The Icon of God the Father

Oh, God, Almighty Father...
PRESENTATION

In order to make the Father known in Eastern countries, in which devotional sensitivity is expressed by means of “icons”, the White Army commissioned Lia Galdiolo, one of the most famous contemporary iconographers, to create an icon of the picture of the Father just as He had revealed Himself to Mother Eugenia.

But why an icon of the Father? So that the Father may be “known, honoured and loved by all men”, as He himself requested in the Message He gave in 1932 and whose authenticity was recognized by the Church after ten years of rigorous examination:

“I also desire that every family prominently display the picture I will later show to My “little daughter”. I wish every family to be able to place itself under My special protection in this way, so that they can honour Me more easily. There, every day, the family will share with Me its needs, its work, its sorrows, its sufferings, its desires, and also its joys, because a Father must know everything that concerns His children. I do know it, of course, because I am there, but I love simplicity. I
know how to adapt Myself to your condition. I make Myself little with little ones; I make Myself an adult with adults; and the same with the elderly, so that all may comprehend what I wish to tell them for their sanctification and My glory. I also desire that this picture be exposed in all public places, in offices, in homes, in barracks, in schools…”

In this era of ecumenism, in the Father we can acknowledge each other as His children and in Him we receive the strength to eliminate barriers and bring about the unity which Jesus so desired: “That they may be one, Father, as we also are one” (Jn 17:22).

We believe that even our Eastern brothers can recognize the Father in this icon, and it would be so wonderful if, from east to west, the same Father was “known, honoured and loved” in every home. It is an icon, but even an icon can be a sign of unity.

I would like to thank don Piero Brazzale – one of Italy’s greatest experts – who has the kindness to teach us how to pray with the icon; I would also like to thank Lia Galdiolo who, after creating this icon at the price of so much prayer and suffering, now leads us to its comprehension and interpretation.

Fr. Andrea D’Ascanio o.f.m.

PRAYING WITH THE ICON

1 - What is an icon?

We are living in an era of images. Perhaps for this reason there is now a rediscovery of the value of images, in order to also encounter God and the supernatural.

It is only right that we enhance the ability we have using our eyes to contemplate what is beautiful and divine: guided by our faith.

Icons (sacred images), the products of prayer, silence and mortification, bring us into contact with something inspired; they convey what God wishes to pass on to us by means of the iconographer.

Therefore the images we contemplate, approved by the Church herself, give us a faith which is lived out by the Christian community, and converted into images. Authentic icons are a form of prayer, conveying a mes-
sage that has to be received, if possible, in the conditions as those in which they were born through the iconographer work, prayer, silence, fasting, mortification.

There is a wide variety of schools and origins, according to the talents, colours and dispositions of people.

It isn’t so easy and simple to approach every icon and immediately and fully grasp its meaning and its message.

Nevertheless, it is essential to keep in mind that icons do not express the artist’s personal inspiration, but the faith of the Church of which the iconographer is a minister, under the action of the Holy Spirit. That is why icons are not signed and do not bear the author’s name.

Icons are forms of sacred Christian art, through which the revelation and the life of the Church comes to us. By looking at icons with faith we can discover something invisible. The holy mysteries of faith are laid down in the icon as if in a cradle, so that we may receive them.

2 - How does one pray before an icon?

In order to fully understand the language of icons, we must make an effort which may be a bit difficult for us who belong to the Western world. We must understand the significance of certain attitudes, certain symbols and even colours.

If the icon is contemplated, it speaks to the heart. Faith is nurtured, it penetrates us, and it is enjoyed and strengthened.

The rediscovery of the importance of icons, in our times, isn’t therefore a “passing trend” (and we don’t want it to be this way!), but a desire to express our faith not only with words.

If every true icon “comes from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is then a visual prophecy, it is the Gospel conveyed in colour”.

It cannot simply be conceived as a work of art; it is a place of worship, that is to say, of prayer and contemplation. Prayer and faith experience are so closely related to the vision of an icon, as a sacred image. The Holy Cross, Scriptures and icons become objects of worship, that can almost be compared to the Eucharist. This isn’t an exaggeration!

3 - How should I place myself before it?

