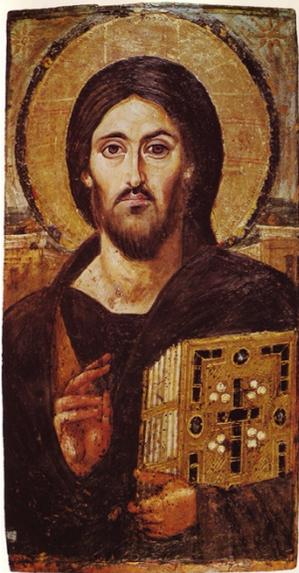


LENT



“Now let us all with one accord, in company with ages past, keep vigil with our heavenly Lord in his temptation and his fast.

Your love, O Lord, our sinful race has not returned, but falsified; author of mercy, turn your face and grant repentance for our pride.

Therefore, we pray you, Lord forgive; so where our wanderings here shall cease, we may with you for ever live, in love and unity and peace.”

Gregory the Great (540 – 604)

The Sinai Christ

6th Century, St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai

The Sinai Christ is the oldest image of Jesus in existence. Most probably created near Constantinople in the late 6th or early 7th Century, it survived the great iconoclastic controversies of 726 – 787 and 814 – 842 that destroyed the majority of the period's icons. The Sinai Christ was preserved in the remote desert monastery of Saint Catherine (Santa Katarina) in the foothills of the mountain where Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments. This holy site on the Sinai Peninsula has been a place of worship and a destination for pilgrims since 300 AD. Heavily overpainted, the icon was not revealed as a religious treasure until a cleaning in 1962.

Christ Pantocrator is among the classic descriptions of Jesus in Eastern iconography. *Pantocrator* (meaning all powerful) is used in the form YHWH (“Lord of Hosts”) and El Shaddai (“God Almighty”). The equivalent depiction in Western Christianity would be “Christ in Majesty.” In this icon Christ's left hand holds a closed Gospel Book (as opposed to the open book of “Christ the Teacher”) and his right hand is raised in blessing, making the sign of “X” and “C” for Jesus Christ.

Most noticeable is the asymmetrical configuration of the face, with the left side (Christ's right) being both lighter and more gentle than the somber and, some believe, either tearful or damaged right side (Christ's left). Use of this technique helps place the icon with the controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries, which debated over the human and divine nature of Jesus. The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) provides the classic “Definition of the Union of the Divine and Human Nature in the Person of Christ” and is found on page 864 of the Book of Common Prayer. This asymmetry adds a powerful dimension to meditation and prayer with this icon.

Saint Mark's “Icons for Meditation” is an ongoing series in the Chapel of Reconciliation in which great iconographic works of Christendom are presented seasonally for study and contemplation.