer of gazing is not about doing it right or successfully. It is only our willingness to dedicate this time to God that is important. God and Our Mother of Perpetual Help will take care of the rest! Now end your prayer session by saying the Hail Mary slowly while keeping your gaze focused on the Icon.

REFERENCES AND LINKS:

Embracing the Icon of Love, Br. Daniel Korn, CSsR, Liguori Publications.

Meditations on the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Marek Koltynski, CSsR, Scala Publications.

The Glories of Mary, St. Alphonsus Liguori, Catholic Book Publishing Corp.

How to Converse with God, St. Alphonsus Liguori, TANBooks.
www.TANBooks.com

Follow Him and Reclaim the World, Dennis J. Billy, CSsR, Liguori Publications.

www.MaryPrayForUs.org

Working with Difficulties in Your Prayer Practice

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.

—John 12:24-26

INTRODUCTION:

You may find that as you practiced the prayer of gazing at the Icon (Session 1)—as you attempted to quiet your mind—the opposite happened. Instead of the icon becoming the expansive gateway to Christ’s Redemptive peace, we may at first feel agitated, even anxious or upset as we become conscious of the busyness, the thoughts and emotions of our day.

This is normal. When we try to be still, the thoughts and feelings that are so often the background noise of our day, suddenly flood into the spotlight of our attention. Distractions are neither bad nor are they harmful to prayer. Thomas Merton said that if a person is not distracted in prayer then they probably are not praying. Please do not become discouraged by this very normal reaction of the mind. Continue your meditation on the Icon. As you persist, the grace of Our Mother of Perpetual Help will be there to aid you and console you. What you are witnessing are the tensions of your day and the stored emotions and feelings of a life time dissolving. Let go! Let Our Mother take this burden from you!

As we die to the little “me” of our fears and grievances, the Icon will open for you the infinite space and mystery of Our Lord’s Death and Resurrection.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

Today’s focus is on quieting the mind. Since this is a lifelong process, it can be helpful to use these questions, not to rate yourself or give yourself a satisfactory or even a failing grade, but simply to bring yourself to a greater awareness of the process. You can ask yourself these questions before or after today’s practice.

- What was the quality of your experience as you sat in prayer yesterday or today?
- Did you find at times you were judging yourself in terms of whether or not you were praying the right way?
- Was there a particular feature of the Icon such as Mary's eyes or the face of Jesus that most caught your attention?
- You may find that there are things you want to say to Our Mother of Perpetual Help or to God. What are these things? Would it help to take some time writing down your thoughts?
- Did it help you to pay attention to your breathing (step 7 of Session 1 practice) or did you find yourself using the word "love" or "God" to help focus your attention and desire? What technique(s) were you most comfortable using?



REFLECTION:

Prayer is an intimate conversation with God. In this conversation we need to realize that God has more of a desire to speak to us than we have to tell Him our troubles and joys. And, if it is true

that our Father really does know what we need, then it is more important that we hear His message than that He hear ours. The prayer of gazing, in its silence, expresses our attitude of interior trustful abandonment and our desire to be receptive to God in the depths of our heart. It does not imply visions. Rather our chief activity in this prayer is to wait patiently for the Lord. We are to be like the virginal womb of Mary, receptive to the Word.

Seeing can be both an active and receptive process. In the prayer of gazing we need to be quiet, yet alert, and attentive to the power of the Icon. If we are simply passive, we might fall into day-dreaming or even sleep. In gazing at the Icon, we use active attention to put aside our own opinions and thoughts so as to be an empty receptacle for its message.

PRACTICE:

Now let's talk in a little more detail about the prayer of gazing that we began in the last lesson. Once again, as in Session 1, set aside 20 minutes for quiet reflection before the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Yesterday in our Practice Notes we covered the general process you are to use each day in contemplation using the Icon. Today we are adding a few more practical steps you can follow in preparing for the prayer of gazing. Please read these over before you begin today's practice.