We cannot suggest enough, in order to understand and appreciate icons, to place ourselves before them in a manner which isn’t easy for us, especially in these troubled and noisy times. We must place ourselves in a
state of serene contemplation, with a humble and pure spirit. We look, listen, remain silent...

This is the right way for icons to become for us “effective symbols” of what they represent.

They are indeed images for our eyes of flesh, but also and above all for our eyes of faith. Icons are intended to be images of the invisible and teachers of faith.

One approaches the icon with respect, veneration, but also with mysterious wonder.

Therefore, if I approach the icon in this way, it will reawaken in me a pure and humble faith, which becomes strength and nourishment for an enriched and more complete Christian vitality.

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The icon is thus presented as an essential element of Christian catechesis alongside Sacred Scripture, since Word and Image are equivalent (Jn 18,30).

“Therefore, the icon is a means and an end. A means as the gateway to the heavenly world and an end as the real vision of our future condition, a condition in which every perfect Christian will be clothed with the spotless wedding dress, thanks to which he will enter the banquet of Paradise, prepared by Christ for his faithful servants”.

After the Incarnation of the Word, man is even more the visible image of God, “in whose image and likeness” he was created.

In this perspective it isn’t contradictory therefore that even the icon of God our Almighty Father has been built.
AN ICON WHICH THE FATHER HAS DESIRED

1 – The icon of God our Almighty Father was created thanks to the impassioned insistence of Father Andrea D’Ascanio (ofm Capp.) who desired to respond to the requests of God the Father himself using a worthy image.

In a marvellous way he revealed himself to a nun in the diocese of Grenoble in France in the 1930’s: Mother Eugenia Elisabetta Ravasio (S. Gervasio d’Adda (BG), 1907 – Rome, 1990).

The wisdom of the local bishop, H.E. Mons. Alexandre Caillot, who in 1935 instituted a commission of experts, drawn from various parts of France, for a meticulous and serious diocesan enquiry which lasted ten years, tells us that we have come across something extraordinarily remarkable, which mustn’t remain hidden any longer.
Mons. Caillot wrote:

«After ten years of research, reflection and prayer, I bless the Father for having deigned to choose my diocese as the place for such touching manifestations of His love».

The way in which the Father appeared to Mother Eugenia urged Fr. Andrea D’Ascanio to suggest that the iconographer Lia Galdiolo “compose” a beautiful, modern icon which took into account as much as possible, even down to the last detail, how He wanted to be seen and contemplated.

These are the Eternal Father’s words to Mother Eugenia Elisabetta Ravasio:

«I am now coming among men in order to love them and to make them know this love, assuming their image, their poverty. Look, now I am putting aside My crown and all My glory to take on the appearance of an ordinary man!»

The generous nun thus recalls those moments: «Having assumed the appearance of an ordinary man by placing His crown and His glory at His Feet, He took the globe of the world and held it to His Heart, supporting it with His left Hand. He then sat next to me. I can say but a few words about His arrival and about the appearance He deigned to assume, and about His love! In my ignorance I do not have words to express what He revealed to me».

It wasn’t easy for the iconographer Lia Galdiolo to keep this information in mind, become part of the experienced and glorious tradition of the physiognomy of real icons and give biblical contents to all the figurative elements she wanted to give to the drawing and to colours.

However, with contemplative prayer and with sacrifice it was possible to complete an icon which seems to truly correspond to the requests of our Almighty Father.

2 – In order to interpret and “pray” this icon, it could be very useful to read a few excerpts of the revelations of the Father to Mother Eugenia Ravasio, which we consider it appropriate to quote here:

«...Know, also, that I wish to be known, loved and, above all, honoured. May everyone recognize My infinite goodness towards all men, and especially towards all those who suffer. Let them know that I want only one thing: to love them all, to give them My grace, to forgive them when they repent and, most of all, to judge them not with My justice but with My mercy, so that all may be saved and numbered among My elect». 
«...Do not think of Me as that frightening old man whom men depict in their pictures and books! No, no, I am neither younger nor older than My Son and My Holy Spirit».

