



Mary Mother of God Mission Society

Reviving the Catholic Church in Eastern Russia

An Explanation of the Icon of Our Lady of Vladivostok

By Father Damien Higgins

The icon of the Most Holy Mother of God of Vladivostok was painted in the 1993 at the request of Fr Myron Effing, C.J.D., Pastor of the parish in Vladivostok, Russia. He had sent me a graphic design that the Mission was using for its official parish seal. It was a black and white line drawing that included an image of the Mother of God enthroned with Our Lord and both of them had crowns.

The icon was painted while I was living at Holy Transfiguration Monastery of the Monks of Mount Tabor of the Ukrainian Catholic Church-Chicago Eparchy in Redwood Valley, California. It was painted (or “written”, which is the official way to speak about icons) on wood that is from church pews taken from the oldest Roman Catholic Church in Northern, California--St Mary's in Lakeport. The wood was prepared in the traditional manner soaked in rabbit skin glue, covered with a piece of fine linen from an old altar cloth and then coated with layers of gesso (crushed marble and rabbit skin glue). A fine layer of bole (red clay) was placed over the areas to which 23k gold would then be applied. The paint itself is egg yolk imbued with various natural pigments and after drying the entire work was then coated with a layer of olifa (Linseed and Stand oil with some drier added.)

The icon is modeled after a prototype from the Cretan School of Iconography in the 14th century. The Mother of God is presented in a solemn manner with Christ directly seated in front of her while her arms wrap around Him. She is not so much holding as presenting Him. The child is presented in the model of the Pantocrator (Byzantine title for the ruler of the universe). The iconographic type tends to emphasize not the emotional relationship between mother and child but rather the theological. The Mother of God is cloaked in a deep red robe that symbolizes the participation in the divine mystery of incarnation giving flesh and blood to this reality. Her under garment is a rich blue that reveals the glorious nature of relationship with her Divine Son. It has however been taught that the blue represents her humanity while the red represents her participation in the Divine Plan. Christ is dressed in the colors not of His earthly ministry (red and blue) but rather in the colors of heavenly glory and eternal light. Both white and gold represent these realities. The throne upon which the sit is green to reflect both the color of the earth where this mysterious relationship between Mary and her son takes place as well as that in the Slavic tradition--green is the color used for Pentecost and the coming of the Giver of Life. The letters surrounding the figures indicate Mother of God, Theotokos and Jesus Christ. Without the names, the icon would not be authentic. They are both crowned with wooden crowns that are set with jewels.

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