

**FROM THE PASTOR**  
**FEBRUARY 12, 2023**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY**

**OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP**

It is said by many of the saints that while we are here in this world, here in this *Valley of Tears*, we are on a pilgrimage. We are all aware of what makes a pilgrimage. It is a voyage of some kind, and it leads us to a destination. One of the greatest works of English literature, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, is the story of a pilgrimage. The individuals in the epic poem are travelling to Canterbury, to pray at the tomb of St. Thomas Becket. In Chaucer's words (Middle English): *the holy blysfaul martyre so to seeke*. In modern English we would say, *to seek the holy and blessed martyr*. And then the epic goes on to record the tales each pilgrim tells at the table of the Tabard Inn.

One of the great consolations for us here in this world is to make pilgrimage to the Shrines of Our Blessed Mother. So many of our parishioners have told me of the pilgrimages to Fatima, Lourdes, Guadalupe, Zaragoza, La Salette, Loreto, Mariazelle, the Rue du Bac, and many other holy places. In these shrines of Our Lady, we always find peace and many graces and comforts. Today I would like to speak of the miraculous icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

A little over a year ago one of our parishioners approached me desiring to offer a gift to St. Paul the Apostle in loving and blessed memory of his parents. This parishioner was born in Italy and has an extensive background in art. He wishes to remain anonymous. The gift he wished to give us was a hand painted icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Sometimes she is called Our Mother of Perpetual Help, or, in England and Ireland, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

Tradition holds that the original icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was painted by St. Luke, the author of the third Gospel. The icon depicts the Blessed Virgin Mary as Mother of God holding the Child Jesus. The Archangels Michael and Gabriel, hovering in the corners, hold the instruments of the Passion – St. Michael (left corner) holds the spear, the wine-soaked sponge, and the crown of thorns, and St. Gabriel (right corner) holds the cross and nails. St. Luke's intention was to portray the Child Jesus contemplating His future Passion. The anguish he feels is portrayed in His tender embracing of His Mother. Nevertheless, the icon also conveys the triumph of Christ over sin and death, symbolized by the golden background (a sign of the glory of the resurrection) and the manner in which the angels hold the instruments, i.e. like glorious trophies gathered up from Calvary on Easter morning.

In a very beautiful way, the Child Jesus grasps the hand of the Blessed Mother. He seeks comfort from His Mother as He sees the instruments of His suffering and death. The position of Mary's

hands both holding the Holy Child (who appears as a small adult) and presenting Him to us ) teaches us the truth of the incarnation, that Our Lord is True God and True Man. In iconography, Mary is seen as the *Hodigitria* (the one who guides us to the Redeemer). She is also our never-failing Help, who intercedes on our behalf with her Son. The star painted on Mary's veil, centered on her forehead, highlights her role in the plan of salvation as both Mother of God and our Mother.

The historic icon was brought from the island of Crete by a merchant who had it shipped to Rome in 1499. During the voyage a terrible storm arose and it seemed the ship and its cargo would be lost. The crew invoked the aid of Our Lady whom they carried on board and the ship was saved. During the storm Our Lady made it known that she would like the miraculous image to be venerated in a church in between St. Mary Major and St. John Lateran. The icon was enshrined in the Church of St. Matthew in Rome. That Church is on the modern Via Merulana which runs in a straight direction from St. Mary Major to St. John Lateran. Many pilgrims flocked to this place to invoke the miraculous intercession of Our Lady until the year 1812. The Church was destroyed, burned, and leveled during Napoleon's taking of Rome. The picture was taken and hidden away. Soon many of the faithful forgot where the picture was until the year 1866 when Blessed Pope Pius IX rediscovered the picture and entrusted it to the Redemptorist Order who had just built a Church near where St. Matthew's had once stood. The Church was named in honor of the founder of the Redemptorists, St. Alfonso Liguori. (It is only one of two Gothic style Churches in Rome). There the image is to this day. And the Redemptorists have spread devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help throughout the world. Her Feastday was set for June 27<sup>th</sup>. She is particularly loved in the Philippines where the Redemptorists did much missionary work. An image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help hangs in the Presidential Palace in Manila.

Bishop Walter P. Kellenberg, the first Bishop of Rockville Centre, founded the Parish of St. Paul the Apostle on June 27, 1962, the Feastday of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. . My assignment as pastor began on June 27, 2013, and my own baptismal Church is Our Lady of Perpetual Help. My parents instilled into me a great devotion to Our Lady under the title of Perpetual Help. She was the patroness of the Diocesan Tribunal where I served for 27 years. I had always prayed that a beautiful image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help would adorn our Church. It was truly a gift from Our Lady: a parish priest who wanted the image and a very generous parishioner who also wanted to bestow the image to St. Paul's.

Our generous benefactor wishes to remain anonymous. But the icon will be blessed and dedicated at the 10.30 Mass on Sunday February 19, 2023. The Knights of Columbus and Squires will sponsor a Pancake Breakfast after the dedication. This will be a wonderful way for all of us, the children of Mary to honor her. It will also be a treat for children and adults on the Sunday before Lent begins.

It is my fond hope that each of us will never hesitate to invoke the prayers and intercession of Our Lady in time of need.

*In Jesus and Mary,*

*Monsignor James F. Pereda*