«...I would like to make My home in every family, as in My domain, so that all can say with absolute assurance: “We have a Father Who is infinitely good, infinitely rich and greatly merciful. He thinks about us and is close to us. He looks after us, supports us. He will give us everything we need if we ask Him. All his riches are ours, we will have everything we need.”

«...I also desire that every family prominently display the picture I will later show to My “little daughter”. I wish every family to be able to place itself under My special protection in this way, so that they can honour Me more easily. There, every day, the family will share with Me its needs, its work, its sorrows, its sufferings, its desires, and also its joys, because a Father must know everything that concerns His children».

«...See, I have laid My crown at My Feet and held the world to My Heart. I have left My glory in heaven and come here, becoming all things to all men, becoming poor with the poor and rich with the rich. I want to protect the young people as a tender Father. There is so much evil in the world! These poor, inexperienced souls are letting themselves be seduced by the attraction of vice which, little by little, leads to total ruin».

«...I desire that the tangible sign of My invisible presence be a picture to show that I am really present. Thus, all men will carry out all their actions under their Father’s gaze and I Myself will have before Me the creature that I have not only created but adopted. In this way, My children will be, as it were, under their tender Father’s gaze.»

«...I would like to be honoured in a very special way in seminaries, in novitiates, in schools and homes for the elderly. May everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, be able to know and love Me as their Father, Creator and Saviour».

This icon represents, with clarity and simplicity, what the Father desires to be, how He wants us to see Him and consider Him.

It was born through obedience, therefore in the silence of the heart, because in obedience there can only be undisturbed peace. There were many suggestions made by experts, which were humbly accepted by the iconographer.
And now... God the Father, who speaks in silence, wants us to place ourselves in front of Him in this very silence: waiting and listening.

The merciful and faithful God cannot disappoint our expectations and our hope.

**In fact, the icon is already a prayer!**

_Fr. Piero Brazzale_

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1 - The Title

God our Almighty Father wants men to contemplate His face through a sensitive image, through an iconographic image.

 Almighty God is patient and merciful in attracting the hearts of men, these hearts poisoned by the enemy in hell.

**Here is the icon of the Father.** Who is the Father? He is known by the titles “Deus omnipotens”, Holy and Almighty God and “Abbà – Pater”, Abba, Father: for Jesus of Nazareth and for all His brothers He is Dad: My Dad (Mk 14:36).
A series of providential circumstances tell us that God the Father desired this icon; it is pleasing to Him and it contains special strength and power.

Moreover, the theological content it expresses is faithful to the traditional doctrine of the Church and to recent private revelations which are considered reliable and authentic and approved by the Church. Therefore the icon, when used in a proper way, can have remarkable spiritual benefits. It is an artistic and elevated form of true contemplative prayer.

My goal is to summarize in the images the wealth of biblical texts. As iconographer, after having studied, with love and passion, the classical traditional form of creating icons, I developed my own personal style. Among my numerous sacred icons, “The Woman clothed with the sun”, “The merciful Jesus”, “The Holy Family” and “Saint Joseph” are well-known. After a long period of fasting, silence, prayer and suffering, we now have the icon of our Father.

2 – A window through which we can contemplate the divine

The plate is a rectangle. The number of sides (4) is an allusion to the four cardinal points and means that the message which God our Almighty Father wishes to communicate is pointed in all directions. It is, therefore, a message for the whole world.

The rectangular shape symbolizes a window on the Divine, which you can open from the earth: that window has an inside gilded frame. The gold symbolizes eternal light. The icon, therefore, is a window through which the divine can be contemplated. It is here that we can contemplate our Father. This definition of the icon is beautiful and evocative! There is a small red border that surrounds the outer frame of the plate. What does that small red border symbolize? It symbolizes the blood Jesus Christ shed on the cross. We can enjoy the beneficial effects of that blood through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

On His forehead we see a white shape, like a dove, and its open wings are above His eyebrows. None of the three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity works without the involvement of the other two.

Therefore, it is the icon of the Father, but we immediately notice that the Son and the Holy Spirit are also present.
3. The blue sphere

In His left hand the Father firmly holds a blue sphere and leans it on His chest. Let us dwell upon it for a moment because it has a fundamental importance in this icon. It is not only the world or the globe. The meaning is very complex, but wonderful.

