

## Українська Католицька Церква Св.Родина

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## Holy Family Ukrainian Catholic Church

225 N. 4<sup>th</sup> St., Lindenhurst, NY 11757

Pastor: Fr. Olvian Nicolae Popovici

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Choir Director: Iryna Popovych 943-3348

Nataliya Popovici – English cantor

Web Page: [www.holyfamilyucc.com](http://www.holyfamilyucc.com)

Sunday Divine Liturgies: 9:00 am - English / 10:15 am - Ukrainian

Weekday Divine Liturgies: 8:00 am or 9:00 am or 7:00 pm

Holy Days Liturgy: 9:00 am or Previous Day at 7:00 pm

No. 20/18

CHURCH BULLETIN – ЦЕРКОВНИЙ ВІСНИК

May 20, 2018 / Травень 20, 2018

### DIVINE LITURGIES SCHEDULE:

**May 20, 2018, Pentecost Sunday.** *The Holy Martyr Thaleus.*

**Festal Tone:** Epistle: Acts 2:1–11. / Gospel: John 7:37 – 52 & 8:12.

9:00 a.m. – Pro Populo – English

10:15 am – (God's Blessing upon Ivan Zakharyuk & Family,  
req. Zakharyuk Family) - **Ukrainian.**

**Note:** This week's Sanctuary Candle Light for God's Blessing upon Skrypczka Family, req. Marta Skrypczka

**Pentecost Monday (Monday of the Holy Spirit), May 21, 2018.**

9:00 a.m. – Pro Populo – English

7:00 p.m. – Special Intention, req. Mendyuk Family

8:00 p.m. – Devotion to the Mother of God (Moleben)

- (it's held every day except Sunday's during the month of May at 8:00 p.m.)

**Tuesday, May 22, 2018.** *The Holy Great Rulers Constantine and Helen, Equal to the Apostles.* (transferred from May 21<sup>st</sup>). *The Holy Martyr Basilicus.*

9:00 a.m. – † Adam and † Olga Galej, req. Family

**Wednesday, May 23, 2018.** *Our Venerable Father and Confessor Michael, Bishop of Synada.*

9:00 a.m. – God's Blessing upon Slawomir & Helen Samilo  
(Wedding Anniv.), req. Samilo Family

8:15 p.m. - Bible Study (Reading, Explanation, etc) – **Ukr.**

**Thursday, May 24, 2018.** *Our Venerable Father Simeon the "Mountain of Wonders".*

7:00 p.m. – God's Blessing upon Balaban Family, req. Mariya Balaban

**Friday, May 25, 2018.** *The Third Finding of the Precious Head of the Holy and Glorious Prophet Forerunner and Baptizer of Our Lord, John.*

7:00 p.m. – Good health for Nadiya Chornomydza,  
req. Nataliya Popovici

**Saturday, May 26, 2018.** *Apodosis of Pentecost.* *The Holy Apostle Carpus (70 Disciples).*

8:00 a.m. – *Panakhida for All Deceased – Memorial Services*  
(Ending Sorokousty) – **Ukrainian.**

9:00 a.m. – † Dannyk Shafranski, req. Lesya & Yuriy Koziy

6:00 p.m. – **Vespers (Вечірня)**

**May 27, 2018, Sunday of All Saints.** *The Holy Priest Martyr Therapontus.*

9:00 a.m. – Pro Populo – English

10:30 am – Pontifical Divine Liturgy presided by Bishop Paul Chomnycky on Thanksgiving to God for 20<sup>th</sup> Priestly Ordination (Anniversary) of Fr. Olvian N. Popovici)

(God's Blessing upon Mychailo Shafranski & Family,  
req. Maria Shafranski) - **Ukrainian.**

**Confessions:** Can be heard by appointment daily and on Sundays before or after the Divine Liturgy.

**Baptism and Chrismation:** By appointment. Sponsors must be practicing Catholics.

**Marriage:** Please contact the Pastor at least six (6) months in advance.

*Attendance at pre - Cana is required.*

**Ukrainian Culture School will be held Every Saturday from 9:15 am until 1:35 p.m.**

For more information please call the Rectory or contact the Director, Mr. Roman Vaskiv at (631) 225 -1203 or visit our Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/HFUkrainianSchool>.

**Ukrainian Cultural Dances** for children ages 5 to 12 are provided by

Mr. Gregory Momot and Khrystyna Momot of Paramus, NJ, every Saturday, by groups: ages (5 – 9) 1:30 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.; ages (8 – 11) 2:15 p.m. – 3:55 p.m.; ages (10 – 14) 3:45 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.

**Religious Education:** Classes for religious education will resume on

September 18, 2017 and will be held every Monday from 5:00 p.m. until 5:55 p.m./6:00 p.m. – 6:55 p.m. Please contact the rectory for further information.