1. Period of time. It is important to set aside a definite period of time for this prayer each day. We are suggesting that you set aside 20 minutes initially for praying. Sometimes we complain that there isn't enough time in the day to fit prayer into a busy schedule. This is true! It simply means you have to create the time for prayer (vs. time for our favorite HBO show or the football game!). It seems the more active and distracting our daily life is, the more need there is for a time of relaxing and coming to rest in God.
2. Place. Once again, any quiet place is good for prayer. Jesus, by His example and by admonition, preferred solitude for His special time with His Father. He advises us: "Whenever you pray,

go to your room, close your door and pray to your Father in private.” (Mt. 6:6) We suggest that you try to pray in the same place each day and make it a kind of sanctuary where you meet the Lord.

3. **Position.** Make sure the Icon is easily viewed at eye level. The best position for you is one which allows a harmony of your body and spirit, and will facilitate an inner stillness for your prayer. Avoid positions that put strain and tension on your muscles. Perhaps the best position for you will be kneeling, or sitting in a comfortable chair, or, once you close your eyes, lying on the floor. Experiment a little before you decide.
4. **Passage from scripture.** On Sessions 4-5 we will suggest scripture passages that correspond to aspects of the Icon. You may right now have a passage that comes easily to mind that you would like to reflect on while encountering some aspect of the Icon. Today, however, we ask that you just see what part of the Icon catches your attention and rest your eyes there. Allow the Icon to still you and gather you into its field. As on Session 1, you can either close your eyes after a while or continue to gaze.
5. If you keep your eyes open, simply gaze softly on the Icon. Perhaps your attention will be drawn to Mary’s eyes or her hands. Just as yesterday, allow this process to unfold with soft attention. To gaze is to fix attention, but in a relaxed manner. In a sense you are “relaxing” into the picture, or perhaps allowing the picture into your heart. Allow God into your heart through the Icon. You do not need to direct or be active in your attention.

REFERENCES AND LINKS:

Embracing the Icon of Love, Br. Daniel Korn, CSsR. Liguori Publications.

Meditations on the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Marek Kotynski, CSsR, Scala Publications.

www.MaryPrayForUs.org

The Practice of Gazing on the Icon

We experience the powerful energy of an icon through our eyes. Looking into a holy icon, we experience the holy looking back at us. This is the contemplative experience of praying with icons.

—Bro. Dan Korn, C.Ss.R., Embracing the Icon of Love

INTRODUCTION:

Icons are considered windows or openings to heaven. Open-minded contemplation of the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help can be a powerful initiation into inner silence directing us to God. It is a powerful tool to center our awareness and our hearts on the gospels and God's presence in our lives. We experience the powerful energy of an icon through our eyes. Looking into a holy icon, we experience the holy looking back at us. This is the contemplative experience of praying with icons.



ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

Today's lesson is about strengthening our concentration and intention while gazing on the Icon. The questions below represent a new assessment that will help direct or prepare you for today's practice. However, please also use the Session 2 Assessment Questions after you have completed today's practice.

- Is there a particular grace that you are praying for in your life today?
- Would it be difficult or easy to tell God that you desire His

presence in your life?

- What changes do you feel in your body as you begin to sit before the Icon? Be aware of any sensations including agitation or restlessness.
- Is there something in particular you wish to say to God?
- Is there some aspect of the Icon that particularly attracts your attention today?

REFLECTION:

As you begin the prayer of gazing try to cultivate a willingness to dedicate the entire 20 minutes to God. In one sense we need to be careful about having any goal in this prayer. When we determine what we want to achieve, then we are putting up obstacles to God's communication. What we want, may not be what God wants for us. If there is a goal of the prayer of gazing, it should be to remain attentive to the Icon as an opening to God's presence. Someone once defined prayer as "wasting time with God." Not a bad way to "waste" time! Of course, on certain days we may feel like we have wasted the whole time in distractions and restlessness. Then we may give into feelings of guilt or frustration, and start judging and criticizing ourselves for not praying well! Try not to judge yourself, or to get discouraged. You are just a beginner in this process. Instead of concentrating on your thoughts and judgments, try to let your awareness of the Icon expand until it seems that any obsessions or ruminations are diluted in the larger container of Mary's love and compassion.