After Adam’s sin, the Father drew back, and waited patiently for man, who was freed, to realize his mistake and return to Him. He waited for many millennia. In the meantime the Father prepared the plan of redemption which His merciful heart had foreseen.

This plan of salvation culminated with the coming of the Incarnate Word, the Son made man who, with His Passion and Death, allowed the Holy Spirit to communicate Himself to man again.

With Jesus’ “It is finished” on the cross, the plan which was so dear to the heart of the Father can finally...
continue: the divinization of man and through man a new creation.

This is what the blue sphere expresses: it is the Father’s plan of love which He rests on His heart and holds firmly in His hand. The blue points out that the plan, its execution and its fulfilment are divine works.

The Alpha and Omega which fill the entire sphere refer to the Word, the beginning and end of all things. In fact: “Everything was made through Him and in view of Him” (Jn 1:3).

A golden cross stands above the sphere. The cross is the throne of the Immolated Lamb, who has given Himself for the salvation of all men.

The gold symbolizes eternity. The Fathers of the Church tell us that “the cross was written in the Heart of God the Father from all eternity”.

How full of meaning is that blue sphere which the Father gently holds with His left hand!

4. – The figure of the Father fills the whole icon

It is in a perfectly frontal position, to indicate His willingness to reveal Himself to all who wish to know Him.

The figure is set in a golden almond drawn around His shoulders. Through it you enter the open skies.

The blue skies are inhabited by the heavenly spirits, who are closest to the throne of the Most High.

The 12 quivering flames represent all the angelic powers, among whom we can see the outline of the seraphim, i.e., the spirits burning with love: six to the right and six to the left.

The seraphim contemplate with wonder the extraordinary and unpredictable action of God the Father, who operates continuously through His infinite love and endless mercy.

The number 12 symbolizes “responsible authority”: like the 12 apostles, patriarchs and the stars which adorn the Woman clothed with the sun, etc. The 12 seraphim not only contemplate, but are also faithful messengers and do the Father’s will.

5. – The face

Philip said to Jesus: “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us”. Jesus answered:
Trinity. Therefore, this icon inspired me for the detail of omitting a beard and also for the colours of the tunic and mantle.

Here, then, according to the canons of Eastern iconographic tradition, is that majestic face which inspires peace, strength and serenity.

The head is surrounded by a white halo, signifying glory. It is marked by the Greek initial letters (omicron, omega, eta, ni) of the name revealed by God to Moses on Mount Horeb: “I am who am” (Ex. 3:14): I am the reason for existence.

The black hair signifies the “divine darkness” or mystery that is inaccessible to the human mind. It opens like a veil in the middle of the forehead, as the sky opens to show the light.

The hair is covered by golden “strigils”, like the veil of the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem, which was rent from top to bottom when the heart of Jesus was pierced by the lance, when enmity with God was removed and man was once again able to contemplate God’s countenance. This is the meaning of the black and golden hair.

The small lips are shown in the act of breathing the live-giving Spirit. This is also manifested in the bulging neck.

The eyes look at all with love and tenderness. They await a response from all of us.
Behind the figure there is a glimpse of the third sky, the place of eternal happiness to which God wishes to lead us all.

6. The tunic and the mantle

The blue tunic and the red mantle point out who God our Almighty Father is for us. The blue of the tunic signifies divinity. The red mantle expresses God’s wisdom and ardent love.

These colours are clear, transparent and almost fluorescent, as if they are diffused with the light of the Transfiguration.

The very ample and imposing mantle means acceptance and the edge, which touches the earth, wants to point out to all people that if they want, they can cling to His mantle to receive the Holy Spirit. The mantle itself which is accepted can be a sign of a precious inheritance which is accepted, in order to cherish it faithfully. Like Eliseus…who, with great appreciation, received Elijah’s mantle: a sign of his spiritual inheritance (1 Kings 19:19).

