

PRAYING WITH COLOURS

JOURNEYING THROUGH THE PASCHAL MYSTERY WITH ICONS



Over the centuries, religious artists have transformed Scripture into images through their sacred paintings. These paintings are called "icons". The word "icon" means "image", and the story of icons in the Christian Church is a story of learning to gaze into the mystery of God. The realities portrayed by words in Scripture, icons portray through colours.

The icon is a window through which we glimpse another world - the world of God. In the icon we are brought into the presence of the holy person or incident pictured; we "see" the Holy Gospel before our eyes and the icon speaks to us. The icon is the occasion of a sort of revelation - in line and colour - of the kingdom of God. Hence the very icon itself is a sacred reality.

In this prayer retreat, Deacon Sherman Kuek journeys with you through some very sacred events of Scripture and guides you on how to pray with these biblical events which are portrayed in colour. The retreat will begin on the Friday afternoon (after lunch) and ends on the Sunday afternoon (after lunch). It will require an attitude of prayerful silence and readiness to hear the voice of God. Participants should bring their bibles and notebooks with pens.

SPEAKER PROFILE



The Reverend Deacon Professor Dr Sherman Kuek OFS is a permanent deacon of the Catholic Church, a Secular Franciscan, theologian, and teacher. As a deacon, he is incardinated in the Diocese of Malacca Johore, Malaysia. As a theologian, Deacon Sherman is the Cornelius Cardinal Sim Professor of Theology and Dialogue at the Christian Institute for Theological Engagement (CHRISTE), an ecumenical and cross-disciplinary research institute chartered under the EUCLID prerogative (United Nations Treaty Series 49006/49007) and affiliated with the School of Theology and Interfaith Studies of *Polê Universitaire Euclide*. He is also Visiting Professor to several institutions of higher learning within Malaysia and abroad. As a teacher of the Catholic faith, he is also the Convenor of the Splendour Project, a Catholic apostolate for formation, evangelisation, and discipleship. Deacon Sherman spends much of his time communicating the Christian faith through prolific speaking, writing, and media production. His work involves teaching at academic institutions and also in non-academic contexts. His Doctor of Theology degree was conferred by Trinity Theological College in Singapore. More information about him can be found at www.shermankuek.com.



SESSION ONE

1. THE TRINITY

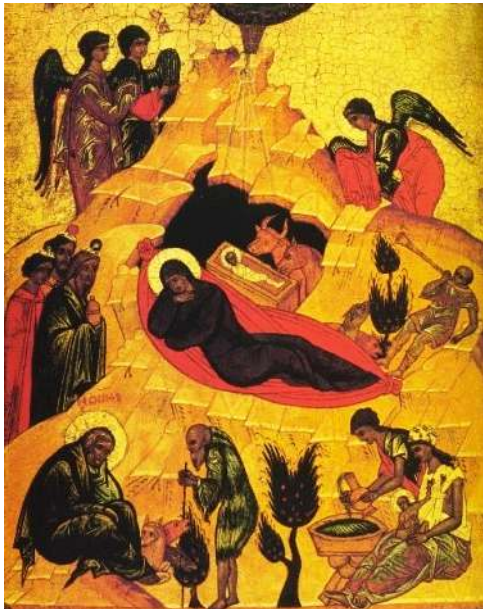


Read Genesis 18:1-15.

Praying with the icon:

Am I not invited to sit at the empty space around the table? Am I not drawn into the very life of God in baptism? Am I not loved into deeper and deeper participation in the divine life through the Bread that is broken and the Chalice that is shared? Is silence not the best prayer when I am face to face with God?

2. THE LORD'S NATIVITY



Read Luke 2:1-20.

Praying with the icon:

Surely both Mary and Joseph experienced many problems and difficulties surrounding the birth of Jesus, their Son. Am I not invited to join them in embracing the inconvenience of making space in my own life for Jesus? Just as Jesus was born in a very much less than luxurious home, am I not also called to embrace the simplicity of life like my Lord? Just as Joseph was challenged to accept the will of the Lord with faith, am I not required to embrace with faith the difficult challenges of my life and believe that God knows what He is doing?

3. VLADIMIR MOTHER OF GOD



Read Luke 1:26-38.

Praying with the icon:

An icon is not just a 'holy picture'. It is a revelation of divine truth. To see the Vladimir Mother of God as an icon of peace is to recognise that, as St Paul says, Jesus “is the peace between us” (Ephesians 2:14). To pray with this icon is to relate to Mary, who holds us in her eyes of love. It is to relate to Jesus, who reaches out to embrace us too. I can bring all my anxieties, disturbances and lack of peace to Jesus and Mary, and with them, understand the embrace of God. The undertone of sadness and of future suffering is not absent from Jesus or Mary. Nor is it absent from us in our prayer. But the peace, which surpasses understanding, endures.

