

## Icons in our Midst

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In an earlier issue of the St. Andrew's Newsletter, Fr. Channing shared some wonderful insight into icons and iconography from a theological perspective. Given the wide range of traditions and backgrounds from which we all come, there are some of us who may still be uncomfortable about the presence of so many icons at St. Andrew's. Years ago, I too was uncomfortable with icons and statues in church, but came to realize that we are surrounded by icons in one form or another in our daily lives, and that their significance is dependent on how we perceive them and how we interact with them.

The most pervasive examples in our present day are probably the computers we use at work, school, and home. Our computer monitors are filled with icons that are important to us because of what they represent and what they enable us to do. These icons are graphic representations or images that start a chain of events when we click on them, perhaps to run a program, play a game, or send a message. They are tools that point to something beyond themselves. The icons on our computers are not the programs – they merely enable us to start the programs and accomplish things.



Most computer users are familiar with these icons or ones that are similar. What do you think of when you see them? If you recognize them as representing popular word processor and email programs, you may think of all the things you can do with them, perhaps about the last letter you wrote or a report you're going to prepare for the next parish forum. These little collections of electrons that paint small pictures on your screen might evoke memories, spark your imagination, or open you up to new ideas, depending on how you perceive them. Others may understand what they represent, but have no desire to use them. Still others may even react negatively or not have a clue what they are, and wary of them.

So it is with the kinds of icons we find in church (including statues and banners in this context). Those icons are collections of pigment, canvas, wood, metal, clay, and so forth; carefully arranged and crafted to represent something beyond themselves. We will react favorably, neutrally, or negatively depending on the nature of the image itself, our own experience, and our impression of what is beyond the icon.

We see icons and react to them – but nothing much else happens unless we somehow “engage” them. With computer icons, that's easy – click on them to start the programs they point to, remembering that the icons are merely tools to get the process started.

With the icons in church, there is no “mouse” with which to point-and-click to get things going – the process is more in the head and in the heart than it is physical. These icons help us to focus not on their physical images, but on what they represent and what they point to beyond themselves. They enable us to become centered on what is ultimately both within us and at the same time surrounds us: the Presence of God and the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. They are windows into the world we cannot see with our mortal eyes. They are not “graven images” in the Biblical sense. We do not pray to the icons themselves or worship them, outward appearances to the contrary.

The next time you feel uneasy about icons, look to the cross – one of the most powerful icons of all. We stand in awe of all that it represents, and it can transport us into a dialog with our Creator unlike any other, if we will but open ourselves up and allow it. All the other icons pale by comparison, but they are there to help us journey on that same path – if we so choose.

*Peter Fabre*