7. – Significant details

Some other very significant details are: the bench, the two pillows, the right hand, the sceptre, the royal crown and the position of the feet.

a) The bench on which the Almighty Father is sitting is very simple, because He desires that we sit beside Him without hesitation or fear. However, because of His Divine presence, although of modest design, it is covered with rays of gold.

b) The two pillows point out that God (the blue pillow on the left) and man (the red one on the right) can converse together, in the same place, like at the beginning of creation.

c) The right hand is raised in an expansive attitude of blessing because, like a good Father, He does not want to judge the world, but save it, confirming the mission entrusted to His Son. In fact, Jesus said: “Go then and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mt 9:13).

d) The sceptre, the symbol of judgement, has been placed on the ground between His feet: the Father only wishes to exercise mercy.
e) The royal crown, placed beside the sceptre by the right foot, is an invitation not to be afraid to approach Him. He wants to remove the uneasiness in us and wants to draw us to Him and receive us on His Fatherly knees.

f) Although the Father is sitting, His feet are in the position of someone who is about to depart. The Father wishes to come towards us and stay with us. They too are surrounded by the halo of sanctity. The black that surrounds the feet is not a sign of the sandals or shoes; it is a sign of the “divine darkness”: a sign of the infinite wealth and wisdom of God, whose knowledge is never ending.

What a wealth of theological contents and how beneficial for our devotion and our spiritual life!

This icon is something to be contemplated, not studied! It was born in prayer. It must be used in prayer and for prayer. It is thus a powerful aid in prayer and union with God.

It brings to life, or makes, present, the divine person or saint who is represented in the icon. In this case it makes our Father alive and present.

May this icon help us, then, to achieve a filial and affectionate encounter with God, our Almighty Father.

Lia Galdiolo
My Father, since it is Your wish that we should always turn to You, I come with confidence to ask You, together with Jesus and Mary... (here request the favour that you desire).

For this intention, and unifying myself to their Most Sacred Hearts, I offer You all my prayers, my sacrifices and mortifications, all my actions, and greater faithfulness to my duties*.

Give me the light, the grace and the power of the Holy Spirit! Strengthen me in this Spirit, that I may never lose Him, never sadden Him and never allow Him to become weaker in me.

My Father, I ask this in the name of Jesus, Your Son! And You, Jesus, open Your Heart and place in it my own, and, together with Mary’s, offer it to our divine Father! Obtain for me the grace that I need!

Divine Father, call all men to Yourself. Let all the world proclaim Your fatherly goodness and Your divine mercy! Be a tender Father to me and protect me wherever I am, like the apple of Your eye. Make me always a worthy son/daughter; have mercy on me!

Divine Father, sweet hope of our souls, May You be known, honoured and loved by all men!
Divine Father, infinite goodness poured out on all peoples, May You be known, honoured and loved by all men!
Divine Father, beneficent dew of humanity, May You be known, honoured and loved by all men!

My Father in Heaven, how sweet it is to know that You are my Father and that I am Your child!

Especially when the skies of my soul are cloudy and my cross weighs more heavily, I feel the need to repeat to You: Father, I believe in Your love for me!

Yes, I believe that You are a Father to me at every moment of my life, and that I am Your child!
I believe that You love me with an infinite love!
I believe that You are watching over me night and day and that not a hair falls from my head without Your permission!
I believe that, in Your infinite Wisdom, You know better than I what is good for me.
I believe that, in Your infinite power, You can bring good even out of evil.
I believe that, in Your infinite goodness, You make everything to the advantage of those who love You; even under the hands of those who strike me I kiss Your hand which heals!
I believe, but increase in me faith, hope and love!
Teach me always to see Your love as my guide in every event of my life.
Teach me to surrender myself to You like a baby in its mother’s arms.
Father, You know everything, You see everything, you know me better than I know myself; You can do everything, and You love me!

My Father, I promise to be more generous, especially during these nine days, in a given circumstance, to such and such a person…*
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Why an icon of the Father?  
Because the Father Himself requested it:

“I desire that every family prominently display My picture.  
I desire every family to be able to place itself under My special protection in this way.  
I desire that you bring Me into all families, hospitals, laboratories, workshops, barracks, conference halls of the ministers of nations - in short, wherever My creatures are, even if there were only one of them!”

(quoted from:  
“The Father speaks to His children”)
