

**Message from Fr. Provincial, Fr. Alfred Grech, OCD, May 4, 2008  
at St. Clement's Church in Etobicoke  
Feast of St Teresa of Jesus**

I would like to start with this story: They asked Macarius saying: "How should we pray?" and the old man said: "There is no need of much speaking in prayer, but often stretch out your hands and say, "Lord, as you want and as you know, have mercy on me." But if there is war in your soul, add, "Help me." And because He knows what we have need of, He will show us His mercy."

**Introductory Prayer**

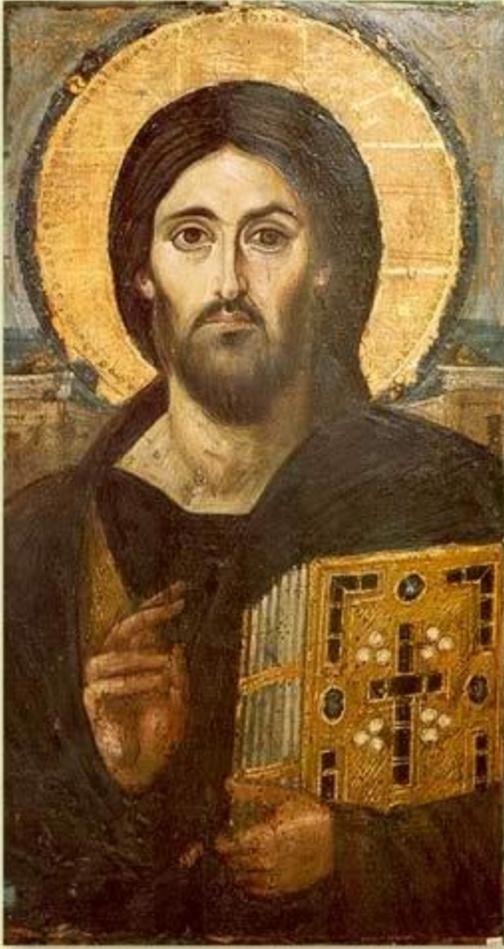
O Lord, grant us to greet this meeting in peace. Help us in all things to reply upon Your holy will. In every hour of our days reveal Your will to us. Bless our dealings with all, who surround us. Teach us to treat all that comes to us throughout our life with peace of soul, and with firm conviction that Your will governs all. In all our deeds and words guide our thoughts and feelings. In the unforeseen events let us not forget that all are sent by You. Teach us to act firmly and wisely, without embittering and embarrassing others. Give us strength to bear the fatigue of the future with all that they shall bring. Direct our will, teach us to pray, pray You Yourself in us, open our ears and heart to your Word. This we ask in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

First I am going to give a description of the icon of the Pantocrator.

**Description of the Pantocrator Icon**

The Monastery of St. Catharine in Egypt's Sinai is a wonderful place, interesting in every respect, but it is not famous throughout the world simply for its facilities nestled up against the foot of Mount Sinai. The monastery has one of the largest collections of ancient illuminated manuscripts in the world, as well as one of the most important collections of icons which number over 2,000 large and small, some unique masterpieces while others are simple works of art. They are spread throughout the complex, with some in the Katholikon, the chapels, the icon gallery, the sacristy and even in the monks' cells. They were produced during various periods between the 6th and 19th century, with every period adding new treasures to the monastery's vast collection.

Explanation of the expression of the face and eyes: the 2 natures of Jesus: Divine and Human. On one part, the left, we have the Divine/Judge (cover one side, then the other); on the other, the right, we have the Human/a weeping eye, suffering, compassionate.



Christ Pantocrator

This is an early image of the Christ Pantocrator. Wearing a tunic (chiton) and a draped outer garment (himation), Christ makes the sign of blessing with the right hand and holds in the left a very thick Gospel-book with a cover adorned with jewels asymmetrical with a melancholic expression, the rather short beard has an inward curve and the hair falls back over the left shoulder.