In dedicating the time to God, be willing to come to prayer in whatever condition you find yourself: peaceful or restless, wide awake or tired, filled with anticipation or bored, consoled or desolate. Give all of these over to the merciful intervention of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Begin your prayer by telling God that you desire Him. Desire for God is important because our half-hearted efforts and indifference to prayer will not hold up against the difficulties of this practice

and the feeling of "wasted" time we are bound to have at times. Leave to Our Mother of Perpetual Help all the cares and worries that you have brought with you today. In this way you will be leaving open the window the Icon provides for you.

PRACTICE:

Once again, set aside 20 minutes for quiet reflection before the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Over the last two days we covered some practical steps to take in preparing and doing the prayer of gazing. Today we will talk about paying attention to the breath as a way of centering ourselves before the Icon.

1. Begin to calm yourself. Whatever you may have been doing prior to prayer, give it to Our Mother of Perpetual Help and let her worry about it for this period of time rather than you.
2. Bring your attention to the aspect of the Icon that you wish to rest your eyes on or seem drawn to today. Again today, if you keep your eyes open, simply gaze softly on the Icon. Perhaps your attention will be drawn to Mary's eyes or her hands. Just as yesterday, allow this process to unfold with soft attention. To gaze is to fix attention, but in a relaxed manner. In a sense you are "relaxing" into the Icon, or perhaps allowing the Icon into your heart. Allow God into your heart through the Icon. You do not need to direct or be active in your attention.
3. Try counting your breath. One technique is to image you are in elevator on the 20th floor of a building and the elevator is gently descending. Count down slowly with each floor from 20 to 1. Repeat this process as often as you like.
4. You might also try a slow rhythmical prayer that you time to each in and out breath: for example, "Our Mother... of Perpetual Help... have mercy on me... a sinner."
5. Finally, a word about expectations. You may find that you are not able to be as calm as you like every time you practice this form of prayer. It is important to understand that the prayer of gazing is not just about feeling relaxed and calm or even open to God's

presence. God and Our Mother will take us just as we are, with our confusion, our emotions and our agitation. As we sit and patiently open to the Icon, we are developing a deeper acceptance of ourselves. This process is not about self-improvement, but about a total surrender to God's presence and will for us.

REFERENCES AND LINKS:

Embracing the Icon of Love, Br. Daniel Korn, CSsR. Liguori Publications.

Meditations on the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Marek Kotynski, CSsR, Scala Publications.

www.MaryPrayForUs.org

The Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, *Part 1*

The whole image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help is about Jesus Christ and Mary's role as his Mother. When we look at the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, we are invited to read what is contained in the image. We are invited to read the icon as we would read a page in Scripture. This reading of the Icon leads us into an experience of Mary that deepens our devotion to her. Through reading the signs and symbols presented in the Icon, we are led into a deeper experience of God.

—Bro. Dan Korn, C.Ss.R., *Embracing the Icon of Love*

Today we are going to discuss some of the signs and symbols to be meditated upon as we enter into contemplation with the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. We will continue to explore the prayer of gazing as a method to center our attention on the mystery beyond these symbols. The prayer of gazing is a powerful form of contemplative prayer. We will briefly discuss various aspects of the Icon and also reference related Gospel passages. Our intention here is not so much to develop new or interesting insights into the Icon's symbols or the gospel passages they relate to, but to experience the living word of God right now, present in our lives. Our intention is to allow ourselves to be pulled more deeply into the mystery of the living Christ.



ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

Continue to reference the Session 2 Assessment Questions after you complete today's practice. Here are a few additional questions that might help center your prayer experience today.

- After your prayer session, do you notice any difference in the appearance of people and objects around you, or do you feel yourself to be more calm or relaxed in how you related to situations and other people?
- When you pray before the Icon, what do you notice about the quality of your prayer?
- If you continue to feel judgments or criticism toward yourself during the prayer session (e.g., the feeling that you're not doing it right), can you simply note such thoughts and then release them to Our Mother?
- If your mind wanders while praying, try to simply return your gaze to the Icon without judgment.
- Were the addition of gospel passages helpful in centering your prayer today?
- How is the passion of Our Lord present or alive in your daily life?

