

Icons

Consider the sense of vision as a prayer.

What do you recall seeing when you awoke this morning? Throughout your day?

Can you see God's hand in all creation?

Religious art also can draw people to a sense of God's presence.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, visual representations of the scriptures are called icons.

Icons are not considered paintings or drawings or even art by the iconographers who do them. They have been called "theology in color," or "the visual gospels." They are considered "words." They were first created for those who couldn't read, so that one could look at them and know the scripture that was referred to, the story.

Icons are enjoyed not for artistic beauty but as a window into heaven, leading us to spiritual growth. You would not get an icon just because its color compliments your room décor, for instance.

Icons are not worshipped; they are used to help us worship God. People who "write" icons have a system in which they pray, fast, and meditate about everything, including the colors to use. If you have seen one icon, you instantly recognize it, even when it is done by another iconographer. There are slight differences, which are sort of like different versions of the Bible.

There are many icons in this room. Some are the ancient versions common in the Russian or Greek Orthodox Christian churches. Others are more modern icons that are inclusive of other cultures.

Here's how to pray with one:

Gaze at the icon. Let your eyes go all around the photo and then perhaps settle on one part. Ask God what message God has for you through the icon.

Do not worry about the time. Allow yourself to consider the beauty of the icon, its message and God's loving presence with you.