



Dolorosa

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUNE 2018



“From the earliest days of the Church,” writes Joan Carroll Cruz in *Miraculous Images of Our Lady*, “images were painted on the walls of the catacombs as religious expressions of the faithful, as acts of veneration and as aids in visualizing Our Lord, His miracles and His holy Mother” (xi). It is evident, then, that from the earliest times Christians have prayed in front of holy images. We do not, of course, pray to holy images since they have neither life nor power of themselves to help us; we pray, rather, *before* them. We do this, as we read in the Baltimore Catechism No. 2, “because [such images] enliven our devotion by exciting pious affections and desires, and by reminding us of Christ and of the Saints, that we may imitate their virtues” (no. 344).

For centuries, however, a large number of Protestants have misunderstood the veneration of holy images and statues. Moreover, they have often grossly misrepresented the Catholic teaching on such, even going so far as to accuse the Catholic Church of idolatry. Nothing, however, is further from the truth. Saint John of the Cross tells us, as related by Joan Carroll Cruz, that

the Church established the use of statues (and images) for two principal reasons: the reverence given to the Saints through them and the motivation of the will and the awakening of devotion to the Saints by their means. Insofar as they serve this purpose their use is profitable and necessary. . . . (xi)

The veneration of holy images is thus a powerful means of preserving recollection and of inspiring us to imitate the virtues and lives of Our Lady and the Saints.

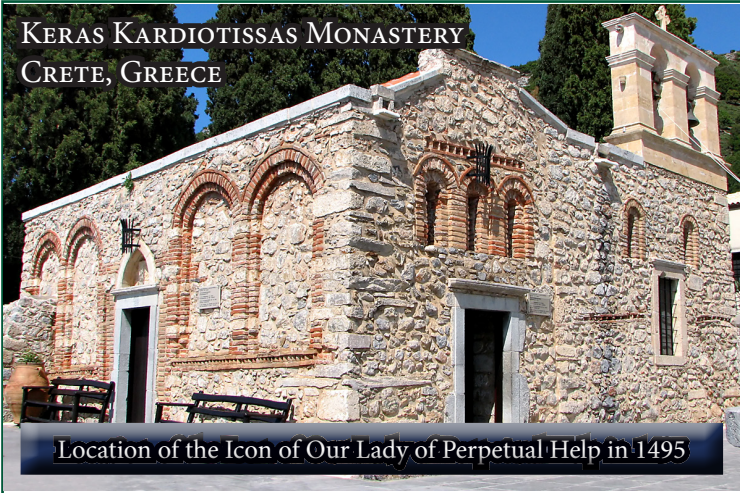
Without a doubt, the most popular holy image or statue found in churches and homes throughout the world is that of the Mother of God. It would be quite a task, indeed, for someone to walk into a truly Catholic Church and not find some image or statue of the Blessed Virgin. Of these Marian images, perhaps the most well known and cherished is the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

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Many authors agree that this image of the Mother of God was painted sometime in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The documented history of the painting can be traced back to 1495.

Initially, the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was kept and venerated at a church on the island of Crete. When the Turks threatened to invade the island, it was carried off by a merchant. Some authors say that the merchant stole the icon, but others relate that he took it to prevent its desecration by the Turks. At any rate, he brought the painting with him to Rome, and while en

KERAS KARDIOTISSAS MONASTERY
CRETE, GREECE



Location of the Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in 1495

route, he was even delivered from a violent storm at sea by praying before it.

While in Rome, the merchant fell seriously ill. Before his death, he gave the icon to a friend and asked him to see to it that this picture of Our Lady be enshrined in one of the Roman churches so that the faithful could venerate it. "His friend, however," writes Father Thomas Flynn, C.C., in *Sermons on Our Blessed Lady*,

had conceived so extraordinary a regard for the picture that he was unwilling to part with it, even after having been warned in a dream that he should be punished for not having carried out the wishes of its late owner. Soon afterward he, too, fell ill and died, and the picture came into the possession of his wife, who was equally reluctant to dispose of it. (276-277)

The Blessed Virgin appeared to the lady's daughter and asked the girl to instruct her mother to have the image placed in one of the churches between those of Saint Mary Major and Saint John Lateran. "Tell her," Our Lady said, "that Holy Mary of Perpetual Help commands this." Even after this, the mother refused to part with the picture. It was only after witnessing the miraculous cure of a friend who was healed by merely touching the icon that the lady decided to accede to the wishes of the deceased merchant. Thus, on March 27, 1499, the miraculous image was carried in solemn procession to the Church of Saint Matthew on the Esquiline Hill. "For the next 300 years," writes Joan Carroll Cruz, "the image hung in Saint Matthew's church, where innumerable favors were granted to people who prayed in its chapel" (194-195).

