

Praying with Icons

Reflection Guide



Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Church
7075 Ashworth Road
West Des Moines, Iowa
515.440.1030
saintfrancischurch.org/adultfaith

What are icons?

An icon is a painted panel with a representation of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or saints.

These images are regarded as windows into the eternal world of revelation and meant to capture, to a very limited degree, the realities of the Gospel and the ways in which the person depicted revealed the presence of God through their life.

For many years icons played a similar role in the Eastern churches that statues do in the West. Recently icons have been used more in the Western Church.

It is important to note that all veneration (honor) and reverence (deep respect) are referred to the one whose image is portrayed, and not to the image or icon itself.

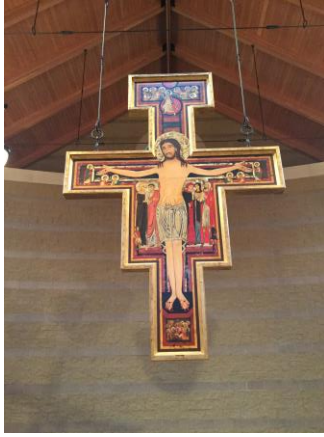
As Catholics we do not worship images, statues or icons – for God alone we reserve our worship.

Brother William Woeger, a Christian Brother from Omaha, Nebraska, painted all of the icons in our Worship Center, including the San Damiano cross.

How do I pray with an icon?

There is no “right” way to pray with and no “correct” way to interpret an icon, yet a beginner may appreciate some initial guidance. So, if this is your first time praying with an icon, here are some suggestions:

1. Pull up a chair or find a pew near the icon and plan to spend at least 5 minutes there, but be open to a longer period of time.
2. Sit comfortably with your back straight, head over your shoulders, and hands placed open on your lap.
3. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
4. Ask the Holy Spirit to be with you during your prayer time.
5. Open your eyes – and your heart – and gaze softly at the icon, perhaps starting with the eyes of one of the persons depicted.
6. From there, allow your eyes and your heart to wander anywhere they are led within the icon.
7. If you like, notice colors, shapes and lines.
8. Consider what captures your attention and wonder in your heart why that might be.
9. End your prayer time by thanking God for your time together.



San Damiano Cross

The cross hanging in our sanctuary is a replica of the icon cross which hangs in Santa Chiarra (St. Clare) Church in Assisi, Italy. It is an icon cross because it contains images of people who have a part in the meaning of the cross, including:

Christ Crucified Christ is represented both as wounded and as strong. He stands upright and resolute.

Major witnesses The five center figures represent the witnesses of the crucifixion and witnesses of Jesus as Lord. On the left is Mary, mother of Jesus, and John, on the right are Mary Magdala, Mary, mother of James, and the centurion who represents a Christian witness.

Minor witnesses Two smaller figures represented are Longinus, the Roman soldier who pierced the side of Jesus with a lance, and Stephaton, the soldier who offered Jesus the sponge soaked in vinegar.

Angels Six angels are positioned at both ends of the crossbar.

Heavenly welcome On the top of the cross, Jesus, fully clothed and carrying the cross as a triumphant scepter, is climbing out of the tomb and into the heavenly courts.

Right Hand of God At the top of the cross is Jesus being raised from the dead to the right hand of God the Father.

Consider...

What do your eyes see?

What does your heart see?

How is God speaking to you in love through this icon?



Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Our Lady of Perpetual Help is a title of Mary, the Mother of God, emphasizing her unfailing eagerness to pray for the welfare of human beings, especially those who seek her intercession.

The original picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help is distinctly Byzantine in style, and many similar portrayals of Our Lady are found throughout the East and in Russia.

In addition to Mary, the picture represents her divine Son as a child of two or three years old, seated on his Mother's left hand.

Consider...

What do your eyes see?

What does your heart see?

How is God speaking to you in love through this icon?



Saint Joseph the Holy Protector

This icon in our Worship Center depicts St. Joseph the Holy Protector. He is shown holding a picture of Mary and the child Jesus. We honor Joseph for the special role he accepted in the lives of Mary and Jesus.

Very little is known about the life of Joseph as he disappears from the New Testament after the family's pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Luke 2:42-52). It is often assumed that Joseph died sometime before Jesus' public ministry.

Joseph is the patron saint of a happy death, workers, fathers, and many countries, including Russia, Canada, Mexico, Belgium, and Korea.

Consider...

What do your eyes see?

What does your heart see?

How is God speaking to you in love through this icon?



Saint Francis of Assisi

This icon depicts St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of our parish. The icon also features a bird, a wolf, and some greenery, all of which recall Francis' reverence for the presence of God in nature.

He is said to have had a profound mystical experience during a retreat in the fall of 1224, which left the wounds of Christ's Passion on his hands, feet and side. These wounds are the first recorded case of the stigmata.

Francis' simple lifestyle and piety, his devotion to the poor and his love for all of God's creation, have made him one of the most beloved saints, revered by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Consider...

What do your eyes see?

What does your heart see?

How is God speaking to you in love through this icon?



Saint Clare of Assisi

St. Clare was a close friend and spiritual associate of St. Francis of Assisi. She was the foundress of the Poor Clares, an order of religious sisters.

The icon displayed in the Worship Center features Clare holding the Eucharist. In the year 1240, an army under Emperor Frederick II was closing in on the town of Assisi. A popular story tells that Clare, suffering a serious illness was carried to a window of the convent, herself carrying the Eucharist. It is said that a mysterious voice came from the host saying "I shall always watch over you" and a ray of brilliant light that emanated from the Blessed Sacrament dazzled the attackers. The convent and the town of Assisi were spared.

Consider...

What do your eyes see?

What does your heart see?

How is God speaking to you in love through this icon?

