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The Logos of the Unsleeping Eye

Sermon, Pentecost 13, Proper 16-C, August 22, 2010

Grace Episcopal Church, Elmira, NY

Deacon Daisy Kirkpatrick

Jeremiah 1:4-10, Psalm 71:1-6, Hebrews 12:18-29, Luke 13:10-17

The parish budget sets aside \$500 for the continuing education of your Deacon. This paid the tuition for a weeklong icon-writing workshop in Endicott, which was offered by the Prosopton School of Iconology. The school was founded by Vladislav Andrejev, a master iconographer, mystic, visionary, and teacher. He was born in Russia in 1938, studied art and then became interested in icons; but it was very difficult to study icons under the Soviet regime. He emigrated with his family to the United States in 1980, settling in Whitney Point and has been teaching iconography for about 20 years. His mission is to create a clearer comprehension of the uncreated Image of God, in whose image we are created. He uses the language of color, image and symbol to help us understand the various layers of created life. The class combines lessons in technique with lectures on theology. I will share with you some of what I learned week before last.

I have brought my icon to show you. It is unfinished and the work of a beginning student so leaves a lot to be desired. It is an icon of The Logos of the Unsleeping Eye. It is done in egg tempera, which involves mixing ground pigments with egg yolk, and building up many transparent layers. Icons speak on many levels and the symbols can be interpreted in more than one way.

At first glance, this seems to be an icon of Jesus with Mary and an angel. But the intent is to portray the seventh day of creation when God rested.¹ Recall the argument in today's Gospel when the leader of the synagogue complained that Jesus had healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath. The Jews believe that since God rested on the seventh day, we should do so as well and do no work on that day. An icon gives visible form to invisible things, so here in the center we have the Logos, the preexisting Word of God as described in the Prologue to John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."² The Logos is resting on a pillow but not sleeping. As I was working on this icon, I often thought of the constant presence of Jesus with us: even when we sleep, he doesn't.



Logos of the Unsleeping Eye
by Vladislav Andrejev
(unfinished)

Mary, the Theotokos, the God-bearer is the symbol of our soul, the foreshadowing of incarnation in physical form. The Angel Gabriel, the announcer of the incarnation, is the symbol of our mind. The small angel is a Power in the hierarchy of angels described in the hymn "Ye watchers and ye holy ones."³ The Powers help us fulfill the will of God, bringing us obedience, patience, and fortitude. The mountains are the earth, and the sky is filled with Paradise, but it is behind a veil. The border represents the fence around the Garden of Eden.

¹ Genesis 2:2

² John 1:1

³ Hymnal 1982 #618

In Vladislav's teaching he explained that this icon is the first in a sequence of seven of the growth of the Logos that is within us. The icons in the sequence are listed in your bulletin. Please understand that this is only one way of interpreting these icons. Icons can be interpreted in a great many different ways and on many different levels.

Succession of Icons Depicting the Growth of the Logos Within Us

1. Logos of the Unsleeping Eye – an invitation to incarnation
2. Logos Spermatikos – the seed of the Logos is planted within us
3. The Logos of the Eucharist – feeding the seed
4. Logos of Tenderness (Eleousa) – an intimate mystical relationship between the soul and the seed of God within
5. Logos of Hodegitria – the soul is recognizing the leadership of the Logos
6. Logos of the Oranta – the mother becomes the background, the Logos is in charge
7. Logos of the Heavenly Kingdom – The Logos is united to itself – realization.

The first in the list is this one, the Logos of the Unsleeping Eye. This is a depiction of the creation story. God spoke the words, "Let there be light."⁴ The Word of God became the Logos. The Logos is at the heart of the light. In that sense the whole universe has the mystical Son within it. This icon is the first step in the growth of the Logos within us. As the Lord says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in your mother's womb I knew you."⁵ Our task is to reveal the Logos that is within us. So symbolically we see the Logos positioned between the soul and the mind. To reveal the Logos both are needed: the mind for reason, critical thinking, and the soul for prayer, the knowing that lives in the heart; both mental and emotional connections need to be made. In a sense the Logos within me is my religious uncreated essence. This icon is all about potential, invitation; it hasn't happened yet.

The second icon is the Logos Spermatikos. There is no image for you to see. It looks a lot like the Oranta icon (6) but the image of Christ has no color; it is only outlined. This ghostly image is in front of Mary. It is a suggestion, there but not there yet. The seed is planted but not yet sprouted.

The third icon in Vladislav's sequence is the Logos of the Eucharist. I have no good image of it, but it portrays Christ lying in a cup, a chalice. The message here is that the Body and Blood of Christ that we receive in the Eucharist feed the seed of the Logos within us. Just as a seed needs good soil and water to grow, the seed of the Logos within us needs to be fed mystical food in order to grow.

The next three icons, 4, 5, and 6, are familiar to us from Rowan Williams's book *Ponder These Things*,⁶ which we studied last Advent.

⁴ Genesis 1:3

⁵ Jeremiah 1:5

⁶ Williams, Rowan, *Ponder These Things: Praying with Icons of the Virgin*, Paraclete Press, 2006.

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The fourth icon in the growth of the Logos within is Eleousa, the icon of the Logos of Tenderness. In this the intimate mystical relationship between the soul and the logos is charmingly shown with Mary holding Jesus to her cheek.

The fifth icon is the Hodegetria. In this one Jesus is sitting up on Mary's knee and beginning to teach and Mary is pointing to him. This shows symbolically that the soul is recognizing the leadership of the Logos.

In sixth icon, the Oranta, Jesus is the main focal point and Mary is in the background. The Logos is fully in charge. These three icons together show the journey, our growth in faith and awareness.

Finally the seventh icon is the Logos of the Heavenly Kingdom. It shows the ascended Christ surrounded by the heavenly host. This is the completion; the Logos within the person has become fully merged with the Logos of God. Our will has become God's will, our faith has become God's faith, our prayers have become God's prayers. We are one with the Logos of God.⁷

And now to Him whose Power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.⁸



Eleousa



Hodegetria



Oranta

⁷ The icons shown are all the work of the Prosopon School, www.prosoponschool.org

⁸ Ephesians 3:20-21