

The Horse and the Dragon

Contemplating the Making of an Icon

Dedication

To the Holy Orthodox Church,

who taught me to see.

To my teachers,

who patiently handed on what they themselves had received.

To my students,

who continually reminded me that learning begins in wonder.

And to every creature through whom the Creator has quietly revealed His mercy.

Above all,

to Christ,

whose Face in every icon longs to reveal.

Preface

For more than forty-five years, I have stood before icons—not simply to paint them, but to pray with them. Throughout those years I have come to understand that an icon never yields all of its meaning at once. Like the spiritual life itself, it reveals its mysteries gradually, through prayer, patient observation, and faithful participation in the life of the Church.

Among the icons that have accompanied me throughout my vocation, none has spoken more persistently than the icon of St. George in Battle. I painted it as I had received it from the tradition. I studied its prototypes, contemplated its symbolism, and taught its theology to my students. Yet there remained one element whose significance unfolded only after years spent working with horses.

It was the horse itself.

For many years I regarded the horse as part of the narrative, the noble companion of the saint. Only through the discipline of horsemanship did I begin to perceive something deeper. Horses became my teachers. They taught me that true strength is inseparable from gentleness, that trust cannot be forced, that discipline is born of relationship rather than domination, and that harmony arises only when two wills learn to move together.

Gradually I began to recognize these same truths within the icon.

The relationship between St. George and his horse is not incidental to the composition. It is theological. The icon reveals something profound about the human person, about the healing of the will, and about the mystery of cooperation between human freedom and divine grace. The dragon, the spear, the horse, and the saint together

proclaim not simply a victory over evil, but the restoration of the human person in Christ.

The reflections that follow are not intended as a historical study of the legend of St. George, nor as a comprehensive theological treatise. They are the fruit of many years spent writing icons, studying the Fathers of the Church, living alongside horses, and seeking to understand how God continually teaches us through both Holy Tradition and His creation.

Again and again I have discovered that creation itself becomes a teacher when it is contemplated with humility. The horse, in particular, has revealed to me dimensions of patience, attentiveness, self-knowledge, and communion that have illuminated the icon of St. George in unexpected ways. What I once understood primarily as an image of heroic conquest has become, over time, an icon of healing, transformation, and the gradual restoration of the human heart.

The iconographer does not invent meaning. Rather, he or she enters into the living memory of the Church, receiving what has been handed down and learning to see more deeply into the mystery already present. It is in that spirit that these reflections are offered.

My hope is simple: that those who stand before the icon of St. George may begin to notice the horse with new eyes and, in doing so, glimpse something of the quiet work of divine grace within their own lives.

There are moments in every iconographer's life when the icon ceases to be something painted and becomes something lived.

The prototype no longer remains on the panel.

It enters the heart.

Only then does the icon begin to reveal what it has been saying all along.

This book is the story of one such revelation.

"Everything contained in these pages has grown from the living Tradition of the Orthodox Church, from my teachers, my mentors, my students, the saints, and the countless hours spent before the icon and within God's creation. If there is any truth here, it belongs to the Church. Any shortcomings remain my own."



Chapter One

Learning to See

Every icon begins long before the first brush touches the panel.

It begins in silence.

For many years I have found myself standing before a prepared board with tears in my eyes, asking God for help. As the years have passed, that prayer has changed. In my younger years I prayed that I might paint well. Today I pray that I may see truly.

The difference is everything.

The iconographer is not called to invent a sacred image but to enter humbly into the living Tradition of the Church. The prototype already exists. The theology has already been confessed. The saints have already walked the path of holiness. My task is not to improve upon what has been entrusted to the Church, but to receive it faithfully and to offer my work as an act of obedience, gratitude, and love.

Over time I discovered that this way of seeing gradually transformed every part of my life. What began before an icon panel slowly extended into the world around me. I found myself paying closer attention—not only to icons but also to people, to creation, to silence, and, quite unexpectedly, to horses.

For many years I believed that the horse in the icon of St. George was simply part of the narrative. It was beautifully painted, carefully proportioned, faithful to the prototype, yet secondary to the saint himself.