**Ministry to the Sick:** Father Popovici will make visits to the sick on the first Friday of the month. It is the responsibility of an immediate family member to kindly notify Rev. Popovici at the Rectory office about any sick or aged individual who is hospitalized or confined at home or in a nursing home, and he will gladly visit and administer the sacraments. In case of emergencies please call any time.

**Pray the Rosary:** The Apostleship of Prayer requests members and parishioners pray the Rosary on the **First Sunday** of each month, beginning 20 minutes before Divine Liturgy. The Rosary Society requests members and parishioners pray the Rosary on the **Third Sunday** of the Month beginning at 10:00 a.m. before Ukrainian Divine Liturgy.

**Mothers in Prayer:** Next prayer group will be held on **June 1, 2018 at 8:15 p.m.**

**St. Joseph's Men's Prayer:** group will be held every Thursday at 8:00 p.m.

**Rectory Office Hours:** Tuesday - Friday: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm; Saturday: 10:00 am – 2:00 pm; Evenings by appointment. **Attention: Monday** is a free day for the priest. In case of an emergency, please call at any time.

**Divine Liturgy:** Dear Parishioners! Remember your faith; please come every Sunday and Holy Days to Church.

**Divine Liturgy for Children:** Special Divine Liturgy (English/Ukrainian language) for family/children will be held on **Sunday, June 3, 2018 at 12:00 Noon. (Also children from our Parish will receive Holy Solemn Communion during this Liturgy).** All parents are requested to bring their children to church to celebrate the Holy Divine Liturgy.

**Sunday Bulletin Deadline:** Notices should be phoned in or brought to the Parish Office **NO LATER** than 12:00 noon on the Friday prior to the Sunday of publication.

**Bequests:** In making out your will, kindly remember your church. Holy Family Ukrainian Catholic Church of Lindenhurst, N.Y. is our legal title.

**New Parishioners:** Welcome to Holy Family Church! To all who are tired and need rest, to all who mourn and need comfort, to all who are friendless and need friendship, to all who are discouraged and need hope, to all who are hopeless and need sheltering love, to all who sin and need a Savior, this Church opens wide its doors in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Please stop by the Rectory to introduce yourselves and register. We look forward to meeting you.

**Change in address or telephone?** Parishioners, kindly provide the rectory with your new address and telephone numbers as soon as possible.

**Parishioners and guests: after each Divine Liturgy, coffee, rolls, & cakes are served in the Parish Center for a donation of \$3.00 per person.**

**Sunday Collection – May 13, 2018.**

*“Give to the Most High as He has given to you, generously, for the Lord is one who always repays, and He will give back to you sevenfold.” (Sir. 35: 9 – 10).*

Candles: \$240, Tetrapod: \$8, Pyrohy: \$30, Ascension: \$170, Liability Ins.: \$30, Coffee: \$165, Bequest: \$550, **Plant Sale: \$570**, Sundry: \$20, Refund: \$15, Mother's Day - \$40,

**Pledge: \$510.00, Sunday Offering: \$1,136.00, Total - \$3,504.00.**

***Dear Parishioners:*** Sincere thanks for the offerings made on Sunday', May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018. May God bless you all for your generosity.

***Our Prayer:*** Please remember all those parishioners who are ill or elderly within your families. They are part of our parish and need to receive Jesus in the Holy Sacraments of Confession and Communion. To schedule a visit by the priest, please call the rectory for an appointment.

**Attention:** To all who celebrate their birthday during the month of May our best wishes and many happy healthy years! Mnohaya Lita and God's Blessing.

**Our Church News:**

**1. Memorial Donations:** In honor of † Gloria Tolopka's request, memorial donations are to be used toward Construction/

**Installation of a Bell Tower for Holy Family Church:** the following parishioners/friends have donated: Mr. Chris Kremidas & Mrs. Olha Samilo - \$500.00; Mrs. Mary Kunycky - \$50.00. To date: \$3,175.00.

**2. Congratulations were extended to Alexander Filyk, son of Vitalii & Lesia Filyk,** who received the Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation and First Holy Eucharist on Saturday, May 19, 2018 at 2:45 p.m.

**3. Reminder:** The Month of May is devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Moleben or Akatistos is celebrated every evening (except Sunday's) at 8:00 p.m. Please make a special effort to attend and participate in this Moleben (Devotional) service.

**4. Upcoming events:**

**A. Dear Parishioners:** On May 27<sup>th</sup> our Eparch Bishop Paul Chomnycky will offer the Divine Liturgy at 10:30 am in Thanksgiving to God for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the priestly ordination of Fr. Olvian Nicolae Popovici. Bishop Paul will also bless our ten, new icons recently brought from Ukraine.