In 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte ordered the invasion of Rome. Pope Pius VI was consequently forced into exile. Churches were demolished. Sacred vessels and holy images were destroyed. In fact, Cruz relates that "almost thirty churches, including the Church of Saint Matthew," were destroyed by the French during this invasion of Rome (195).

Foreseeing what was to befall Saint Matthew's Church, some of the Augustinian monks who were caretakers of the church removed the miracle-working image of Our Lady before Napoleon's forces arrived. For many years, the icon was lost to the rest of the world.

Over forty years later, in 1840, an elderly Augustinian monk, named Brother Augustine Orsini,



THE REDEMPTORIST CHURCH OF SAINT ALPHONSUS
ROME, ITALY

Enshrined above the tabernacle is the original icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.



noticed it hanging in the monastery of Santa Maria in Posterula. Brother Augustine was the last living friar of the monastic community which had resided at Saint Matthew's. He vividly remembered the miraculous image and its wonderful history, and he eagerly related the history of the image to anyone who would listen. Among those interested in the image was one of the altar boys—Michael Marchi.

About thirteen years later, in 1853, Pope Pius IX requested that the Redemptorists open a religious house in Rome. The superior general of the congregation chose to do this on a portion of land located between the basilicas of Saint Mary Major and Saint John Lateran. It was, in fact, the very soil, or at least adjacent land, on which the Church of Saint Matthew had once stood.

One day a certain Redemptorist priest was speaking to some fellow priests about the history of the site of their new house. He mentioned that he had learned that a miraculous image of Our Lady had once been venerated there, but that it had been lost. Hearing this, one of the other priests spoke up, informing him that the painting had not been lost but was currently hanging in the chapel Santa Maria in Posterula. That priest was none other than Michael Marchi, the former altar boy.

By a decree of Pope Pius IX, the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was solemnly enshrined in the Church

of Saint Alphonsus in April 1866 on the Esquiline Hill—the very area Our Lady herself had requested it be venerated so many years before. A little over a year after this, the Vatican ordered that the icon should be crowned. Thus, on June 23, 1867, after a Solemn Mass and amid joyous hymns, two golden crowns set with jewels were blessed. They were then placed on the icon—one on the head of the Blessed Mother, the other on the head of the Divine Infant.

“Pope Pius IX,” relates Joan Carroll Cruz, “also fixed the feast of the image for the Sunday before the feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist” (196). The feast was later moved to June 27th. In May 1876, Pius IX gave papal approval to a special Office and Mass in honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. This Office and Mass the pope permitted to be used exclusively by the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, the Redemptorists. “Since [that time],” as we read in the Office for the Feast:

the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help has been made famous by such numerous and such wonderful miracles, that within the space of a few years, devotion to it has spread throughout the whole world.

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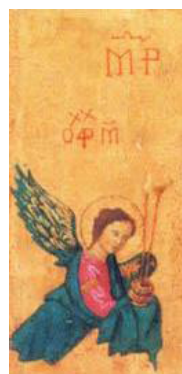
An icon is a form of religious imagery used especially by the Eastern Rite Church. According to eastern custom, many icons were plated with gold or silver. It was also usual to have a brief inscription painted into the picture itself explaining the subject or story represented by the image.

The inscription on the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help consists of Greek characters which identify the persons depicted. The initials “MP TV” near the crown of Our Lady stand for “Mother of God.” The symbols next to the Christ Child “IC XC” are an abbreviation of “Jesus Christ.” The smaller letters over the angels’ heads identify the one on the left as Saint Michael and the one on the right as Saint Gabriel.

Interestingly, the artist even made use of certain colors to teach the viewer. Our Lady is clothed in a tunic

of dark red with a mantle of dark blue lined with green. Such colors are symbolic of royalty, but there is also another meaning behind them: dark red is said to have been the color usually worn by virgins at Our Lord's time, and dark blue was the color commonly worn by mothers in Palestine. The Christ Child is also depicted wearing the colors of royalty, green and gold.