I was wrong.

Only after years spent riding and living with horses did I begin to understand that the horse was patiently teaching me what I had overlooked in the icon for decades.

The icon had not changed.

The Tradition had not changed.

I had changed.

The more deeply I entered into the life of the Church, the more I discovered that the icon was quietly educating my vision. It was teaching me that creation is never merely background to salvation. Because the Word became flesh, the created world is capable of bearing witness to its Creator. The saints reveal this truth through their lives, and icons reveal it through sacred form.

The horse became one of my teachers.

Not because it replaced Scripture or the wisdom of the Holy Fathers (St. Maximos the Confessor on the will, St. John Damascus on the holy icons) , but because it taught me to recognize in lived experience what the Church had already preserved in her sacred memory. Patience. Humility. Discipline. Trust. Gentleness joined to strength. The mysterious cooperation between freedom and obedience. These lessons, learned over years of attentive relationship, slowly illuminated the icon of St. George in ways I

had never anticipated.

Looking back, I now understand that I was never simply learning to paint icons.

I was learning to see.

And perhaps that is the true vocation of every iconographer.

The journey of an iconographer is, above all, a journey toward the Face of Christ.

Along the way, we discover that the world God created is not silent. Through the lives of the saints, through the beauty of creation, through the quiet companionship of a horse, through prayer, labor, and love, we are continually invited to see more deeply.

The icon teaches us to behold the Face of Christ.

Then, by His grace, we begin to recognize His presence reflected throughout creation.

Every true act of seeing becomes an act of thanksgiving.

There came a time when I realized I was no longer simply painting icons.

The icons were painting me.

Each prototype slowly reshaped the way I perceived the world. What had once seemed ordinary became luminous. Prayer became less a search for answers than a school of attention. The saints ceased to be distant historical figures and became companions on the journey. Even creation itself seemed to wait with quiet patience for someone willing to see it as gift.

Only then did I begin to understand that the vocation of an iconographer is not merely to make holy images.

It is to become, however imperfectly, a person whose own vision is being healed.

Every icon I have written has taught me something about Christ.

Every horse I have loved has taught me something about myself.

Together they have taught me that all true seeing begins in humility, is sustained by grace, and finds its fulfillment in love.

An iconographer spends a lifetime learning that every line, every color, every gesture must decrease so that Christ may increase.

Perhaps writing is no different.

The truest words are not those that call attention to themselves.

They are the ones that quietly disappear, leaving the reader standing before the mystery instead of the author.

If, when these pages are finished, the reader remembers Christ more clearly than the one who wrote them, then the work has fulfilled its purpose.

Chapter Two

The Living Memory of the Prototype

People often ask me how long it takes to paint an icon.

I have never found that an easy question to answer.

If they are asking how many hours are spent preparing the board, applying the gesso, laying the gold, mixing pigments, and building successive layers of light, then perhaps the answer can be measured.

But if they are asking how long it takes to write an icon, I can only answer:

A lifetime.

An icon is never merely the product of artistic technique. It is the fruit of living within the memory of the Church.

Long before the first line is drawn, the iconographer has already entered a conversation that began centuries earlier. Every prototype bears within it the prayers of those who first contemplated the mystery, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers, the labor of generations of iconographers, and the faithful gaze of countless Christians who stood before the image seeking the Face of Christ.

When I stand before a prototype, I do not ask, "How shall I improve this image?"

Instead, I ask,

"What has the Church preserved here that I have not yet learned to see?"

That question has shaped my entire vocation.

The prototype is not a limitation upon creativity. It is an invitation into freedom.

The modern world often understands freedom as the ability to create without restraint. The iconographer learns another kind of freedom: the freedom that comes through obedience. We willingly place ourselves beneath the wisdom of those who have gone before us, trusting that Holy Tradition enlarges rather than diminishes our vision.

Over the years I have discovered that every icon contains depths that cannot be exhausted. I have painted the same holy faces many times, yet each encounter has revealed something previously unnoticed. Not because the icon changed, but because grace continued its quiet work within me.