**B. May collections:** Regular church cleaning: The next second collection will be collected **today** Sunday, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

**C. On June 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – our Parish will hold our second Ukrainian Cultural Dance Festival. Mark the dates on your calendar.**

**D. Please note that you will soon receive information by mail, about the annual Bishop's Appeal campaign, which will begin on May 15, 2018.**

**5. We wish to express our sincere thanks to:** a. **the ladies from the Apostleship of Prayer:** Ms. Sandy Motekew, M/M William & Elaine Eluk, M/M James & Barbara Fromel, M/M Ihor & Olesia Warywoda, who sold flowers and plants for Mother's Day last weekend (due to the weather conditions a few baskets are still available!) Many thank to those of our parishioners who purchased flowers to support our fundraiser. The net profit realized was \$570.00 which was donated to our church.

b. **the ladies from the Rosary Society especially:** Mrs. Katherine Serdyuk, Mrs. Mariya Gotra, Mrs. Ganna Maksymova, Mrs. Neli Voitovych, Mrs. Olha Kostyuk, Mrs. Laryssa Atammanov and Mr. Petro Dankov who came and prepared baked kapusta for the Festival on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings this past week.

c. Mr. Sergey Buchak who recently donated furniture cubbies for use of our children on the second floor of our parish center.

d. Mrs. Sandy Motekew, M/M James & Barbara Fromel who donated their time this past week to bake many cakes for our festival and church fund raising. **May God bless all those who volunteered or made donations and may He reward you with His choicest Blessings.**

**6.** We have for sale pyrohy with potatoes, meat, cheese or kapusta - \$6.00 per dozen/package. All proceeds go to our Church. This is a fund raiser.

**7. Dear Parishioners,** if anyone desires to have Rev. Popovici *visit the grave sites of your loved ones for Panakhyda*, please call the Rectory for an appointment. This may be done until May 29, 2018.

**8. Dear Parishioners! Join us for our next Pilgrimage: “Steps of the Saints” – Italy (Rome, Padua, Asisi, etc). Save the dates: September 16 – 28, 2018. More information is attached to our Church Bulletin.**

**HOMILY OF St. John Chrysostom on St. Ignatius the God-Bearer.**

...continued from previous Bulletin...

And Paul again, when showing this very thing to the same Timothy wrote and says, Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins (1 Tim. 5:22). What do you say? Has another sinned, and do I share his blame and his punishment? Yes, says he, the man who authorizes evil; and just as in the case of any one entrusting into the hands of a raging and insane person a sharply pointed sword, with which the madman commits murder, that man who gave the sword incurs the blame; so anyone who gives the authority which arises from this office to a man living in evil, draws down on his own head all the fire of that man's sins and audacity. For he who provides the root, this man is the cause of all that springs from it on every side. Do you see how in the meanwhile a double crown of the episcopate has appeared, and how the dignity of those who ordained him has made the office more illustrious, bearing witness to every exhibition of virtue in him? 3. Do you wish that I should also reveal to you another crown springing from this very matter? Let us consider the time at which he obtained this dignity. For it is not the same thing to administer the Church now as then, just as it is not the same thing to travel along a road well trodden, and prepared, after many wayfarers; and along one about to be cut for the first time, and containing ruts, and stones, and full of wild beasts, and which has never yet received any traveller. For now, by the grace of God, there is no danger for bishops, but deep peace on all sides, and we all enjoy a calm, since the Word of piety has been extended to the ends of the world, and our rulers keep the faith with strictness. But then there was nothing of this, but wherever any one might look, precipices and pitfalls, and wars, and fightings, and dangers; both rulers, and kings, and people and cities and nations, and men at home and abroad, laid snares for the faithful. And this was not the only serious thing, but also the fact that many of the believers themselves, inasmuch as they tasted for the first time strange doctrines, stood in need of great indulgence, and were still in a somewhat feeble condition and were often upset. And this was a thing which used to grieve the teachers, no less than the fightings without, nay rather much more. For the fightings without, and the plottings, afforded much pleasure to them on account of the hope of the rewards awaiting them. On this account the apostles returned from the presence of the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been beaten (Acts 5:41); and Paul cries out, saying: I rejoice in my sufferings (Col. 1:24), and he glories in his afflictions everywhere. But the wounds of those at home, and the falls of the brethren, do not suffer them to breathe again, but always, like some most heavy yoke, continually oppress and afflict the neck of their soul. Hear at least how Paul, thus rejoicing in sufferings, is bitterly pained about these. For who, says he, is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not (2 Cor. 11:29), and again, I fear lest when I come I shall find you not such as I would, and I be found of you such as you would not (2 Cor. 12:20), and a little afterwards, Lest when I come again to you, God humble me, and I shall mourn many of those who have sinned before, and have not repented of their uncleanness, and wantonness, and fornication which they have committed (2 Cor. 12:21) And throughout you see that he is in tears and lamentations on account of members of the household, and evermore fearing and trembling for the believers. Just as then we admire the pilot, not when he is able to bring those who are on board safe to shore when the sea is calm, and the ship is borne along by favourable winds, but when the deep is raging and the waves contending, and the passengers themselves within in revolt, and a great storm within and without besets those who are on board, and he is able to steer the ship with all security; ....to be continued...