REFLECTION:

One thing we noticed immediately about the Icon is that it is not a naturalistic image. As a noted Eastern Orthodox scholar of icons has stated: "The unusual details of appearance which we see in the icon—in particular in the sense organs (the eyes without brilliance, the ears which are sometimes strangely shaped)—are represented in a non-naturalistic manner, not because the iconographer is unable to do otherwise, but because their natural state is not what he wants to represent. The icon's role is not to bring us closer to what we see in nature, but to show us a perception of the spiritual world." (*Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, Daniel B. Clendenin, p 55)

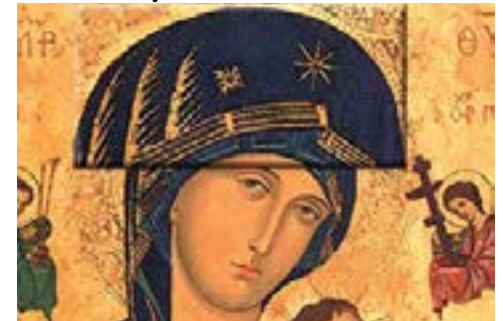
Icons call us to move beyond the superficial and surface quality of the world around us to a deeper kind of seeing. In our fast-paced world of instant gratification, we must approach the Icon of Our Mother with the intention to slow down and make the Gospels central to our day. The Icon calls us to a prayerful, sacred embrace of life. As Fr. Marek Kotynski, C.Ss.R. states, "[icons] are a fruit of prayer, since their painters created them in an atmosphere of penitence and deep meditation.... They present the Gospel not written in word, put painted." (Fr. Marek Kotynski, C.Ss.R., *Meditations on the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help*, pp 21-22)

Some Elements of the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help

Let's now explore some of the ways the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help invites us into the mystery of the Incarnation, Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

1. THE EIGHT-POINTED STAR

Suggested Reading: "...you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High" (LK 1:31-32)



The star reminds us that Mary is the dawn announcing the coming of Jesus. It symbolizes the role of Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church. The star indicates that she is the one who will lead us to Christ. Mary is the rising star who drives away the night of sin and prepares the way for the mercy and love of God to be manifested in the flesh, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer.

Concentration: Mary is the star that leads us to redeeming love.

2. THE EYES OF THE VIRGIN:

Suggested Reading: "...Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." (LK 1: 38)

Mary's eyes are not directed toward Jesus or toward the activity of the angels, but always facing toward the one who is looking at her. Her look is one of great tenderness, but also



one of intensity. Both the looks of Mary and of Jesus portray a sense of pondering and contemplation at the events surrounding them. Both faces convey that they are listening reflectively. The Virgin, who listens to the word of the angel, and the Child Logos are always attuned to the will of the Father.

Concentration: Mary has surrendered deeply to God's will.

3. THE HANDS OF MARY

Suggested Reading: ".....and his mother kept all these things in her heart." (LK 2:19)

Mary's right hand points to the image of the Christ. She is not



holding the Infant to herself, rather, she is presenting him to all who stand before the icon. We are invited to respond to this presentation by becoming the ones who extend our hands and receive the Word of

Christ. The image of Our Mother is thus the image of a woman who is pondering and contemplating Jesus. Mary is contemplating all the events that have happened in her life concerning Jesus. We

too are called to ponder and reflect on our commitment to live the Gospel and proclaim Christ through our words and actions.

Concentration: Mary contemplates Jesus who is impressed upon her heart and always with her.

4. THE GAZE OF THE CHILD

Suggested Reading: "...and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'" (LK 2:34-35)



We can see the look on the face of Jesus. He imitates his Mother's look of pondering and remembering. He is looking at the cross that the angel holds. His look is not fearful, but prayerful and contemplative. He is focused on the cross, teaching us to reflect upon the passion of Jesus.