The prototype became my teacher.

It taught me patience before accomplishment.

Listening before speaking.

Receiving before creating.

It taught me that contemplation is itself a form of participation in the living memory of the Church.

As iconographers we do not preserve the past as though it belonged to history alone.

We receive it as something alive.

The saints remain alive.

Their witness remains alive.

The Incarnation remains alive.

The icon itself becomes a meeting place where the eternal enters the present moment.

For this reason I have never believed that an icon is simply painted.

It is received.

And perhaps the greatest transformation occurs not upon the wooden panel, but within the heart of the iconographer.

Each icon quietly asks us the same question:

"Have you learned to see more deeply than before?"

The iconographer does not seek extraordinary experiences.

The iconographer seeks to become attentive.

For grace often arrives quietly, hidden within ordinary faithfulness.

Years may pass before a single line in an icon, the gentle eye of a horse, a verse of Scripture, or the face of a saint suddenly reveals what God has been teaching all along.

This is not the discovery of something new.

It is the joyful recognition of what has always been present.

Chapter Three

The Horse That Taught Me to See

There are moments in an iconographer's life when a familiar image suddenly becomes unfamiliar.

Not because the image has changed, but because our vision has.

For many years I painted the horse beneath St. George as generations of iconographers had painted it before me. I loved its movement, its grace, its nobility, and its quiet strength. I understood, as I had been taught, that the white horse reflected the purity and radiance of the saint who rode it.

Yet I sensed there was something more.

The horse seemed to be waiting patiently, asking me to look again.

Only after years of living among horses did I begin to understand why.

A horse cannot be mastered through force. It responds to truthfulness before technique, to consistency before command, and to relationship before control. The horse possesses great strength, yet willingly entrusts that strength to one who has learned humility, patience, and quiet confidence.

Again and again I found myself returning home from the stable thinking not about riding, but about my own soul.

The horse revealed impatience I had not noticed.

Fear I had tried to hide.

Pride that disguised itself as confidence.

Moments when I demanded instead of listened.

Moments when I corrected before I understood.

The horse became an uncompromising mirror.

It revealed me to myself.

Only then did I begin to understand the icon.

The relationship between St. George and his horse is not simply that of rider and mount.

It is the image of human nature learning to cooperate with grace.

The saint does not overpower the horse.

He is united with it.

Their movements become one.

Their purpose becomes one.

Their harmony becomes visible.

The icon teaches that holiness is not domination.

It is communion.

As I continued to contemplate the prototype, I began to see that the horse was not merely carrying the saint.

It was revealing something about every one of us.

Like the horse, our human nature is powerful, beautiful, wounded, and capable of extraordinary transformation.

Separated from God, our strength easily becomes fear, pride, or disorder.

United to Christ, those same powers become courage, gentleness, perseverance, and love.

The icon suddenly became intensely personal.

I was no longer looking only at St. George.

I was looking at my own journey.

The horse had become my teacher.

Not because it possessed wisdom of its own, but because the Creator, in His generosity, often teaches us through His creation.

As Job declares:

"But ask the beasts, and they will teach you..."

For many years I believed I was learning to ride.

Now I know that I was also learning to pray.

The horse taught me attentiveness.

The icon taught me contemplation.

Together they taught me that healing begins when we surrender the illusion of control and learn the quiet obedience that leads to communion with God.

When I now stand before the icon of St. George, I no longer see only a heroic saint defeating a dragon.

I see the mystery of the human person.

I see strength transformed by humility.

I see freedom shaped by obedience.

I see creation itself participating in redemption.

And I quietly thank the horse for waiting so patiently until I was finally able to see what had always been there.



The iconographer learns that revelation is rarely sudden.

It comes as dawn comes.

Quietly.

Patiently.

Almost unnoticed.

Until one morning the familiar has become luminous, and we realize that the light was present long before our eyes were ready to receive it.

Chapter Four

The Space Between the Horse and the Dragon

Among the many details that distinguish the icon of St. George, there is one that is easily overlooked.

