

Commentary for the Rose Of The Carrier Icon
In collaboration with
St. Thomas Aquinas Regional High School

When commissioned to write an icon of Rose Prince, the journey began in gathering all available information about Rose Prince, her story, and the discovery of her uncorrupted body. I had seen the painting of Rose, which has been part of the grassroots devotion and pilgrimages to her grave. It is a caring image which establishes Rose's identity by being depicted in a buckskin dress, and holding a talking stick. With the residential school portrayed in its background, my sense is that it was a means of highlighting Rose's sanctity in an institution, which remains a strong trigger for many others.

But the imagery of the painting posed a few challenges for the icon. An icon requires that it leads to prayer and not be political or posing conflicting questions around the residential schools. It was important that the icon be about Rose Prince.

With the icon having a gold leaf background, the issue of the Residential School imagery was not an issue. The task was to find the connection to Rose's interior life within an environment that she chose to remain in, primarily because of her physical restrictions, and her spiritual need to remain close to Jesus and Mary. In the hope of finding Rose, I initially looked for internal images of the chapel and workrooms. I knew that the Chapel was central to her life, as was her work with the students.

The other path of discovery was how to portray Rose herself. Although a member of the Dakelh (Carrier) Nation, there are no pictures of her in Traditional Regalia. There was no need to superimpose anything upon her as she herself was/is an Aboriginal person. But then, there were only a few blurry pictures of her, and the challenge was deciphering what I was seeing. There were no records as to colours etc. She wore her sweater with a small cross pinned on it. Two pictures showed her in a light coloured brocade patterned dress. I chose to make her sweater an Indigo Blue instead of the assumed black. A dark blue is preferred to black for some of the Indigenous Peoples, and I generally avoid black within my icons (unless a religious habit is required).

The dress in particular was challenging. It was impossible to work out the pattern from what could be seen in the reference photos. Nor did I know what colour to use. Having tried a few very pale vintage pastel colours without success, I decided to go with cream/sandy colours. I initially thought that it would be too close to the gold leaf on the icon, but the blue sweater framed it adequately. I created a pattern, based on sections that could be seen, and that would be recognizable to viewers of the icons.

In receiving archival pictures, I knew that the prayer book/hymnal was the key. It was one that Rose had used herself, which had been translated in the Carrier language, and one which she used to teach the children the Carrier language. It was the clearest symbol for the icon, which connected her spirituality and cultural heritage, and the Carrier Nation. The book is depicted as opened to Hymn No. 5. 'Truly ět šta' (Really there he sits, The Real Presence).

The archival pictures also presented a selection of her floral and ornamented artwork on the altar linens. The flowers are included along the bottom of the icon.

As the design was in progress, a question was brought to my attention about the use of a halo. Rose was just beginning her journey towards canonization. The question was whether a

conventional red halo would be premature. But to keep the icons timeless, and recognizing her sanctity in the interim, I chose a variation to honour Rose, using her inscription, which will remain applicable even once she is proclaimed Beatified or Saint, and use a light blue halo.

One last note which posed many attempts in the portrayal, was Rose's deformity from her childhood accident. Rather than overlooking the curved spine, or minimizing it, her deformity had to be honoured. It had become a painful life-long condition. But presenting the deformity with sensitivity posed challenges in how it affected her stance; complicated by a sweater, not within the iconographic norms robes, veils etc. 1940s garments had to work in with the same reverence and prayerfulness of other icons.

Rose's path to Sainthood has come as a surprise for some, with the unexpected discovery of her uncorrupted body. The title of the article by Marie Flouriot 'An Extraordinarily Ordinary Life' is precisely Rose's gift and example to the world. . There were no works of wonder, no collected writings, no followers prior to her death. She was buried with no added significance than any other student, and in the same cemetery location, which later required the relocation of those buried there. It was only at that time that she was discovered as being uncorrupt. It was interesting how her 'ordinariness' seemed inadequate to explain the uncorrupted discovery by witnesses of her time. Her ordinary life doesn't fit expectations of what a saint looks like. But that is the very thing that brings us hope, in seeing an ordinary person recognized and being a guiding light for us all, in just living a good and steadfast life.

The icon is 22"x28" and written on Baltic plywood covered with gessoed muslin, and written in archival acrylic and finished with 23K Patent Gold.

References:

* **'Uncorrupted, The story of Rose Prince'** DVD Produced by Gold Star Productions Inc.

* **'Indigenous woman's grave site brings pilgrims to former B.C. residential school'**,
Vancouver Sun

<http://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/indigenous-womans-grave-site-brings-pilgrims-to-former-b-c-residential-school>

***'Rose Prince: Reflecting On An Extraordinarily Ordinary Life'** by Marie Flouriot

http://www.pgdiocese.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2016-Rose-Prince_larticle_EN.pdf

Archival References Received From Lejac:



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HYMNS

No. 5. — *Truly ət ʃta.*
Cəzi, tatqa hwolla skēntsi
Antit tēhwoneszen:
Si spa Nəzelyutco inla
Tʃil'en snatcaōlnēh ha.
Ira yaʃənnē rhitiqerh
Srē ulnih lē-rhetēn!

(Hwēhanadītal i).

Alaʃsetni, Smutihthi, sēnroh sīnta;
Si spa inqa nqan nēnīnyā;

5.— Really there he-sits [the-Real Presence].

Air: Seigneur, je crois, et je veux.

Jesus, how (ex) thou-lovest-me
Now I-know:
Me for-me the-Eucharist thou-madest
Truly thou-shalt-do-charity-to-me that.
Therefore the-Angels themselves
Of-me are-jealous as-if-they-do!

(It-commencēs-again: refrain).

We-say-truly, my-Lord, near-me thou-sittest;
Me for-me thou-didst here thou-hast-stopped;