Concentration: Mary invites us and teaches us to embrace this Infant and take into ourselves the incarnate-crucified mystery of Redemption.

PRACTICE:

A few cautions are in order before you practice today. The prayer of gazing is not Bible reading nor Bible study. We are not using the Scriptures during prayer to come up with keen insights or even inspiration. This prayer is to help us to experience in the depths of our hearts God's message for us. Scripture is the living word of God and we want that word to come alive in us. We do not approach the Scriptures as a scholar or a theologian. We come as a hungry believer needing nourishment, waiting to be fed, savoring every morsel.

1. Begin to calm yourself. Whatever you may have been doing prior to prayer, release it now to Our Mother of Perpetual Help.
2. Bring your attention to one of the aspect of the Icon that we discussed above: Mary's Face or Hands or the Face of the Child. Again today, if you keep your eyes open, simply gaze softly on the Icon. Read again the passage above related to that aspect of the Icon giving special attention to the Concentration at the end.
3. Following Day 3's instruction you may also wish to begin your prayer by concentrating for a time on your breath as a way of calming yourself and becoming present.
4. Now return your attention to the Icon. Just as yesterday, allow this process to unfold with soft attention. To gaze is to fix attention, but in a relaxed manner. In a sense you are "relaxing" into the Icon, or perhaps allowing the Icon into your heart. Allow God into your heart through the Icon. You do not need to direct or be active in your attention. Allow the Gospel words into your heart.
5. Continue in prayer and contemplation for 20 minutes.

REFERENCES AND LINKS:

Embracing the Icon of Love, Br. Daniel Korn, CSsR. Liguori Publications.

Meditations on the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Marek Kotynski, CSsR, Scala Publications.

Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Re-ader, Daniel B. Clendenin.

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The Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, *Part 2*

She is our Mother—not by the flesh, of course, but spiritually; the Mother of our souls, of our salvation.

—St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*

INTRODUCTION:

Today we will conclude our discussion of the signs and symbols of Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help with Reflections on The Archangels, The Feet of the Child Logos, and the Gold Background of the Icon. There are other additional points of entry into the Icon, and to learn about these we urge you to consult either Brother Dan's *Embracing the Icon of Love*, or Fr. Kotynski's *Meditations on the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help*. We will continue to explore the prayer of gazing as a method to center our attention on the mystery beyond these symbols. Once again our intention is to gaze upon elements of the Icon in order to experience the living word of God right now, present in our lives.

Brother Dan reminds us that "Prayer is descending with the mind into the heart and standing in the presence of God." (*Embracing the Icon of Love*, pg. 69). We hope that this course has helped you to experience the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in just this way.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

The last day of our course is a good time to reflect on your experience of the prayer of gazing and its relation to the Gospels in your daily life. It is also important to remember that integrating the prayer of gazing into your daily prayer life is a long-term practice; this course is only the beginning of that process.

- How strong do you feel is your intention to continue the prayer of gazing as part of your spiritual life?
- What parts of the prayer of gazing have been easy or difficult for you?

- Is there an element of the Icon that you feel most drawn to?
- Do you feel the addition of gospel passages was helpful in centering your prayer yesterday?
- What does it mean for you to be living the Gospel in your daily life?
- Does meditation on the Icon open you to compassion? Are there places in your life that need to be healed?

REFLECTION:

Before we begin our practice today of gazing on the Icon, it might be instructive to reflect again even for a moment on Mary's role in revealing to us the Gospel message. Brother Dan calls Mary our guide or "way shower" to Christ.

"She stands before us looking intently out to those in front of her with her right hand pointing toward the Child she is holding. Mary, in this Icon, is teacher and evangelist. She is a way shower into the mystery of Christ."

The Icon is an invitation to read and contemplate the mysteries of the Gospel story of Christ's Incarnation, Death and Resurrection.