It is not the dragon.

It is not the spear.

It is not even the saint himself.

It is the small space between the horse and the dragon.

To many viewers, this detail seems insignificant. Yet every faithful iconographer knows that the horse must not trample the dragon. The prototype preserves this relationship with remarkable consistency, not because of artistic convention alone, but because theology is being proclaimed through form.

For many years I accepted this canon with obedience. I painted what had been handed down without fully understanding why this distance mattered.

Only later did I begin to see.

The icon is never arbitrary.

Every line, every gesture, every relationship carries theological meaning.

The horse does not touch the dragon because evil possesses no true communion with what God created good.

The dragon is real.

Its presence cannot be denied.

Sin wounds.

Temptation deceives.

The passions distort the beauty of human nature.

Yet none of these things belongs to the essence of the human person created in the image of God.

The horse remains untouched.

This small space proclaims a profound truth.

Sin is not our nature.

It is an intrusion.

It is a distortion of what God lovingly created.

The icon refuses to confuse the human person with the passions that seek to enslave the human heart.

This understanding has shaped my own life as deeply as it has shaped my iconography.

Working with horses taught me that fear, resistance, impatience, and confusion are never the deepest identity of the horse itself. Beneath every struggle remains the creature God created—capable of trust, strength, beauty, and communion.

The patient trainer does not hate the resistance.

The patient trainer seeks the horse beneath it.

Gradually I realized that the Holy Fathers describe the human person in much the same way.

Repentance is not the destruction of our humanity.

It is its restoration.

Grace does not replace our nature.

Grace heals it.

Standing before the icon of St. George, I began to understand why the horse must never crush the dragon beneath its hooves.

The icon is proclaiming hope.

No matter how fiercely evil attacks, it never becomes the deepest truth about the human person.

The dragon may tempt.

It may wound.

It may frighten.

But it cannot erase the image of God.

Only Christ heals.

Only Christ restores.

Only Christ reveals who we have been created to become.

The small space between the horse and the dragon becomes, for me, one of the most hopeful places in

all of iconography.

It is the space where freedom remains possible.

It is the space where repentance begins.

It is the space where grace quietly waits.

When I now paint the horse of St. George, I do so with new reverence.

That tiny distance is no longer simply part of the composition.

It has become a confession of faith.

It reminds me that God never confuses His beloved creation with the darkness that seeks to obscure it.

The icon teaches us to see the distinction clearly.

And in learning to see it, we begin to understand ourselves with greater mercy, greater humility, and greater hope.



There are tears that arise from sorrow.

There are tears that arise from gratitude.

And there are tears that belong to mercy.

These are the tears that have accompanied me most often before an icon.

Not because I believed myself worthy to paint holy images, but because I knew that every icon is a witness to the immeasurable mercy of God toward His creation.

As the years passed, I discovered that those same tears would come while standing beside a horse, walking through the quiet of the countryside, or contemplating the face of a saint. Slowly I came to understand that mercy enlarges our vision. It teaches us to look upon creation not as something to possess or control, but as something entrusted to our care and offered back to God in thanksgiving.

Perhaps this is why the iconographer must first learn compassion.

For only a merciful heart can begin to perceive the world as Christ sees it.

Chapter Five

The Spear and the Healing of the Human Will

When we first stand before the icon of St. George, our attention is naturally drawn to the spear. It appears to be the instrument by which the dragon is overcome. Yet, as with every element of the icon, the Church invites us to look beyond the obvious.

The spear is not merely a weapon.

It is a revelation.

Over the years I have often returned to the icon asking why the spear is held with such remarkable stillness. There is no violence in the saint's face. No anger in his posture. No triumphal gesture proclaiming his own strength.

Everything about the icon speaks of peace.

Only gradually did I begin to understand that the spear is not revealing the destruction of an enemy. It is revealing the healing of the human will.

The Fathers teach us that the human will is one of God's greatest gifts. It is through our freedom that we love. It is through our freedom that we offer ourselves to God. Yet that same freedom can become fragmented, fearful, proud, or turned inward upon itself.