### The Story of the San Damiano Crucifix



*“The same things that the Book of the Gospels explains by means of words, the painter shows by means of his works.”*

–St. Basil the Great

An Eastern Orthodox bishop once described iconography as “theology in line and color.”

### The History of the San Damiano Crucifix



“Go repair my Church, which as you see is falling completely in ruin” – when the image of Christ in the crucifix at San Damiano miraculously spoke these words to St. Francis, he was awakened to new zeal. He first concentrated on repairing the church buildings of San Damiano and nearby churches. But his great “repair” to the Church was the founding of the Franciscan Order, which began with the followers that Christ began to send to him shortly after the vision. An unknown Umbrian artist painted the original crucifix in the twelfth century. As we can see, it is strikingly iconographic in character; because of this, many identify the artist as a Syrian monk, since there were known to have been Syrian monks in the area at that time. In 1257 A.D., the Poor Clares left San Damiano for San Gorgio, taking the crucifix with them. It was placed on public view for the first time in modern times in Holy Week of 1957 A.D., over the new altar in San Gorgio’s Chapel in the Basilica of St. Clare of Assisi.

### The Symbolism in the Icon



The most striking element of the San Damiano Crucifix is the figure of Christ. It is not the body of a corpse, but of God Himself, incorruptible unto eternity and the source of life, radiating the hope of the Resurrection. The Savior looks directly at us with a compassionate gaze, regal, triumphant, and strong. He does not hang on the Cross, but

rather seems to be supporting it, standing in His full stature. His hands are not cramped from being nailed to the wood, but rather spread out serenely in an attitude of both supplication and blessing, which our iconographer has further emphasized by Jesus’ tranquil and gentle expression. This iconographic Crucifix does not express the brute horror of death by crucifixion, but rather the nobility and gentleness of eternal life.



Above His head is a portrayal of the Ascension: Christ emerging from a red circle, holding a golden cross which is now His sceptre. A host of angels welcome him into heaven, while at the very top of this scene the right hand of God the Father is extended in benediction.



Beneath this scene is the Latin inscription described in the Gospels: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

Around the crossbar of the cross we see a company of holy angels, looking in awe upon the Divine Sacrifice. Their hand gestures indicate their animated discussion of this wondrous event.



To the left of the central figure of Christ at the foot of the cross stand the Holy Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist – “His Mother and the disciple whom He loved.” To the right stand Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Mary Cleophas, and the Centurion. The Centurion holds a piece of wood, indicating his building of the synagogue (Luke 7:1-10); the little boy behind him is his son, healed by Jesus. In the lower right- and lefthand corners of this scene are small figures of the Roman soldier Longinus and the Jewish temple guard Stephaton – one holding the lance that pierced the Savior’s side, and the other holding a stick with a vinegar-soaked sponge.



Near the border of the Cross on the right, just below the level of Christ’s knees, you will find a small rooster. This recalls the denial of Peter, who wept bitterly, and reminds us that we should not be presumptuous of the strength of our faith.



At the very bottom of the Cross the original artist depicted several saints. Their visages in the original cross were damaged over the centuries and are now unrecognizable. In this recreation of the icon, the iconographer has chosen to identify and depict these saints as the four most beloved saints of the Franciscan Order: Saint Francis, Saint Clare, Saint Anthony of Padua, and Saint Bonaventure. Truly, as Saint Basil the Great wrote, "With a soundless voice the icons teach those who behold them."

The colours of the crucifix are rich and glowing and draw us by their warmth. The icon tells the whole story of Jesus' victory over death and invites us to share in the new life of which his resurrection is the first fruit. Many have felt in the face of Jesus something of his love and compassion for all creation and have been moved to respond with something of the generosity and joy of St Francis.

### **The Icon of the Transfigured Christ**

For Eastern Christians the Icon is a representation of the living God. By coming into its presence, for them, it becomes a personal encounter with the sacred, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly the San Damiano Icon is then an opportunity for personal encounter with the transfigured Christ - God made man.

The present Crucifix contains the story of the death, resurrection and ascension into glory. It expresses the total and universal Paschal Mystery of Christ.