SESSION TWO

4. O NUMPHIOS – THE BRIDEGROOM

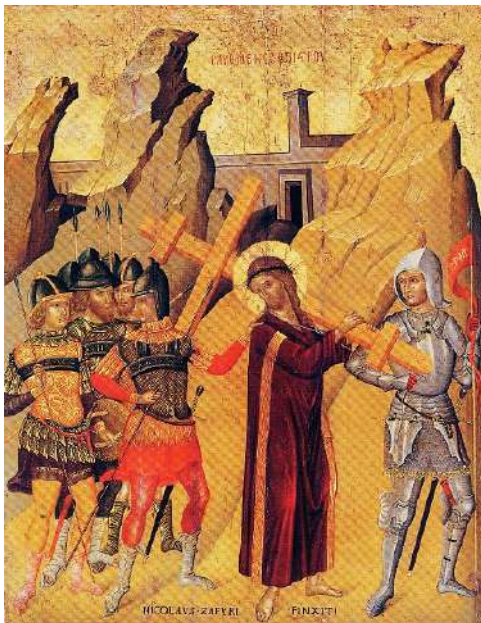


Read Matthew 25:1-13 and 27:27-30.

Praying with the icon:

Despite the barbaric treatment of Jesus, there is a stillness and a beauty about the icon. The eyes of Jesus invite a contemplative response, and the title "The Bridegroom" draws us to a level even deeper than the physical sufferings. Surely the real secret of this beautiful icon is the incredible love which endures so much and which longs for a response in love. Jesus asks us to ponder the price of our redemption and the enormity of the love involved. Can we wear the crown in our nuptials with God?

5. THE WAY OF THE CROSS



Read John 19:1-17.

Praying with the icon:

It is not difficult to identify with the context of violence which this icon portrays. Surrounded by executioners, carrying an impossibly heavy cross, crowned with thorns, roped to the leading soldier, Jesus still looks calm and composed. That look in his eyes haunts all who occupy the space in front of him. As we come before him with our particular cross, we are brought to a standstill by that look. Is it recognition? Is it surrender? Is it peace? Is it, in the end, love? Whatever cross we have to carry, he knows from experience our need of support and strength. He knows in a personal way the horrors of a brutal and violent society. We do not pray alone before this icon. We bring with us all the victims of violence being dragged to their death.

6. CRUCIFIXION



Read John 19:18-42.

Praying with the icon:

Prayer before the icon of the Crucifixion takes us into the mystery of the death and New Life of Jesus. We still have to make our personal Passover. But in contemplating the Passover of Jesus we are already embraced by the New Life. With the restraint of Mary, with the tenderness of John, we glimpse in our prayer the New Creation in which the old Adam (seen in the open earth beneath the cross) is at last redeemed.

SESSION THREE

7. ANASTASIS – THE RISEN CHRIST



Read Matthew 28:1-10.

Praying with the icon:

“By your cross and resurrection you have set us free.” The blaze of light, the Risen Light, dazzles us. We simply enjoy this burst of brilliance. We see everything now in the light of Easter. In his light, we see light. We see the mystery of redemption; we see our destiny; we see the God who never gives up on us. But we too are silent in the face of this mystery of mysteries. Words and images cannot encompass this reality. In praying with this icon, we let Jesus take each one of us by the hand and draw us clear of sin and death. He draws us into his risen Life. He draws us into the inner life of God.

8. ANASTASIS – THE RISEN CHRIST



Read Luke 24:1-12.

Praying with the icon:

The resurrection of Christ should lead us to believe that even if life brings us to die a thousand daily deaths, there will be a resurrection for us. The resurrection of Christ means that no matter how much distress or despair life brings to us, there is a life greater than the present one that we experience. The resurrection of Christ means that even when hope seems to be out of reach, we must not stop believing that Christ IS that hope who will bring us into eternal joy, eternal blessedness and eternal life.

9. THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST



Read Luke 24:13-35.

Praying with the icon:

Surely our first instinct is to take our place at the round table with Jesus and the two disciples. We are drawn to the Supper at Emmaus by the Spirit of the Risen Lord. Let us sit with the Risen Eucharistic Lord. We also echo the disciples' invitation: "they pressed him to stay with them". Stay with us, we pray, aware that it's more likely that we will not stay with him. The disciples had their eyes opened; they came to recognise the Stranger in the Breaking of the Bread. We too pray to have our eyes opened, to recognise Jesus in the stranger and to recognise the stranger in Jesus. Most of all, we marvel at the depth of our communion with the Risen Lord in his Eucharist. Through the gift of his Body and Blood, we become one body, one spirit, in Jesus. Our very flesh is given a guarantee of new and immortal life. In our co-mingling with Jesus we share the radiance of his glory, even in our bodies. O sacrament most holy, O sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

SESSION FOUR

10. THE TOUCH OF THOMAS



Read John 20:1-30.

