

**RETREAT DURING THE TRIDUUM
WITH THE HOLY TRINITY ICON OF ANDREI RUBLEV.
by Fr Tiernan Doherty CP**



Introduction:

When learning the art of producing icons, the most sacred icon that one might eventually write is to copy the Icon of the Trinity, also known as the 'Hospitality of Abraham.' Based on the story of Abraham and Sarah entertaining three strangers who announce that Sarah is pregnant. It is an encounter for them, with God, who comes as three persons and is depicted as Angels in the Icon. It is a glimpse into the final revelation through Christ of the Holy Trinity and the Trinitarian life we are invited into through Baptism. (We don't use the word 'paint' describe this. To say 'write' places icons into the sacred, alike to the sacred scriptures and the sacraments.)

This icon was proclaimed by a Russian Holy Synod as a doctrine of faith in 'icon form' rather than in a written text which would be of the 'mindset' in the Latin Rite of the western Church.

LOOK, READ & REFLECT

Use the Icon each day to 'gaze' upon. 'Open' yourself to meditate on the Sacred Scriptures / liturgy of each day of the triduum in the hope you may enter into a deep silence of contemplation and union with your God.

HOLY THURSDAY - 'GAZING' at the three Angels around the table (altar)

Read the text from Genesis of the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah to the three strangers (Genesis 18:1-8). Appreciate the contrast of this meal with the Last Supper. Where Abraham and Sarah entertain and feed God in the three persons, and learn that their generosity now leads to a 'barrenness' being transformed into new life (Sarah becoming pregnant); now in the Last Supper, God entertains and feeds us with the gift of his Son who is the Paschal lamb.



Let us 'gaze' at the three angels seated around the table, (the small open space in the base of the table can be seen as a place for relics and so the table can also be an altar).

The images naturally lead us to gaze first at the figure on the right. It is an image of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is clothed in the 'blue' of the oceans of the world and the 'green' that form the land masses of the world. The 'Spirit' is the breath of God breathed into all of creation. The Holy Spirit's head is leaning in the direction of the central figure. It is the power of the Spirit to take us to Christ.

So the centre figure is Jesus.

The figure of Jesus wears red against his flesh symbolising his divinity and blue as the outer garment to reflect his humanity. (In Icons only Jesus should have the colour red against the flesh). The face and head of Jesus lean toward the final figure on the left.

This is God the Father and Creator. His colours are translucent indicating he is 'beyond' our full comprehension, yet he also wears blue, since through his Son, he now shares in our humanity.

The wings of the angels all connect indicating 'One God' but three persons in union with each other.

Spend time appreciating your own trinitarian life and the place the Spirit, Son, and the Father have in your journey of faith. The gift of the Eucharist is Christ drawing us into union with himself, in the Spirit and to the Father.

GOOD FRIDAY AND HOLY SATURDAY - 'GAZING'

beyond the three Angels to the symbols behind them.

The three symbols invite us to appreciate our own journey of Salvation.

1. Above the Holy Spirit on the right is the 'mountain'. Like the invitation of Jesus to a couple of his disciples to experience his Transfiguration, we too are invited to climb the 'mountain journey' of our life. To appreciate the dead ends, the pitfalls and struggles where the path is not so clear to travel. At end of our life we will reach the top and be transfigured with him. This is the journey into 'Theosis' or divinization where Christ invites us to share in his divinity through his own death and resurrection, (he shared in our humanity that we might share in his divinity).



2. Behind the central figure of Christ is the 'Tree of Life'. Green leaves indicate new life pouring out of the wood of the Cross. Allow the readings of the Passion to speak of the mystery unfolding in your own life story. Appreciate where the cross in your life has been transformed into hope, change and love. Appreciate the 'green leaves' of your life.

3. Behind the angel on the left is the prodigal son's Father's house. A window at the top allows the Father not only to 'wait' for the return of his son, but to 'race out' to embrace him when he finally arrives! This points to the Father's will for all of us and the redemption he desires for all that he has created - us and all of creation! This is the 'big' picture.



VIGIL OF HOLY SATURDAY AND EASTER SUNDAY- FROM 'GAZING AT' TO STEPPING 'INTO' the spare 'place' and 'space' before the central Angel.

Christ's resurrection means that now you are a son/daughter too of the Father and that Jesus is your brother. You are now the fourth figure to sit at the table with them and contemplate the world - symbolised by the table, which under the figures, is square (out of harmony) but through our union with the Trinity, can become transformed and renewed.

We are Christ's disciples now called to continue to proclaim the 'Good `News' of life and the vision of God for all of us made in his image. Seated at the table as the fourth figure, we with the Trinity, make a complete circle. We are at the service of God to continue to assist the broken and suffering of this world into the circle of love.

Finally appreciate that at the centre of the table is the Pascal lamb within the chalice. This is the great Paschal event of Christ's death and resurrection. He is the new Paschal lamb of the covenant in his blood, memory of the Passover meal of the First Covenant.



The Three angels are depicted as talking not eating. Their gestures and smooth and restrained and suggest the sublime nature of their conversation.

The Father's hand is raised at a distance in a gesture of blessing the cup on the altar.

In the centre, Christ points to the cup with the two fingers emphasising his humanity and divinity united. The Spirit has its hand turned into the table suggesting perhaps again, its place of making Christ present to the world and its place of being God within us.

Finally, all three figures hold a staff in one hand. God is with us in the journey of this life into a life eternal, where we are resurrected and share a crown of glory, in Heaven, with all the saints. We should also appreciate the figures being displayed as angels as it makes them more inclusive of gender. ('In his image God made them, male and female he created them'. Book of Genesis)

Fr Tiernan Doherty CP

I give profound thanks to God for the gift of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion in my formation as a seminarian and young religious Passionist. In my first year as a seminarian at Templestowe we were taught by the Sisters in becoming catechists to teach the faith in the public state schools. I taught and shared the faith all through my seminary days in public high schools one day a week. Later during my first four years as an assistant priest in our parish in Marrickville Sydney, I worked in four of our public primary schools and a senior girls' high school for four days a week. At times it was challenging yet I loved every moment of it. It also introduced me to catechists of other faiths and I did as much as I could in assisting especially those of the orthodox faith who often didn't have enough teachers. Let us give thanks for the ministry of the Sisters in keeping us in dialogue with the Jewish faith and the People of the First Covenant.