

## (Food for thought)

### 150 Years with the Redemptorist - Icon of the Mother of Perpetual Help (1866 – 2016)



**M**ater de Perpetuo Succursu, or as we used to call her, Mother of Perpetual Succour, comes from the Latin words ‘currere’ – to run- and ‘sub’ meaning ‘under’: she is as a mother who runs to catch her falling child. She is always at hand to help us,- being as she is the greatest disciple, and mother of her Son, mother of the whole ‘body of Christ’, his people. She cares for the whole body of Christ, all God’s people, as she cared for Jesus. ‘Mother, behold your son’, said Jesus from the cross to her, as she stood beside the beloved disciple,- and he represents all of us. She is watching out for us at all times.

Where did the icon come from? It is generally agreed that the icon was ‘written’ in Crete, in the Mediterranean. Sometime in the 1400’s, it was stolen from there by a merchant who brought it on his ship to Rome. A violent storm arose, and they prayed to Mary, and all were saved through her intercession. Shortly before his death, the merchant gave the icon to a friend to be put in some church in Rome. The friend never did so, until near the end of his own life, when his daughter had a dream in which the Virgin expressed the desire that the icon be placed in a church between St. Mary Major’s basilica and that of St. John Lateran. Eventually the icon was given to the church of St. Matthew, then in the care of the Irish Augustinians in Rome,- as this church was between the two basilicas, above. This was about the year 1500. The picture was venerated there for three hundred years, but when Napoleon attacked Rome in the early 1800’s, the icon was put into hiding in a chapel in St. Mary’s at Posterula. There it remained for over sixty years. Meantime, St. Matthew’s had been destroyed. A new church, San Alfonso was built by the Redemptorists on the former site of St. Matthew’s, and opened for worship in 1859. A Redemptorist, Michael Marchi, remembered as an old man that he had seen the famous icon of the Mater de Perpetuo Succursu when he was an altar server in the St. Mary’s at Posterula. The icon was recovered, it was in bad repair, but was restored by a Polish artist, Leopold Nowotny. In 1866, after it was restored, and remembering the story of where Our Lady wished the picture to be placed, Pope Pius IX entrusted it into the care of the Redemptorists, and since April 26 of 1866, it has

been venerated in the church of San Alfonso, on the Via Merulana, -between St. Mary Major's and St. John Lateran's.

Within a year, the first copy of the icon arrived in Mt. St. Alphonsus' Church in Limerick. In Esker, the Dominicans had a stained glass window made of the Mother of Perpetual Help, and it was in the Esker Church during their time. Later, when the Redemptorists came to Esker, and the church had to be extended, the icon window was removed, and it can now be seen on the stairway in the Retreat House.

So, this coming year, from the Feast of the Mother of Perpetual Help, June 27, until her feast day next June, Redemptorist celebrate the gift we have been given, of this Icon of Mary Our Mother.