The icon does not portray a will dominated by force.

It portrays a will restored to its original purpose.

The spear becomes the visible form of that restored will.

Straight.

Undivided.

Steady.

Entirely directed toward the good.

Its strength does not arise from aggression but from communion.

The more I contemplated this mystery, the more I recognized something unexpectedly familiar.

The horse had already been teaching me the same lesson.

No rider can guide a horse through tension alone. A horse immediately perceives hesitation, fear, pride, or impatience. The rider's hands become truthful long before the horse obeys them.

The horse does not respond first to strength.

It responds to integrity.

Slowly I came to realize that the saint's hand upon the spear possesses this same integrity.

His hand is quiet because his heart is quiet.

His will has become transparent to the will of God.

There is no division within him.

This is the mystery that the icon quietly proclaims.

The dragon is not overcome because St. George possesses greater physical power.

The dragon is overcome because nothing within St. George cooperates with it.

His fear no longer answers fear.

His pride no longer answers temptation.

His heart has become whole.

The spear therefore teaches something that reaches far beyond the story of one saint.

Every Christian is called to hold such a spear.

Not a weapon of iron, but a will made steadfast through prayer, repentance, humility, and love.

This healing is never accomplished by our own effort alone.

It is born through communion with Christ.

The Church calls this synergia: the mysterious cooperation between divine grace and human freedom.

As I painted this icon over many years, I began to understand that the spear is perhaps the simplest line in the entire composition.

Yet it may also be the most profound.

One straight line.

One undivided will.

One human heart resting entirely in God.

Whenever I now stand before the icon of St. George, I no longer see a spear defeating a dragon.

I see the quiet beauty of a human will restored to the likeness for which it was created.

And I find myself praying that my own heart may one day become so simple, so peaceful, and so wholly directed toward Christ.



The Open Heart

The heart does not open because it has found every answer.

It opens because it has learned to trust.

The iconographer stands before the empty panel knowing that nothing holy can be accomplished by skill alone.

The brush waits.

The pigments wait.

The gold waits.

Even the prototype waits.

The first movement is always the opening of the heart.

For only an open heart can receive what the Holy Spirit desires to reveal.

Everything else is added in its proper time.

The line.

The color.

The light.

The face.

The blessing.

So it is with every Christian life.

God does not first ask whether we are accomplished.

He asks whether we are willing.

For an open heart becomes the place where grace finds room to dwell.

And where grace dwells,

Christ becomes visible.

Chapter Six

The Whisper of Creation

There are days when I leave the stable convinced that I have attended another lesson.

No words were spoken.

No lecture was given.

Yet something within me has changed.

For many years I wondered how this could be.

Then I slowly began to understand that it was never the horse speaking to me.

It was God.

The horse was one of His beautiful creations through which He chose to whisper.

The mystery was never the animal alone.

The mystery was always the Creator, whose love quietly shines through everything He has made.

The more deeply I entered the life of the Church, the more I discovered that the saints had always known this. They did not worship creation. They loved it because it belonged to God. They listened carefully because every created thing, rightly received, bears witness to the One who called it into being.

Only then did I begin to understand that every day spent with my horses was not simply another day of riding.

It was another invitation to prayer.

The greatest lessons of my life have rarely come with great noise.

More often they have arrived as a whisper.

A quiet morning in the stable.

The warmth of a horse resting its head upon my shoulder.

The stillness that follows prayer before an unfinished icon.

The gentle light falling across an ancient prototype.

The silence of a monastery.

A student's question that remained with me long after class had ended.

These moments seemed ordinary while I was living them.

Only later did I recognize them as gifts.

For many years I believed that I was learning iconography from books, teachers, and faithful

prototypes. While this is certainly true, I slowly came to realize that God was also teaching me through His creation.

Not by adding to the revelation entrusted to the Church.

But by opening my heart to recognize that same Truth reflected throughout His world.

The horse became one of those quiet teachers.

Not because it possessed divine wisdom, but because it belonged to the Creator whose wisdom fills all things.

