

**Faith in Five – Adults**  
**Sacred Art and Iconography**  
**August 26, 2022**

The three sacred arts (art, architecture, music) form an integrated whole that brings beauty into our liturgy ([source](#)). Each type of art will be discussed separately.

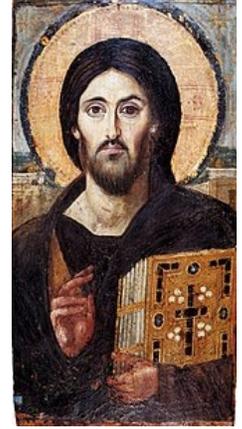
1. **Sacred art** has as its subject God, His saints, and events from scripture and Christian history. All three forms - art, architecture, music - have a common goal, the contemplation of heavenly things. "Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer, and to the love of God, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2502).
2. In every church building, art and architecture become the joint work of the Holy Spirit and the local community, in preparing a place to receive God's Word and to enter more fully into communion with him.
3. Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: to evoke in faith and adoration, the beauty of truth and love visible in Christ, who "reflects the glory of God". This spiritual beauty of God is also reflected in the most holy Virgin Mother of God, the angels, and saints.
4. Art chosen for the place of worship is not simply to make the ordinary space more pleasant. Nor is the place of worship a museum to house artistic masterpieces. Rather, artworks truly belong in the church when they are worthy of the place of worship and when they enhance liturgical, devotional, and contemplative prayer. The purpose of sacred art is not to draw attention to itself but to draw us to the sacred realities the arts point to.



Catholic churches use icons, stained glass windows and statues of the Blessed Mother and various saints not to adore or worship, but to inspire us to live similar lives. They remind us of the style of life, of holiness to which we are all called.

5. **Iconography**, is the study of the image, history, and interpretation of the traditional representations of God, the saints, and other sacred subjects in art. An icon is a representation of a Gospel story or holy person which was used in the early church to teach the illiterate, and to help them pray. Some sources say icons were created among Greek and Roman pagan culture and were eventually adapted by Christianity. Others believe it to be a solely Christian art form, where it gained in popularity. ([Image Source: Google](#))

6. The word 'icon' in Greek is 'image' and 'grapher' is 'writer', hence the word iconographer is a writer of images. Iconography is more than a beautiful re-creation but focused on symbolic representation. The symbolism written in each one gives the observer something to contemplate about themselves and the virtues they desire. For Catholics, learning about icons can be a new way to pray, meditating on the holy images with the mind drawn to heaven.
7. Icons are most commonly associated with the Byzantine Orthodox churches and are central to the prayer and culture of all the churches of the East. It is the oldest artistic tradition in Christianity and has become increasingly important to many Roman Catholics. The oldest known icon, "Christ Pantocrator," (right), can actually be traced back to sixth-century Egypt. (Image Source: Google)



Tradition states that St. Luke the Evangelist was an iconographer in his own right, having created one of the first images of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He shared this with her, and she gave her approval. He is often credited with being the first iconographer of the Catholic Church, as well as being the patron saint of iconographers.

8. To be clear, icons are not idols. There was a time in church history when the veneration was suppressed and questioned as a form of idolatry. Praying with icons is not idol worshipping. With the aid of the image, we meditate and are led to a deeper communion with God. We grow in holiness. The second Council of Nicaea (787) determined that icons are a way for God's grace to enter our life. [Pope St. John Paul II states in his 1999 Letter to the Artists](#), "The icon is venerated not for its own sake, but points beyond to the subject which it represents".
9. **Praying with icons** – excerpts below from this [article](#)  
Praying with icons demands time, focused attention and a quiet, calm attitude. "It does not force its way. It asks for time spent before it in stillness.... gazing". We let the Holy Spirit draw us into closer friendship with the holy one portrayed.

**The key steps are:**

- a) Ready – Sit comfortably and still the body. Focus on breathing.
- b) Look – Take time to look closely at the icon. What do you see? See 'the more'. Take time. (Example: what do the eyes, position of hands, head, objects or colors tell you)?
- c) Look and reflect – What is the icon calling you to be? What is the message for you? What do you hear?
- d) Look and respond- Read the icon once more by gazing on it. Respond in prayer. Write/draw thoughts and prayers if you journal....
- e) Look and rest- let the image of the icon rest in your heart.
- f) BE.... Give time for this to happen!!!

“...pray constantly...”  
1 Thessalonians 5:17

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