Praying with the icon:

As we are drawn into this decisive encounter, we are encouraged to face our doubts, our hesitations and our difficulties. Thomas teaches us to remain with the community of believers, especially when the journey of faith is clouded. In the delicacy of Thomas' gesture of reaching out to the pierced side of Jesus, he helps us also to reach out to the Risen Lord who defies all closed doors and all barriers of space and time. This beautiful icon shows us how Jesus deals with those "of little faith". He trusts us; he believes in us. We reach out to respond with our trust and our faith. In the end, it is a matter of "the loving kindness of the heart of our God", the mercy of God shining out in the gentleness of Jesus.

11. EASTER BREAKFAST



Read John 21:1-19.

Praying with the icon:

In our prayer, we want to be like John, the beloved disciple, the first one in the boat to recognise the risen Jesus: "It is the Lord". We want to be like Peter and rush headlong into an encounter with the Risen Lord. We want to be like the other disciples who share breakfast with Jesus - a moment of special intimacy. We want to hear in our hearts the question Jesus puts to us too: "Do you love me?" We want to resonate with Peter's repeated confession of love: "Yes, Lord, you know I love you; Yes, Lord, you know I love you; Lord, you know everything, you know I love you". We want to hear Jesus' final words: "Follow me". And we want to respond.

12. ASCENSION



Read Acts 1:1-10.

Praying with the icon:

We take our stand with Mary and the Apostles as we are gathered into this mystery. We are at once in heaven and on earth: we stare in amazement and wonder, but our feet are on the earth. We know that Christ has passed beyond our sight, not to abandon us but to be our hope, to be present to us, indeed to be present in us, in a way beyond our imagining. With Mary and the Apostles we must go back into the city, we must continue in prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit and we must be available to the Lord in his new and real presence. Our prayer with this icon helps us realise that where He has gone, we hope one day to follow.

SESSION FIVE

13. PENTECOST



Read Acts 2:1-40.

Praying with the icon:

With great joy we enter the icon to sit in the company of Mary, Peter, Paul and the other Apostles. We wait our turn to be set on fire by the Spirit and to celebrate in our lives the gifts of the Spirit. Our personal world of darkness (emotional, social or spiritual) is forever illuminated by the light of the Spirit. Our personal Pentecost will mean that we will always be part of the Community of the Spirit - the Church. We will live by the Word and we will let the Spirit use us to build up the Body of Christ in our own context.

14. THE DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

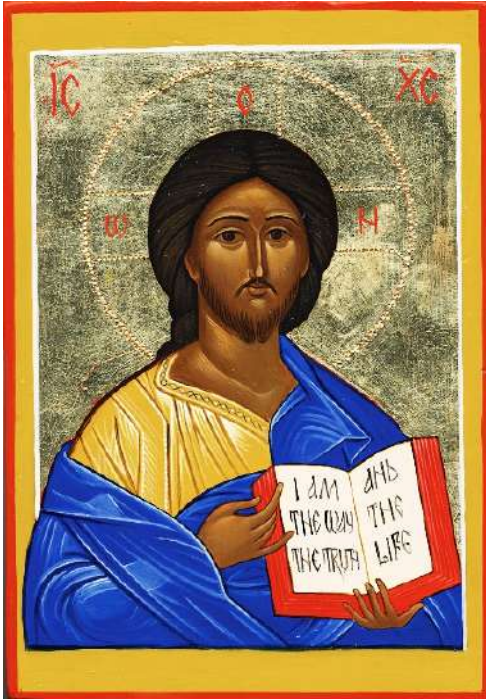


Read Revelation 12:1-17.

Praying with the icon:

We are challenged to entrust ourselves to the fact that if our Blessed Mother experienced an assumption, so will we one day. Just as Mary received her eternal blessing upon such a painful and challenging earthly life for the sake of her Son's mission, we are drawn to share in His saving mission by being willing to suffer with Him. Just as we see Christ receiving His Mother into His eternal Kingdom, we must trust that our sufferings in life are not for nothing, and that God's eternal Kingdom also awaits us.

15. THE PANTOKRATOR – RULER OF ALL



Read Revelation 1:1-8.

Praying with the icon:

This icon reveals the face of the Risen and Glorified Lord, Jesus the Christ. If I am still looking for a path through life, Jesus offers himself as the Way. May my path merge with Jesus, the living Way to the Father. Having Him, I don't need to run after the latest trends. If I am still perplexed or hesitant about my own inner integrity or about my Christian heritage, Jesus stands before me with divine confidence, announcing himself as The Truth and drawing me by his own integrity. If my life is slipping away or I am at a loss about its meaning or significance, Jesus is The Life that will make my life wonderful again. Can I set out on The Way? Can I face The Truth? Can I enjoy The Life?