There were days when no remarkable event occurred. I simply brushed a mane, cleaned a stall, stood in silence, or rode through the changing seasons.

Yet I often returned home aware that something within me had become quieter.

More attentive.

More patient.

More grateful.

Only after many years did I understand that these were not merely lessons in horsemanship.

They were lessons in communion.

A horse cannot be hurried into trust.

Neither can the human heart.

A horse cannot be deceived by appearances.

Neither can God.

A horse responds to the quiet integrity of the person before it.

How much more does Christ call us to such integrity?

Creation became, for me, a gentle school of repentance.

Not because it spoke with words, but because it reflected the order, patience, generosity, and beauty of its Creator.

As I continued writing icons, these experiences gradually became inseparable.

The silence before the panel prepared me for the silence beside the horse.

The patience learned from the horse deepened my patience before the prototype.

The reverence awakened by the icon transformed the way I looked upon creation.

Everything began to speak the same language.

The language of communion.

This has led me to believe that one of the greatest gifts of the iconographer is not merely the ability to paint sacred images.

It is the gradual healing of perception.

We begin to recognize that every true beauty points beyond itself.

Every act of genuine love reflects its Source.

Every created thing, received with thanksgiving, quietly invites us toward Christ.

For this reason I no longer ask what the horse has taught me.

Instead, I ask what Christ has chosen to reveal through one of His beloved creatures.

The answer is never exhausted.

Each day brings another whisper.

Each whisper becomes another invitation.

And every invitation leads more deeply into the mystery of the Incarnation, where the Creator entered His own creation so that all creation might once again become transparent to His glory.

It is a profound sense of awe to know that life itself rests in God's hands.

As the years have passed, I have come to recognize the Creator in every living, breathing creature—not because creation is divine, but because it bears the imprint of the One who lovingly called it into being.

The icon taught me to contemplate this mystery.

My horses taught me to receive it.

Together they have taught me that reverence begins when we recognize that every living thing exists because it is first loved by God.

From that recognition grows gratitude.

From gratitude grows humility.

From humility grows communion.

And in communion, we begin, however imperfectly, to behold the Face of Christ.

There comes a time when the iconographer realizes that every icon has been preparing the heart for one final icon.

Not one painted upon wood.

But the image of Christ slowly being restored within the human person.

Every prototype.

Every prayer.

Every layer of pigment.

Every moment of silence.

Every act of repentance.

Every lesson received from creation.

Every tear offered in gratitude.

All of it belongs to the quiet work of the Holy Spirit, who never ceases to restore the image that was placed within us from the beginning.

Perhaps this is the true vocation of the iconographer.

Not merely to paint holy images.

But to become, by grace, ever more transparent to the Face of Christ.

And when that begins to happen, the only words that remain are these:

Glory to God for all things.

Chapter Seven

Becoming the Icon

There is a question I have been asked throughout my life.

"When did you become an iconographer?"

For many years I answered by speaking of teachers, study (and in one such study from student teachers trained by Fr. Zenon), travel (Russia, Ukraine, Greece), and the first icons I was privileged to write.

Now my answer is different.

I do not believe there was a single moment.

An iconographer is formed slowly.

Layer by layer.

Prayer by prayer.

Failure by failure.

Grace upon grace.

When I was young, I believed the icon was something I would one day master.

The years taught me otherwise.

The icon cannot be mastered.

It must be received.

The prototype became my teacher.

My mentors became living witnesses.

The Holy Fathers became trusted companions.

My students became unexpected instructors, for through their questions I often discovered how much more there was to learn.

The horses entrusted to my care taught me patience when I wished to hurry, humility when I wished to succeed, and attentiveness when I thought I was already listening.

Every experience belonged to the same school.

The school of Christ.

Only now, looking back, do I understand that God was never asking me simply to paint holy images.

He was patiently restoring His own image within me.

Every icon I completed quietly continued its work long after the pigments had dried.

The icon remained before me.

The saint remained beside me.

The questions remained within me.

The journey continued.