The Icon is also the occasion for heartfelt prayer. Today we encourage you in the last few minutes of your prayer time to allow yourself to speak from your heart to Our Mother and Our Lord. You have made yourself receptive to the Icon, now take a moment to speak. Let your prayer come from your heart, not from the head or from formulas. If you are filled through the prayer of gazing with love for God, or if you feel desolate and restless—whether you judge your feelings to be positive or negative—tell them to Christ and Our Mother. Whatever the prayer may be, let it come from your heart. Have confidence that if you bring your interior darkness to the light of Christ's love, his light can overcome whatever suffering you may experience.

St. Matthew tells us "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Just a short prayer from the heart of praise or pe-

tion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, who is our way shower to Our Lord, is a fitting conclusion to your prayer time today.

Additional Elements of the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help:

1. THE ARCHANGELS MICHAEL AND GABRIEL:



Suggested Reading: "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (ROMANS 8:16-17)

The Angels present instruments of the passion to Christ. They carry them in veiled hands, thus announcing the message of the dignity of the glorified, crucified, and resurrected Jesus. The Archangel Michael is holding a lance, a pole with a sponge, and a vessel of vinegar. These prefigure scenes from Jesus' crucifixion. The Archangel's veiled hands inculcate reverence for holy things. The Archangel Gabriel holds a cross and nails, the very instruments of the coming death. His veiled hands inculcate reverence for holy things.



Concentration: The passion proclaims the redemptive love of God for us in Christ—the mystery of Jesus in Mary and Mary in Jesus.

2. THE FEET OF THE CHILD LOGOS

Suggested Reading: "When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you done this

to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.’ And he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them...” (LK 2:48-51)



The falling sandal informs us that Jesus became human like us in all things but sin. Showing his heel is from the promise of God in the book of Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Jesus conceals his divine nature in his humanity and allows to fall the Golden Sandal, the symbol of his glory. In this presentation of the Infant Christ, we are being invited into a dialogue about the mystery of redemption: the Incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection.

Concentration: Jesus’ humility in taking on our humanity.

3. THE GOLD BACKGROUND

Suggested Reading: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (JN 1: 1-5)



The gold background represents heaven and the divine light of the Resurrection shining through the garments of Jesus and Mary entering into the one praying before the image. The Gospel message proclaims: God is light, and in him there is no darkness. The gold in the Icon is

symbolic of the light John speaks about in this reading.

Concentration: Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in us for the glory of the Father.

PRACTICE:

Come again today to Mary and Christ as a hungry believer needing nourishment, waiting to be fed, and savoring every morsel.

1. Begin to calm yourself. Whatever you may have been doing prior to prayer, release it now to Our Mother of Perpetual Help.
2. Bring your attention to one of the aspect of the Icon that we discussed above: The Archangels, the Feet of the Child Logos, or the Gold Background. Again today, if you keep your eyes open, simply gaze softly on the Icon. Read the passage above related to that element of the Icon giving special attention to the Concentration at the end.

Following Day 3’s instruction you may also wish to begin your prayer by concentrating for a time on your breath as a way of calming yourself and coming present, or you may proceed to the next step of softening your eyes as you gaze on the Icon.

4. With your eyes fixed on an element of the Icon, allow this process to unfold with soft attention. To gaze is to fix attention, but in a relaxed manner. In a sense you are “relaxing” into the Icon, or perhaps allowing the Icon into your heart. Allow God into your heart through the Icon. You do not need to direct or be active in your attention. Allow the Gospel words into your heart.
5. Continue in prayer and contemplation for 20 minutes.
6. At the end of today’s prayer time, add a heartfelt prayer in your own words to Our Mother and to Christ
7. Finally, remember there is no such thing as bad prayer or a failed practice period—no matter if you have a difficult time today, or if you are frequently distracted. Through the prayer of

gazing you have dedicated this prayer time to the Lord. This is indeed a very good prayer.

REFERENCES AND LINKS:

Embracing the Icon of Love, Br. Daniel Korn, CSsR. Liguori Publications.

Meditations on the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Marek Kottynski, CSsR, Scala Publications.

Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Re-ader, Daniel B. Clendenin.

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