The exceptionally high quality of the painted icon suggests that it must have been the product of a Constantinopolitan iconographer in Justinian's age. This may be further confirmed by the fact that the iconographical type it represents was created at the time when Justinian was emperor, although we cannot be absolutely certain about that. It should be remembered at this point that the Monastery of St. Catherine had been founded by Justinian and that the emperor had presumably sent various gifts to the Monastery, including perhaps this very icon.

At one time the icon was dated to the 13th century. However, its cleaning and conservation in 1962 revealed the original encaustic layer, thus pointing to a much earlier date in the 6th or 7th century. (.85 x .45 meters).

Encaustic Icons

The encaustic technique uses wax and vegetal pigments mixed at high temperature and spread on a wooden surface, and the icons produced with this technique are of considerable historical and artistic value. This method required the artist to create a preliminary drawing of the subject on wood, or very rarely, marble panels and then apply the still warm mixture to the surface using either a brush or a hot iron. The artist would then work on the colors by rubbing the mixture into the painted surface using a special instrument. The mixture penetrates deeply into the pores of the material and when it cooled the colors become indelible. The earliest icons were produced using the encaustic technique, which was used until the 7th century AD, when it was replaced by the secco or tempera painting as is the use nowadays.

Reading: Luke 24.13-35 Emmaus

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scripture the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflections

They were leaving Jerusalem: the place of pain, disappointment, failure, death. Running away from reality. Jesus comes with us on the road of life when we are completely confused and disappointed.

They were not able to recognize Him. He now possesses a resurrected body. They are still fixed on death, on the cross!

He is with them/us as we walk on our way in life. They are sad because they do not understand what

has happened to them. They consider themselves a failure: totally disappointed.

For them Christ, this fellow Who is walking with them, is a total stranger. He is someone outside reality: He is just a "visitor to Jerusalem".

We had hoped ... He was the one (the one foretold by the prophets). Now we have no more hope: totally discouraged!

Woman: good only for word and ... to produce and take care of children. Their witness was not valid. They were never asked to give witness. They could not be trusted. They imagine things: too sentimental!

They were amazed by what the women said. "He was alive." They never imagined that such a thing could happen: They were totally blind to what happened and to what Jesus had foretold. In fact they underlined the fact: "but Him they did not see".

Jesus rebukes them. He does not tell them that they are bad people. He is not angry. He is just sorry for them, sorry to see them so blind, foolish, and hard to believe. They were not able to understand what Scriptures said about Jesus, even if they said that they had hoped He was the one. They expected a triumphant Messiah, not a Suffering Servant! For them nothing made sense. What they perceived was that all their hopes had vanished. They were closed within their own pain, and suffering had blinded them completely.

Jesus explains to them how "it was necessary" for Him to pass through suffering/cross/death. Salvation could not come through the refusal of the Suffering Servant. He had to take upon Himself all our sins. No glory without the Cross! He opened to them the Scriptures, which before was a sealed Book (cf Revelations). The Scriptures speak constantly of Jesus ("He who doesn't know the Scriptures, does not know Jesus." (St. Jerome).

He "appeared" to be going further on. He knew what was going to happen. He knew He was going to reveal Himself to them. He wanted them to "constrain" Him to go into their home. He wanted them to ask Him to stay. It had to be their initiative, their need.

The perfect prayer when, like these disciples, we are tired and disappointed: "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." The night is dark and frightful: please, come into my house, come into my life!

What does Jesus do? He comes in to stay with us.

They recognized Him in the breaking of the bread: the Eucharist: the sacrament of the Risen Lord. He took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. The Eucharist opened their eyes and they recognized Him.

He vanished out of their sight. The moment of contemplation is short. But immediately they recalled what happened to them on the road. His presence was felt even when they were not prepared to recognize Him. He is there even when we fail to see Him or recognize him in our history.