

## *The True Ikon*

Homily for September 3, 2021

Our readings today celebrate a wonderful idea. Jesus is the Icon of God. What is an Icon? It is a representation and symbol of a dimension of the life of the Church. Here is a reproduction of an Icon, called the Sitka Icon that hangs in St. Michael's Cathedral in Alaska. Here is an Icon of the Holy Family, which I was given to me when I was in the Holy Land almost three years ago.

In today's reading from Colossians St Paul says that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. The English word "image" is in Greek, the language in which Paul wrote Colossians, the word "ikon". Jesus because of his incarnation is the true Ikon, not just a symbol, like the representations you see here.

So let's see what our readings say to us about Jesus as the true Ikon that is image of God.

From our Gospel we read that Jesus is the true bridegroom for Jesus says that the guests do not fast when the bridegroom is with them. Now why would Jesus call himself the bridegroom? In part, because he knew he was the fulfillment of Isaiah 54.5 where we read:

*For your Maker is your husband,  
the LORD of hosts is his name;  
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,  
the God of the whole earth he is called.<sup>1</sup>*

As the husband of Israel the Prophet Isaiah also says the Lord is Israel's Maker and Redeemer. Now with this in mind listen again to our reading from Colossians and what the Apostle says about Jesus the creator and redeemer.

<sup>15</sup> *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;*

So when St Paul says that Jesus is the first born he is developing the Ikon theme. In Jesus the character of God described in Isaiah 54 is incarnate, it takes on flesh because Jesus is the Ikon of God. Now remember back in Isaiah we are told that the one who is Israel's husband is also their creator:

<sup>16</sup> *for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible,  
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him  
and for him.<sup>2</sup>*

This is exactly what Paul says when describing Jesus. He is

---

<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Is 54:5). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Col 1:15–16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

1. The first born of creation
2. In him all things, whether visible or invisible – in other words the whole universe and heavenly dimensions were created through him and for him.

Now think about how in Isaiah our husband is also called “The Lord of Hosts”. Hosts means the angels of heaven. Do you hear how St. Paul describes Jesus as the Lord of Hosts, because all things in heaven and earth were created for him, which means they are to worship him.

But not only is the Isaiah’s husband our creator he is also our redeemer:

***and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,***

the passage says.

Now listen again to the second part of our reading from Colossians:

***He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. <sup>3</sup>***

Here Jesus is the first born from the dead so that we could be redeemed. What does it mean to be redeemed? It means to be bought back, to be restored to our rightful relationship with God. To be reconciled. And here is a dimension of our hope highlighted by St Paul. Ultimately all things will be reconciled to Jesus and so in the present we was to embody this image of reconciliation by how we are living.

Here is the beautiful teaching of this passage. When we experience a deeper conversion in our own lives, when we come to see Jesus as the bridegroom and ourselves as the bride of Christ, the old wine skins of our heart cannot hold in what we are discovering about Jesus and ourselves.

Pope Gregory who was pontiff from 590-604 spoke wrote honestly about how he saw himself as an imperfect ikon and representative of Christ. But such was his confidence in Jesus that he trustingly wrote:

Who am I — what kind of watchman am I? I do not stand on the pinnacle of achievement, I languish rather in the depths of my weakness. And yet the creator and redeemer of mankind can give me, unworthy though I be, the grace to see life whole and power to speak effectively of it. It is for love of him that I do not spare myself in preaching him.

---

<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (Col 1:17–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

When we come to see in Jesus the true Ikon of God and as we are transformed by taking to heart and pondering in our mind what this means for us, we in turn can become living Ikons of Christ, just as was one of the Church's greatest Popes, Gregory.