This Crucifix in its serene majesty portrays the presentation of St. John's Gospel where Christ's death is presented in its salvific dimensions. It is not surprising that Saint Francis was attracted to this Icon and that the inspiration for his life came from this Christ who spoke to him "Go repair my Church ...".

### **The central Figure of Christ**

The central figure of the icon is Christ, not only because of the relative size, but because Christ is a figure of light dominating the scene and giving light to the other figures: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Christ stands upright, not nailed. The eyes of Jesus are open: He looks out to the world, which He has saved. He is alive; the one who is eternal. Jesus' vestment is a simple loin cloth - a symbol of both High Priest and Victim. The chest, throat and neck are pictured as very strong. It symbolizes Jesus who gives the power of re-creation to His Disciples (John 22:23). He breathed on His Disciples (John 20:22). The Greek word used recalls the moment of Creation (Gen 2:7). The shadow over the face of Jesus is increased by the fact that the halo and face are tilted forward on the original Icon. It shows that the humanity of Christ veils the true glory of the Word. Behind the outstretched arms of Christ is His empty tomb, shown as a black rectangle. The Medallion and Inscription. The Ascension is portrayed within the circle of red in the Medallion. There Christ is breaking out of the circle, holding a golden cross which is now His Royal Scepter. His garments are of gold - a symbol of royalty and victory. His red scarf is a sign of His Dominion and Kingship; exercised in love. Angels welcome Him into Heaven. IHS are the first three letters of the name of Jesus. The little bracket above indicates that it is shorthand. NAZARE is the Nazarene; REX is 'king' and IUDEORUM is 'of the Jews', as is reported in St. John's Gospel "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews".

### **The Hand of the Father**

From within the semi-circle at the very top of the Icon, "He whom no eye has seen" reveals Himself in a benediction. This blessing is given by the right hand of God with the finger extended - the Holy Spirit. The

Father gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to all because of the merits of the Christ's Passion.

### **The Mystical Vine**

Around the Cross are various calligraphic scrolls which may signify the mystical vine "I am the vine, you are the branches..." (John 15), which also contain the words "Greater love has no one than this, that one lays down one's life for one friends". At the base of the cross there seems to be a section that looks like a rock - the symbol of the Church. The seashells are symbols of eternity - a mystery hidden in the vast and timeless sea of eternity is revealed.

### **Mary and John**

As in John's Gospel, Mary and John are placed side by side. Mary's mantle is white meaning victory (Rev 3:5), purification (Rev 7:14); and good deeds (Rev 19:8). The gems on the mantle refer to the graces of the Holy Spirit. The dark red worn under the mantle indicate intense love, while the inner dress is purple - the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 26: 1-4). Mary's left hand is raised to her cheek. It shows her acceptance and love of John. Her right hand points to John while her eyes proclaim acceptance of Christ's words "Woman, behold your son..." (John 19:26). The blood drips on to John at this moment. John's mantle is of rose colour indicating eternal wisdom, while his tunic is white denoting purity. His position is between Jesus and Mary as is fitting for the disciple loved by both of them. He looks at Mary "Son, behold your Mother", but points to Christ.

### **The Other Major Figures**

Mary Magdalene: Mary Magdalene is next to Christ indicating her as very special. Her hand is on her chin indicates a confided secret - "He is risen". She wears scarlet, which is a symbol of love; her mantle of blue deepens this aspect. Mary Clopas: Some authorities argue her to be the mother of James. She wears garments of an earthen colour, a symbol of humility, and her light green mantle that of hope. Her admiration of Jesus is indicated by the gesture of her hand. The Centurion of Capernaum: He holds a piece of wood in his left hand, indicating his building of the Synagogue (Luke 7: 1-10). The little boy beyond his shoulder is his son healed by Jesus. The three heads behind the boy show "he and his whole household believed" (John 4: 45-54). He has his thumb and two fingers extended, a symbol of the Trinity; his two closed fingers symbolize the hidden mystery of the two natures of Jesus the Christ. "Truly He is the Son of God"(Mark 15:39).

### **The Lesser Figures**

Saint Longinus: According to tradition he is the Roman soldier who pierced Jesus' side with a lance. Stephen: Tradition also gives the name Stephen to the soldier who offered Jesus a sponge soaked in vinegar made of wine, after Jesus cried out "I thirst" (John 19: 28 -30).

### **The Unknown Saints**

At the bottom of the Icon are six unknown saints whom Scholars postulate are Saints Damian, Ruffin, Michael, John the Baptist, Peter and Paul. They were all patrons of Churches in and around Assisi. St. Damian was the Patron of the Church that housed the Cross and St. Ruffin was the Patron Saint of Assisi. The area of the cross has undergone too much damage to make a proper identification.

