

OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP

Our Lady of Perpetual Help is a Byzantine icon that is believed to have its origin sometime during the 13th -15th century. The image is also known as “Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.” The icon is known for being miraculous; over the centuries countless healings and special graces have been attributed to it, so much so that the image has been honoured and venerated by many Popes.

The miraculous icon depicts the Virgin Mary, under the title “Mother of God,” holding the Child Jesus.

The Archangels Michael and Gabriel, hovering in the upper corners, hold the instruments of the Passion of Jesus. St. Michael (in the left corner) holds the spear, the wine-soaked sponge, and the crown of thorns. St. Gabriel (in the right corner) holds the cross and the nails.

The intent of the artist was to portray the Child Jesus contemplating the vision of His future Passion. Frightened by the vision, he runs to his mother for consolation. The anguish He feels is shown by the loss of one of His sandals as he quickly flees into the arms of his Mother.

Despite a foreboding vision of suffering, the icon also conveys the triumph of Christ over sin and death, symbolized by the golden background as a sign of the glory of the resurrection. The royal crowns on the heads of Jesus and Mary also symbolize their triumph as the King of Kings with his Queen Mother.

In a very beautiful way, the Child Jesus grasps the hand of the Blessed Mother. He seeks comfort from His mother as He sees the instruments of His passion. The position of Mary’s hands – both holding the Child Jesus (who seems like a small adult) and at the same time presenting Him to us – convey the reality of our Lord’s incarnation, that He is true God who became also true man.

What Our Lady of Perpetual Help Means for Us

Just as the Child Jesus fled into the arms of his Mother when he was frightened, so too do we flee into the arms of our Blessed Mother with child-like confidence whenever fear envelopes our hearts. Just as the Virgin Mother consoled and comforted her Divine Child, so too does she console and comfort us, her spiritual children, in our afflictions. We can always come to her in our time of need and receive her help.

Mary is represented as the one who guides us to the Redeemer. The Virgin Mother is also our Help who intercedes with her Son on our behalf. The star painted on Mary's veil, centered on her forehead, highlights her role in the plan of salvation as both the Mother of God and our Mother.

To this day, the Church of St. Alphonsus in Rome displays the original icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. They are the guardians and promoters of the holy icon, the only religious order entrusted with the task of doing so with a venerated image of Our Lady.