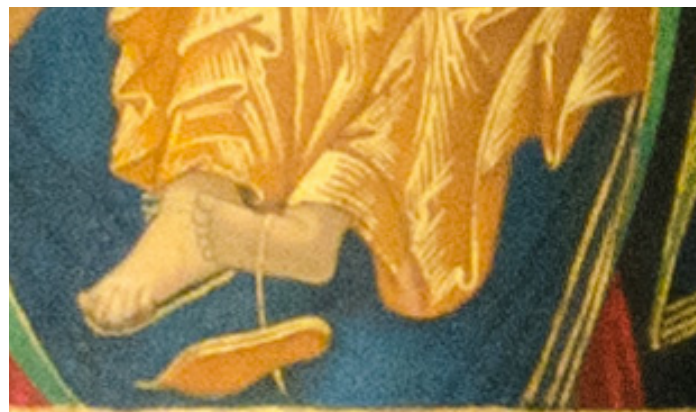
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The icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help tells a rather touching story about the Mother of God and her Divine Son. One day, the Christ Child saw the archangels Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel standing by looking at Him. They held in their hands the instruments of the Passion. Saint Michael bore the lance, which would one day pierce Jesus' sacred side, and the reed with the sponge saturated in vinegar and gall. Saint Gabriel was holding the Cross and the nails which were destined to pierce Our Lord's hands and feet on the first Good Friday.



Seeing these cruel instruments foreshadowing His future torments and death, the Child Jesus grew fearful. He was frightened at the sight of these objects which would one day cause Him so much pain and suffering. So, what did He do? He did what all children do when they are scared of something—He rushed to His Mother. He ran as quickly as His little legs could move. He ran so fast, in fact, that one of His sandals came unloosed and was about to fall off His little foot.



On reaching His Blessed Mother, Jesus leaped into her arms. He firmly wrapped His tiny hands around hers, confident that she would protect Him from all danger. There, in His Mother's arms, He remained while she calmed His fears.



This is the story depicted in the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. This is the instruction that the Mother of God gives us through the wonder-working icon: she will always be there to protect her children from the threat of danger and in all their fears and worries. As Our Lady did for the Child Jesus, so will she do for us—she will hold us safely in her arms, she will shield us from danger, she will calm our fears. But we must, like Jesus, rush to her. We must run to her as soon as danger, fear, or worry strike.

As Our Lady did for the Child Jesus, so will she do for us—she will hold us safely in her arms, she will shield us from danger, she will calm our fears. But we must, like Jesus, rush to her.

What greater peril do we face on a daily basis than the danger of falling into sin by yielding to temptation? Indeed, “the devil,” as Saint Peter explains in his first epistle, “as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour” (5:8). In other words, the devil roams this world as a lion on the hunt, and we are the prey.

Satan knows his time is short. He understands that soon he will be cast into the fires of hell never again to emerge to tempt another soul. So, while he still has

time, the devil does all in his power to convince us to sin. To do this, he makes use of temptation and even frequently employs his ally the world. He attacks some people with temptations to impatience, whether with oneself or with others. He assaults others with temptations against holy purity. He bombards still others with temptations to uncharitable thoughts, words, and actions. We are all tempted in so many ways each day.

We, therefore, must take care to differentiate between sin and temptation. Temptation is not sin. No matter how often we are tempted, no matter how intense our temptations are, they are not sins. Just because someone is tempted does not mean he is a bad person. In fact, the opposite is often true. Saint Hilary of Poitiers, one of the great Doctors of the Church, tells us that “the temptations of the devil principally assail those who are holy because he desires, above all, to overcome the holy.” Many saints—Saint Paul, Saint Catherine of Siena, and Saint John Vianney, to name a few—were assaulted with violent temptations. These saints used the devil’s own tool against him. They used temptation to increase their merit in heaven. They used their temptations as stepping stones to sanctity. So it must be with us. Like the saints, we must wage war against temptation, for by resisting it, we will prepare for ourselves a far more glorious place in heaven.

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In the Book of Ecclesiasticus, we read, “Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation” (2:1). We should not, then, be surprised however great, however frequent, however strong our temptations are. We should, rather, expect them and be prepared for them. At times, it is true, the onslaught of temptation can be overwhelming. We cannot allow ourselves, however, to be discouraged by them. We cannot permit ourselves to be downcast.

We must be ever mindful that we are not alone in this battle. The devil may go about as a roaring lion seeking to devour us, but Our Blessed Mother with her Divine Son, the Good Shepherd, goes about seeking to deliver us from the mouth of the lion. We must, then, rush to Our Mother of Perpetual Help the very moment temptation strikes. We must run to her so quickly that our shoe would fall off because we ran so fast. We must go to Our Lady by invoking her with little aspirations, such as “Mother Mary, help me!” “Mother, Most Pure, pray for me!” “Mother Mary, make me patient!” “Mother of Charity, help me to be charitable!” “Mother of Perpetual Help, pray for me!”



If we are faithful in this, we can be sure that Our Lady will not turn a deaf ear to our pleas, but seeing us running in her direction, she will rush towards us. She will pick us up in her arms, and she will hold us close to her. There, in Our Mother’s arms, we can remain while she carries us through the storms of this life and leads us along the path to the never-ending happiness of heaven.