### **The Astonished Angels**

There sat two groups of angels - animatedly discussing the scene unfolded before them (Cf. Jn 20:12). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not die but have life everlasting" (John 3:16).

### **The Tomb**

Behind Christ is the open tomb; Christ is alive and standing over the tomb. The red of love overcomes the black of death. The gestures of the unknown saints at His hands indicate faith. These could be Peter and John at the empty tomb (John 20: 3-9).

### **The Rooster**

The inclusion of the rooster recalls the denial of Peter who wept bitterly. The rooster also proclaims the new dawn of the Risen Christ, the true light (1 John 2:8).

### **The Shape of the Cross**

The shape of the Cross has been changed to enable the artist to include those who participated in the drama of the Passion. Note that the arms of the cross lift to Christ's right indicating that the Good Thief (traditionally called Dismas) went to Heaven; while the left hand dips - the other thief did not.

### **Numbers**

There are 33 figures in the Icon - Two Christ figures, 1 Hand of the Father, 5 major figures, 2 smaller figures, 14 angels, 2 unknown at His hands, 1 small boy, 6 unknown at the bottom of the Cross and one rooster. There are 33 nail heads along the frame just inside the shells and seven around the halo.

### **The Prayer of Saint Francis before the Cross at San Damiano**

*"Most High glorious God, bring light to the darkness of my heart. Give me right faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, insight and wisdom, so I can always observe Thy holy and true command. Amen."*

### **From Saint Francis Third Order Confraternity of Penitents.**

The San Damiano Crucifix is a visual essay on the spiritual life and a tool of conversion. It was one of the primary instruments which God used to cement in St. Francis of Assisi a firmer change of heart. The rich symbolism of the crucifix speaks to anyone who gazes upon it in faith, but most especially to penitents.

No one knows the identification of the artist who, probably sometime in the twelfth century, painted this icon. Quite possibly a Syrian monk was the unknown craftsman, for the Crucifix is an icon in the Syrian vein. The anonymity of the artisan reminds us penitents that we, too, ought to go about unknown and unnoticed to the world. Instead of the world noticing and acclaiming us, others should see instead the fruit of our works and of our prayers which hopefully and humbly proclaim the goodness and glory of God. Sometime during the summer of 1206, Francis Bernardone, a young, playboy merchant of Assisi, Italy, began to experience conversion. He had always possessed a generous heart for others and for God, but now he began to see that his father's obsession with money, his mother's concerns for his health, and his own desires for sumptuous foods, lavish clothes, and extravagant parties were but dead end streets in the city of life. He yearned for more than money, health, recognition, and a good time. Life was too short and too bitter for acquisition of these transitory goods to be its ultimate aim. Francis had lived, although barely, through war and imprisonment. He'd been nursed back from the brink of death by his mother's loving care. He'd come through a period of physical weakness and spiritual confusion. He knew that there had to be more to life than what he'd been seeking. If he gave himself enough time, if he gave God enough emotional space, Francis sensed that he would find whatever it was he sought. Thus, just recovered from illness, Francis began to spend many hours wandering through the woods and visiting the chapels around Assisi, thinking, praying, being before the One Who could tell him all, whenever He Who is All was ready to speak.

One of the places Francis frequented was the church of San Damiano, a tumbling down, deserted chapel half way down a steep hill outside the walls of the city. In this decrepit place hung a large, almost life size painted icon of the Crucified. This summer day in 1206, Francis was walking in the vicinity of San Damiano when he felt an interior tug of the Spirit to go within to pray. Obeying the inner voice, Francis descended the worn staircase into the dark, smoke blackened vault and fell on his knees before the familiar icon, his own spirit alert to what the Lord might wish to convey. In eager anticipation, Francis looked up into the serene face of the Crucified Lord, the icon's eyes closed in death. "Most High

glorious God," he prayed, "enlighten the darkness of my heart. Give me, Lord, a correct faith, a certain hope, a perfect charity, sense and knowledge, so that I may carry out Your holy and true command." Ever more quietly he repeated the prayer until the only words spoken were the unspoken ones in his heart. Almost imperceptibly, the eyes of the icon opened and the head nodded forward toward Francis. Somehow the movements seemed not startling but rather perfectly natural. From the Crucified spoke a tender, kind voice, a voice a parent might use in addressing an obedient but rather uncomprehending child. "Francis, don't you see that my house is being destroyed? Go, then, and rebuild it for me." So this was his mission! God be praised! "I will do so gladly, Lord," Francis joyfully exclaimed. Oh, to finally be given direction, after all these months! To rebuild this crumbling edifice and make it fit again for worship! What a glorious task! Francis leaped to his feet and, with an exultant bow to the Crucified, whirled to leave the vault. He would begin at once. Francis began his mission as a penitent, that is, a person converted to the Lord. He adopted the garb and lifestyle of the penitents of his day and went about begging stones to rebuild San Damiano. Folks thought that the playboy merchant had become a madman, but to their taunts and mud slinging, Francis simply offered his thanks and a blessing. As he lugged stones down the steep hill to San Damiano, he would sing. His singing rang out as he repaired the decaying walls. He sang as he trudged uphill, back to Assisi, to beg more rocks and to meet with more verbal and physical mockery. Nothing destroyed his joy. Francis knew that a life of penance is a life of joy or else it is not worthy of the name "conversion."

