

GLIMPSE

Year of Mercy

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The word "icon" has gotten a new dressier position in our every-day experience. Icons were restricted to religious images and iconography was the painting or production of such articles. They were often painted on screens evoking prayer and feelings of devotion.

Icons have migrated to a new kind of screen that does not evoke anything like devotion except to that of more information and productivity. We are encouraged not to have false images before us as false gods. Our Jewish ancestors warred against the tribes and nations who served and worshipped images of various gods. Most historic cultures fashioned images depicting gods of protection, fruitfulness, power and even anger. The Jews of biblical history experienced the One God through physical and agricultural fertility as well as through interventions in victorious battles. Their images were not material, but memories expressed in songs, poems and rituals.

Here on my computer screen, I am presented with all these icons which offer me power and information almost returning me to the ancient tribal positions of begging for something I need. They burned animals or incense to please and assist the benevolence of the gods whose images stood before them. I do my worshiping by tapping a key and behold, there it all is, well most of the time.

A further use of the term is the person who is said to be an icon, or example, or image of something valued or esteemed. Persons of virtue or goodness can be icons of patience, faith, love, forgiveness, and other interior states of being. These persons can be of great encouragement to us and at the same time an insult or challenge to our ways of being and doing. In the presence of such icons we are called easily to reflect on our sub-iconicity. Their image is way up there and that can diminish our sense of self. Kierkegaard once said something like, the most common form of despair is not being or allowed to be our true selves. Iconic

persons can depress our true image and force us to be dominated by false images of who we really are.

The worst icon or image of god is the image which we create to lessen the image of our selves. The "false god" that we should not have before us is the self-created god which haunts and hounds us, reducing us to be who we are not. Our image of just who we must be prevents us from worshiping the One God and makes us and others false gods. The God in Whose image we are created is not stone or metal, but flesh and spirit. "Jesus is the face of God" as the "Bishop of Rome" writes in the letter which begins the Year of Mercy today. If that Face or image is merciful then so shall be the face of each of us. Our faces become the new screens on which the icons can be tapped for healing, gentleness, acceptance and forgiveness which are all written on the screen of God. It is only a glimpse, Happy New Year of Mercitude.