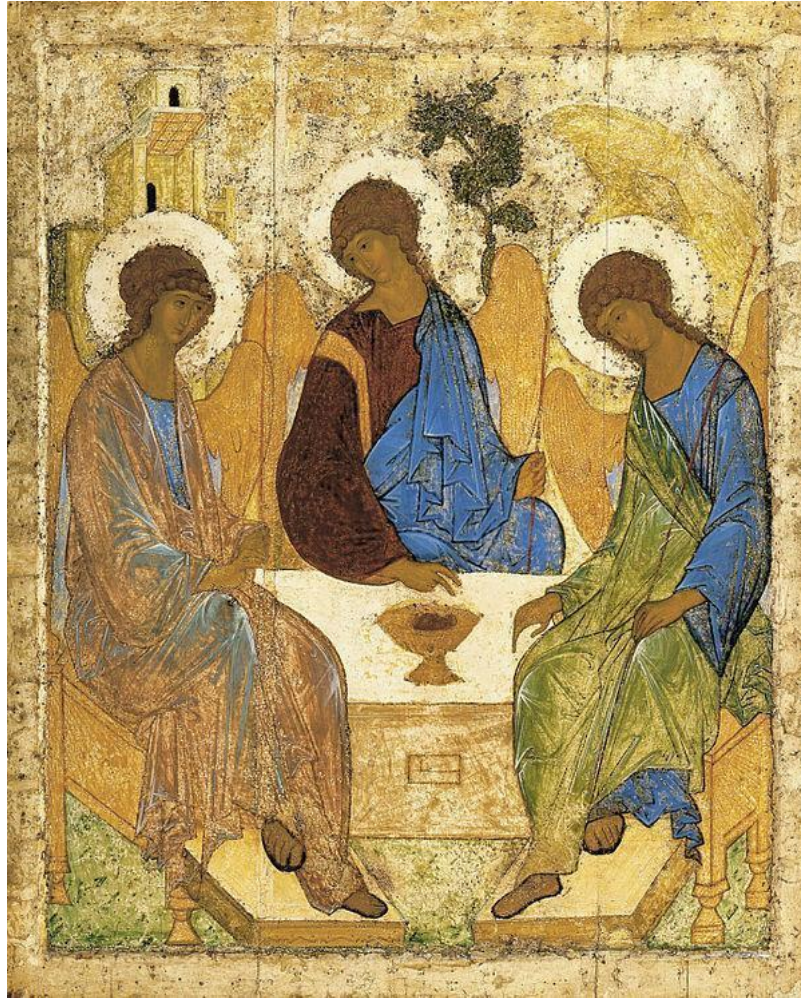


Andrei Rublev's Icon of the Trinity



Some points to ponder...as you gaze at the icon and pray ...

Sometimes when we gaze on an image we are struck by the colours, the composition or the subject matter. In Andrei Rublev's icon of 'The Trinity' it would seem that each of those are with care chosen to focus on the message of The Trinity.

Andrei Rublev painted *The Hospitality of Abraham* in 1411 for the abbot of the Trinity Monastery near Moscow, portraying the quintessential icon of the Holy Trinity by depicting the three mysterious strangers who visited Abraham (Genesis ch18).

Many in Rublev's religious culture were confused by the Trinity doctrine while others rejected it. Rublev addressed this confusion by showing a beautiful understanding of God as relational as 'Three-in-One'. 600 years later the icon continues to draw people into the mysterious and wonderful presence of the Trinity that is God.

Most scholars of the icon understand the figures seated from left to right in the picture to be depictions of the Trinity, in the order of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Many other artists had painted this Biblical story, but Rublev was the first to paint in this way, where the three angelic figures appear to be equal in every way. Rublev depicts the three as 'One Lord.' Each holds a rod of authority in their left hand, symbolizing equality. Each wears a cloak of blue, the colour of divinity. Each is the same size and the face of each is identical, depicting their oneness.

The more we look at this sacred image with the eyes of faith, the more we come to realise that it is painted not as a lovely decoration for a church, nor as a helpful explanation of a difficult religious doctrine, but as a holy place to enter, to stay within, and to pray within.

The faces are all identical. Does this help us understand the Trinity?

The fact that the figures seem enclosed in a circle...what might this tell us about the life of the Trinity?

All the figures wear a blue garment - the colour of the heavens... but each wears something that speaks of Their own identity – Can you guess?

The figure denoted as God the Father wears an ethereal robe almost covering his blue robe of divinity...is this the God we cannot see, yet is with us? In the icon His hand is outstretched as in mid action of blessing the cup.

Jesus wears a robe of blue and brown, the latter denoting His coming to us in human form. The brown garment speaks of the earth - of His humanity. The gold stripe speaks of kingship. Reflect for a moment on the form of kingship being represented here..

The Christ figure rests two fingers on the table – a statement of His divine and His human nature. He points to a cup filled with wine... What more does this represent?

The Holy Spirit wears a blue robe of divinity and the green robe represents new life. The Spirit touches the table - earthing the divine life of God. Reflect on that touch and the words of invocation: "Lord, You are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness. Let Your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy...." Reflect on that touch and its meaning for the life of the world...

Now, although, as we have seen, the three figures can be enclosed in a circle they are not closed in upon themselves.

There is a very important open-ness. The Holy Spirit's head is inclined toward the Father and the Son. This gaze is toward the open space at the table, inviting you, the beholder, into the picture.

The three are turned towards you, the one looking at the icon, drawing you into their relationship.

(From Henri Nouwen's meditation on Rublev's Icon)

“As we place ourselves in front of the icon in prayer, we come to experience a gentle invitation to participate in the intimate conversation that is taking place among the three divine angels and to join them around the table. The movement from Father toward Son and the movement of both Son and Holy Spirit toward the Father become a movement in which the one who prays (which is you) is lifted up and held secure.... We come to see with our inner eye that all the engagements in this world can bear fruit only when they take place within this divine circle...the house of perfect love.”

There is much more to be reflected upon in this icon: hours of pondering and praying, many-layered significances laid brushstroke on brushstroke by the iconographer and far beyond the scope of these simple few words. Praying at an icon can be a profound experience.