Only with the passage of time did Francis slowly come to realize that the message to rebuild God's house went beyond the three Assisian chapels which Francis repaired. God was calling Francis to rebuild the Church itself, by becoming a unique and radical witness for Christ, in poverty, simplicity, and humility. In the same vein, Christ calls all penitents to rebuild the Catholic Church. Rebuild it by witnessing to the truth of the faith, by living lives centered on God and devoted to neighbor, by being people of prayer and selflessness. Not easy goals but the San Damiano cross portrays pictorial guideposts on how to do these very things.

When one gazes at the Crucifix of San Damiano, one is immediately captured by the wide open eyes and serene face of the Lord. The eyes seem to gaze gently into the penitent's soul, beckoning, "Come, follow Me." The face pleads but does not cajole. The invitation to become the Lord's is made with love yet freedom. Christ calls, but He does not force assent. On the cross, Christ is both crucified and glorified, showing that the penitential life of joyful and voluntary self surrender for the sake of others is a humble self emptying that leads to our eternal glory. A small figure of a cock, alongside Christ's lower legs, recalls Peter's denial of Christ, a bitter reminder to penitents of our own sinfulness, which we offer to God as part of our own self-emptying. "Lord, have mercy on me for I am a sinner." On the opposite side, is a very faint creature almost impossible to see. The figure, intentionally nearly invisible, is that of a cat or a fox, both symbols of secretive, sly acts of treachery and deceit. The towering, glowing figure of Christ overshadows both the rooster and the fox/cat. Christ has overcome both public sins like that of Peter and private, hidden sins that lurk in the dens of our souls. We can be forgiven of all if we gaze into the eyes of that Crucified God-Man and call out, "I believe. Forgive me. I give myself to You."

Behind Christ's outstretched arms is a long, black band that represents the empty tomb. Above Him radiate the glories of heaven. The Father's Hand at the top of the icon blesses us who venerate the image as well as the Ascended Christ who enters glory, surrounded by welcoming angels and saints. The Father's two extended fingers, in granting the blessing, grant the Holy Spirit as well, coming from the Father to be with us forever. Thus we have hope that, because of our voluntary giving of

self to God and to neighbor, we, too, will overcome eternal death and enter eternal life, won for us by the Sinless One Who took our sins upon Himself and Who died voluntarily for us so that we might live for Him. Christ stands on a solid black mass which represents the Rock of the Catholic Church. On the foundation of the Church, which, in the Pope and Magisterium support Christ, we penitents can feel secure. Below this Rock, almost obliterated by thousands of kisses placed at the foot of this cross, are haloed saints whom we cannot identify. Scholars postulate that these may be patron saints of the churches of Assisi: Saints Damian, Rufinus, Michael, John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul. However, no one is certain who these saints are. Because we cannot identify them, these saints remind us of the unknown multitudes who were washed in the Blood of Christ, who remained solidly within the Church, and who reign with Christ in heaven. They are humbly placed beneath the feet of Christ for they recognize that He is their Lord and Master. So must we realize the same.

Around the cross are clustered holy followers of Christ who are models for penitents. First stands Our Lady, the sinless Virgin whose only response to God's Will was always a "yes." To her, the Confraternity and all its members are dedicated. May we honor her daily as she intercedes for us. Next to her, sharing a smile for they know that Our Lord lives, is St. John the Evangelist, Christ's beloved apostle who spoke so eloquently of the divinity and of the love of Christ. It's wise for penitents to read his Gospel frequently and to meditate well on it. The blood from Christ's pierced heart is spurting on John, who is representative of all humanity. We are all bathed in the living, ever flowing sacrificial love of Christ, a love so profoundly intense that it led to His incarnation, life on earth, Passion, and death.

On the opposite side of the Crucifix stands Mary Magdalene, she who loved the Lord so sincerely that she would not even abandon Him at His grave. Her hand is to her mouth, as is Our Lady's Hand. The two women, who loved Christ best, are sharing the deepest feelings of their hearts with those who listen to them. What can these two women teach us about a pure and total love of the Lord? If only we could hear what they are saying! Perhaps if we pray, the Holy Spirit will grant our hearts insights into their selfless and pure love.

