

The Deesis Icon

Painted by the hand of Odile van der Hoff, parishioner and Christian Meditation coordinator.

Deesis is Greek for supplication or intercession (Latin: mediation). This is originally a Byzantine composition whereby Our Lord Jesus Christ is depicted as a judge in between the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist or the Forerunner (his name in the Orthodox Church). The latter two raise their hands in supplication for humanity.

The Greek letters at the sides of their head give their names: the Mother of God, Jesus Christ, St John the Forerunner. In Christ's halo you see in the arms of the cross the Greek letters 'omega, omicron, nu', which stand for 'I am that I am' (Exodus 3:14).

In the centre of the composition we see Our Lord seated on a throne as a loving, merciful and righteous judge. His right hand is raised, asking our attention. In his left hand he is holding Holy Scripture, open at the pages of the Book of Revelation (22:13) where the Lord says "*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last*".

The intercessors are at both sides: at his left St John the Forerunner as representative of the Old Testament, at his right the Virgin Mary as representative of the New Testament. They supplicate for a merciful but fair judgement.

The following three features are important in this composition:

- The bowing of the heads. By bowing their heads Mary and St John display their humility and their respect for the judge. This humility is important for their supplication: it embodies the relation between God and man.
- The raising of the hands. Their supplication is expressed by the raising of their hands. Through these two mediators humanity addresses itself to the Lord; in their capacity Mary and St John form the way and means to reach God.
- The depiction of the two advocates at ¾ view. A figure that is not depicted frontally has less authority. Jesus Christ, depicted here '*en face*', is sitting on a throne, slightly more elevated, seemingly more distant, awe inspiring and less accessible. The reason why Mary and St John are depicted at ¾ view is that as mediators they are open to both mankind and to Our Lord.

Please note that there is no clear distinction between heaven and earth. The colours of the garments are indicative of the nature of the holy persons. Christ is wearing a purple/red undergarment to indicate his royal and divine nature, plus a blue outer garment for his human nature. For the Virgin Mary this is the other way around. The green outer garment of St John stands for renewal, a new beginning; the orange and brown of his undergarment carry the meaning of revolution and humility.

This icon was painted last year, using the ancient tempera technique (paint pigment and egg yolk). It has been blessed very recently in a special ceremony by a RC priest. The painting of this icon involved 72 hours (4,5 months of weekly 4-hour intensive painting sessions). The wooden board was made exclusively for this composition and genuine gold leaf was used where appropriate.

A reserve of € 1.000 has been put on the sale of this icon. This amount involves all the cost of painting the icon, including guidance of an expert teacher, the painter's fee, travel cost, material, etc. The proceeds from the sale of this icon will go partly to the painter and partly to a charity designated by the RC Parish of Our Saviour.