

d. The Iconostasis

600 In our Church tradition the veneration of icons is organically bound up with liturgical services in church. The church building is a place of encounter of the heavenly and the earthly, of the invisible and the visible, of God and people. This encounter takes place in the Divine Liturgy, while the icons visibly manifest the heavenly, invisible, divine world. Icons are placed on the iconostasis. This is a wall that separates and at the same time unites the sanctuary and nave. The sanctuary represents the invisible presence of God—heaven—to which we are directed. The nave, in turn, represents the visible world of our earthly life, within which we make the pilgrimage of our life.

601 The Venerable Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky teaches:

The part [of the church] behind the iconostasis where the Holy Table is found, and the Divine Liturgy is celebrated is the image of heaven, whereas that part where the people stand is the image of the Church on earth. The iconostasis is, as it were, the doors to God's eternal kingdom. On the iconostasis is gathered all that Jesus Christ gives to Christians in the Church, all that he did for them. On the icons is represented all that the Holy Church teaches people and the entire way along which she leads people to heaven.⁴⁷⁹

602 The iconostasis has three doors: in the centre are the Royal Doors (also called the Doors of Paradise or Holy Doors), and on either side are the Deacons' Doors. The doors symbolize the link between heaven and earth; they are opened as a sign that God and his angels manifest their presence during the divine services. This exchange between heaven and earth is symbolized by the entering and exiting of the bishop (or presbyter) and deacon through the doors of the iconostasis during divine services. On the Royal Doors are icons of the Annunciation and of the four evangelists. On the side doors are icons of archangels or deacons. These icons show that the Good News of the Messiah's coming was addressed first of all to Mary of Nazareth and that her assent to accept divine motherhood opened the gates of paradise that were previously closed due to sin. The Good News of Christ the Messiah was proclaimed to the world by the four evangelists. The icons of the evangelists on the Royal Doors, and of the Mystical Supper above them, indicate that we enter into God's kingdom by receiving the Gospel proclamation and Holy Communion.

⁴⁷⁹ METROPOLITAN ANDREY SHEPTYTSKY, Пастирський лист до вірних Львівської та Кам'янецької єпархій 0 Церкві [Pastoral Letter to the Faithful of the Lviv and Kamyanets Eparchy - On the Church] (January 14, 1901).

- 603 Behind the Royal Doors is a curtain (in Greek, *katapetasma*). Usually it is closed, but its opening during the Divine Services shows that the incomprehensible and inconceivable Lord opens himself to us, becomes accessible.
- 604 To the right of the Royal Doors is the icon of Christ, usually depicted as the Pantocrator (Almighty Ruler) and dressed in a tunic and mantle. In his left hand he holds a book; with his right hand he blesses. To the left of the Royal Doors we see the icon of the Mother of God, depicted as the *Hodegetria*, or The One Who Shows the Way. With one hand she holds the Christ-Child and with the other she points to him, showing the way. On some iconostases the *Hodegetria* icon can be replaced by an *Eleousa* (or *Tenderness*) icon of the Mother of God. On this icon the Christ-Child and his mother lean into one another cheek-to-cheek. Sometimes other Marian icons may be seen here, such as the Mother of God Enthroned with Child. Together, these two icons on either side of the Royal Doors—that is, of the Saviour and the Mother of God—express the entire plan of salvation: the Son of God became human (Christ's purple tunic is covered by a blue mantle) in order to make humans, represented by the Mother of God, partakers of his divinity (the blue tunic of the Mother of God is covered by a purple veil or *maphorion*).
- 605 Alongside the Deacons' Doors on both sides of the iconostasis are two more icons. On the south (right) side is the patronal icon, that is, of the person or event to which the church is dedicated. On the north (left) side we frequently find the icon of Saint Nicholas of Myra in Lycia. This first row of the iconostasis, which includes the Royal and Deacons' Doors and the main icons, is usually called the stationary or foundational row. Above this row the second, or festal, row presents the icons of twelve great feasts of the Lord and Mother of God. This row may also include more than twelve icons. Their order of succession may vary: it may follow the order of the Church Year, or, on the other hand, the north side may contain the icons of the Mother of God, and the south side—icons of the Lord. These icons depict not only past realities, that is, events of the past. Rather, these are the principal milestones in the history of salvation. Through the feasts of the Church Year the community experiences these events anew, receiving the particular grace of Christmas, or Theophany, or the other feasts.
- 606 Above the Royal Doors is the icon of the Mystical Supper. It is placed here because under this icon the faithful approach to receive Communion, to partake of the Lord's Supper.