Listening intently to Mary Magdalene is Mary Clopas, another woman who came to the tomb with Mary Magdalene, to anoint the dead body of the Lord. These two women typify the intense and courageous devotion which penitents ought to have for Christ, a devotion that persists no matter how difficult life may become.

Last in line, is a figure who may represent either of two men. Perhaps this red robed gentleman without a halo represents the centurion who was captured by Christ at the very hour of our Lord's death. The bearded figure is oblivious to the crowd. His gaze is fixed on Christ, just as was the gaze of that centurion whose conversion came about because he witnessed the crucifixion. The wood which he holds in his hand could be symbolic of his role in erecting the cross or in fastening the inscription over it which reads "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." The centurion is holding up three fingers which indicate the Trinity. He now knows, "Truly this man was the Son of God." As the circumstances of the centurion's conversion point out, the past makes no difference and the future does not count where conversion is concerned. The right time for conversion is always now.

Behind the centurion are the heads of many others. These may be those multitudes who witnessed the crucifixion. The only figure whose face is visible is the one in front and he is frowning. This figure may represent those who mocked Christ, taunting Him to come down from the cross and save Himself. The grumpy looking man and the heads behind him remind us that we have a choice--we can believe and smile as the other major figures are doing, or we can reject Christ and be devoid of spiritual happiness.

There is an alternative symbolism for the bearded, red robed man and the small figures behind him. Perhaps this man represents the centurion whose story is told in the Gospels of Luke (7:1-10) and Matthew (8:5-13). Luke's story reveals that this centurion was a supportive of the Jewish community and had built for them a synagogue, represented by the wood which this figure holds. The centurion had asked Jesus to cure his servant but did not feel it was necessary for Christ to enter his house to do so. "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof," the centurion said. "Just say the word and my servant will be healed." The words recall what Catholics profess at every Mass before the reception of the Eucharist. The man's gaze so fixed on Christ admonishes us to see Him in the Eucharistic Presence and to adore Him as this man is doing.

In this interpretation, the small head behind the centurion is the cured servant and the heads behind him the members of the centurion's household, all of who came to believe in Christ because of the miracle of the servant's cure. We are reminded that God's workings in our lives are expansive. What He does for one can bring many others to Him. Two small Roman figures are on either side of the cross as well. One seems to signify the soldier who offered Jesus a taste of sour wine. The other could possibly be the centurion who pierced the side of Christ with a lance. These men are sad symbols of those who are just "doing their jobs," without regarding the moral nature of their work. As penitents we need to beware of engaging in any activity that is not morally sound. In the red border around the cross are scrolls that recall tendrils of vines. They bring to mind Christ's admonition that He is the vine while we are but branches. To bear fruit, we must remain in Him. A life of penance, conversion, must be rooted in Christ.

The Crucifix is bordered with golden scallop shells, ancient symbols of baptism. In baptism, we are made new, our sins removed by the grace of the God-Man Who died for us in agony. Penitents must daily renew their baptismal promises to reject satan and embrace the fullness of the faith. This we do by twice daily praying both the Apostle's Creed and Psalm 51. The wounds of Christ are spurting blood which pours down upon the figures of the cross and upon us. The crucifixion is not something that happened once and can be thought of as a past event. The crucifixion is timeless in the mind of God to Whom all time is now. Christ's agony is real and immediate. He suffers now for our sins and for the sins of all. His fresh and flowing wounds call us to give our life blood for the sake of others, as He did, in loving service to all.

The loincloth that girds the figure is white for purity and chastity, virtues to which all penitents are called, yet bordered in gold, the garb of a king. The cloth is tied with three knots, reflecting the purity and kingly nature of the Trinity. The cloth reminds us that pure and holy lives are the only lives worthy of penitents, and the only lives that will lead to glory.

The hair that cascades down Christ's shoulders plaits into three locks on His left shoulder and three on His right, with Christ's head in the center. The six locks of hair recall the six days of Creation, while the head of Christ indicates the Lord of that creation and the Commandment that He be honored on the seventh day. Penitents are to honor the Solemnity of the Sabbath and keep it holy for the Lord and, likewise, to keep holy all other Solemnities of the Church.

The halo behind Christ's head is radiant and huge. It portrays a cross, too, yet a glorified one, reminding us that holiness is possible only through embracing of the cross of Christ. The way of the cross leads to glory. The primary colors of the crucifix are black, gold, and red. Black for sin and penance, red for sacrifice and love, and gold for glory. The colors alone are a sermon on conversion. May we repent of our sins, be willing to sacrifice for and love others and the Lord, and be rewarded with eternal glory.