Perhaps this is why I no longer measure an icon by the smoothness of its lines or the brilliance of its colors.

I ask another question.

Has this icon helped me love Christ more deeply?

Has it taught me greater humility?

Has it enlarged my compassion?

Has it made me more attentive to the quiet beauty of God's creation?

If not, then I have more to learn.

For the greatest icon God is writing is not the one resting upon my easel.

It is the one He is patiently restoring within every human heart.

This work continues for as long as we draw breath.

And it is the greatest joy of my life to know that I remain a student within that holy school.

Receiving the Gift

There are gifts that we choose.

And there are gifts that quietly choose us.

I do not believe I chose iconography.

Looking back across the years, I can only say that it was given.

Like every gift from God, it carried both joy and responsibility.

It asked for patience before skill.

Prayer before understanding.

Humility before accomplishment.

There were moments when I believed I was shaping the icon.

Only later did I discover that the icon was shaping me.

Perhaps this is the mystery of every true vocation.

God never gives a gift merely to increase our abilities.

He gives it to enlarge our capacity to love.

If iconography has taught me anything, it is this:

The greatest gift is not learning to paint.

The greatest gift is slowly becoming a person whose heart remains open to the quiet work of the Holy Spirit.

Everything else follows from there.

And for that gift, I can only say,

The highest calling of an iconographer is not to leave behind beautiful icons.

It is to leave behind people who have learned to seek the Face of Christ.

Glory to God.



Epilogue

When I first stood before the icon of St. George, I believed I was learning to paint.

Years later, I thought I was learning theology.

Still later, I discovered that I was learning to pray.

Now, looking back across the years, I understand that God was gently teaching me something even simpler and far more profound.

He was teaching me to see.

To see the saint.

To see the horse.

To see creation.

To see my neighbor.

To see myself.

And through all of these, to seek the Face of Christ.

If these pages have accomplished anything, I hope it is only this:

That when you next stand before the icon of St. George, you will linger a little longer.

You will notice the stillness of his face.

The quiet strength of the horse.

The unwavering line of the spear.

The distance between the horse and the dragon.

The light that seems to come from another Kingdom.

And perhaps, in that holy silence, you will discover that the icon has been waiting patiently for you all along.

For every icon is an invitation.

Not merely to look.

But to enter.

Not merely to admire.

But to be transformed.

The journey of the iconographer is, in truth, the journey of every Christian.

It begins with learning to see.

It ends with learning to love.

And that journey has no end.

For in Christ,

love is forever.



O Lord, Bless Thine Inheritance

O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.

Bless every iconographer who stands before an empty panel with trembling hands.

Bless every student who longs to learn not only how to paint, but how to pray.

Bless every teacher who faithfully hands on what has first been received.

Bless every horse that has quietly taught patience, humility, trust, and gentleness.

Bless every saint whose life continues to illuminate the path of those who seek Thee.

Bless every tear offered in repentance.

Bless every silence filled with hope.

Bless every heart that desires only to behold Thy Face.

If these pages bear any goodness, let them belong to Thy Church.

If they offer any light, let it be only a reflection of Thy Light.

If they bring any healing, let every soul know that healing comes from Thee alone.

For Thou art the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the Beauty beyond every image, the Truth beyond every word, and the Love toward which every icon points.

To Thee be glory, with Thine eternal Father and Thine all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

Amen.



Before the Next Icon

Lord Jesus Christ,

*Tomorrow we will return to the panel,
not of wood alone,
but of memory,
of prayer,
of Holy Tradition,
and of the life You have so generously given.*

*Keep our hearts quiet enough to hear,
our minds humble enough to learn,
and our hands faithful enough to serve.*

May no word remain that seeks its own praise.

May every stroke become an offering.

May every image lead us more deeply into the mystery of Your Presence.

*Teach us to recognize Your Face
in the saints,
in the icon,
in creation,
and in one another.*

*And when this work is finished,
may it never point to its authors,
but only to the Light
from which every true icon receives its radiance.*

*For Yours is the Kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory,
now and ever,
and unto ages of ages.*

Amen.

