



Edmund Rice Icon

*Icon of
Blessed Edmund
Rice
(1762-1844)*

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Gazing at an Icon

The glance of a loved one makes the heart soar and gifts us a memory for life. We remember such glances. We recall them frequently and they nourish us when our spirit is weak. They sustain us when our strength is ebbing. When we doubt ourselves, they reassure us. We cherish them in idle moments as they lift up our hearts.

There is so much that can be communicated in a glance. A glance is momentary, whereas a gaze transcends all measurement of time. A gaze gently holds the eyes of the beloved one and in their eyes a glimpse of the soul is caught.

So too, when we take our time to gaze upon an icon. We first take in the detail and then gently we let our eyes rest. As the eyes rest, the apparent divide between the physical and spiritual realities dissolves. Effortlessly, we ford the waters separating presence from Presence.

We invite transformation within, as our gaze is returned. We who gaze find ourselves gazed upon. And as our conscious gaze meets the bestowed gaze, we open ourselves to be changed.

If we are patient and are able to sit, we will eventually close our eyes and our gaze is turned within. We realize that Presence is an indwelling Presence. This is a moment of centering, a moment of contemplation. Time evaporates and becomes irrelevant. The ego is silenced and is, for a time, at rest. We experience Reality.

Returning the Gaze of an Icon

Sometimes, people say of a portrait painting that the eyes seem to follow you about the room. With an icon, this can also be true. But, more than just follow you around, the eyes in an icon also penetrate. They seem to look into the depths of our being, searching out the soul. This is more than a figure of speech, a pious observation, an artistic accident, or an illusion of optics. The eyes of the icon somehow connect with the Divine in the beholder.

The icon communicates what it represents and it represents the presence of the Divine. This presence seeks the Divine in us. It seeks the indwelling of the Divine Trinity celebrated in baptism and it seeks the Divine image and imprint guaranteed by our humanity. It seeks the essence within. It speaks to our deepest and truest self.

Its purpose is to call forth, in each one of us gazing upon it, a fuller realisation of our human potential. Jesus came to give us the Good News. This Good News is that God is in all of life and that the fullness of all life is to be found only in God. The eyes of the icon, therefore, call us to more. They call us to become. Their call to us is to fully embrace life. We are invited to return the gaze bestowed upon us, to consciously engage in prayer and to be open to transformation. We are challenged to creativity.

This means that the essence of an icon is to be discovered in communication rather than in artistic analysis or appraisal. In this sense, it is in its colour, tone and composition somewhat akin to a poem. It is a mysterious expression of the inexpressible.



Edmund Rice

A Person of His Times

Edmund was a modern man of business. He understood the world and was at ease in the marketplace.

Lord, help us to understand the world around us and teach us to see your presence in that world.

A Husband

Edmund knew the joys of intimate relationship. He was able to open his heart to share himself fully with others.

Lord, gift us with happy relationships. Help us to work constantly at our relationships to enrich our lives.

A Widower

Edmund experienced the devastation and despair of bereavement when he lost his wife through tragedy.

Lord, help us to embrace life in its fullness and not allow ourselves to be twisted and misshapen by suffering when it comes our way.

Father of a Special Needs Daughter

Mary, Edmund's daughter, had special needs. This was a further cause of anxiety and suffering for Edmund.

Lord, may your arms reach out in loving embrace to all who have special needs and to the parents and carers who accompany them in life.

A Teacher

Edmund was a teacher, a master dancer who taught the dance of life to children running wild in the streets.

Lord, may all teachers be masters of the dance and bring true wisdom and joy to their work.

Friend of the Poor

Edmund befriended the poor and, giving in handfuls spent both himself and his fortune on their behalf.

Lord, may the poor be our passion as they were Edmund's. May we dedicate ourselves to their service.

Friend of the Condemned

Edmund was not afraid to brave the derision and contempt of the crowd to stand with those about to be executed.

Lord, you were condemned. May we refuse to condemn. May we stand by the despised and speak for life.

Friend to the Stranger

Edmund bought the freedom of a young black boy to afford him an opportunity to lead a life of dignity.

Lord, may we welcome strangers and all who are in any way different and may we treat them as Edmund did.

Founder of Religious Congregations

Edmund founded two religious congregations. He had a profound awareness of God's presence in his life.

Lord may each one of us have the courage and strength to live out our vocation, whatever that vocation may be.

A Person of Faith

As a person of faith, no difficulty could distract Edmund, no disappointment could dishearten him or dissuade him.

Lord, may we realise that in you is the meaning of life. May you be the beginning and the end of all that we do. Amen

Symbolism in the Edmund Rice Icon

The faces of Edmund and his daughter, Mary, reveal the soul of the icon and speak individually to whoever gazes upon them. Mary's name is included in red on Edmund's sleeve. She is believed to have been a person with special needs.

The pink dress Mary wears was a style popular in America at the end of the 18th century. It was called a 'Molly Malone', so it is likely to have had an Irish connection.

Edmund's green jacket is symbolic of the earth, of Ireland and of life. The ball of fire in Edmund's hand is symbolic of the Holy Spirit who challenged, guided and encouraged him all through his tumultuous life. Now the same Spirit challenges us.

The city is the new Jerusalem, the city of God, the Kingdom Jesus was always talking about. It is everything that God wishes for humanity but needs our help to bring about. The tower in the city is Reginald's Tower that stands at the quayside in Waterford. It is a symbol of the city where Edmund lived and worked and spent himself in service.

The ship facing out to sea represents the spiritual voyage and ministry without horizons. Edmund's fortune was made supplying such tall ships. The sea represents humanity's unconscious and the need for growth in consciousness.

Finally, the dry stone wall behind Edmund's shoulders, can be seen as the horizontal beam of the Celtic stone cross, representing his Celtic spiritual heritage and his many setbacks and sufferings.

Creed of Edmund's People

We believe the God fire burning in our hearts can transform ourselves and the world.

We believe we are called to a deep personal relationship with Jesus, lover of all creation
We believe we are called to be Good News.

We believe we are called to care for creation.

We believe we are called to keep our hearts and minds open and attentive to God's will.

We believe we are called to prophetic action alongside the poor, oppressed and disadvantaged.

We believe we are called to immerse ourselves in the culture in which we live and work.

We believe in building community which is prayerful, inclusive and welcoming.

We believe in the search for a global unity that is respectful of the rights of all human beings.

We believe by facing our shadow and weaknesses we can stand by others as they learn to face theirs.

We believe that in sharing Eucharist and Reconciliation that we are drawn beyond ourselves to the mystery of God.

We welcome others who share in the Charism of Blessed Edmund and accompany us in service.

We hear the call to live justly, love tenderly and to walk humbly with each other and with God.

Prayer Before the Icon of Blessed Edmund

Come Holy Spirit, you led Edmund Rice through many sufferings and trials to be the servant of all who were poor, condemned, oppressed or rejected.

Through you, he responded to the great needs of his time and offered hope to those who had lost hope and dignity to those who were afforded none. He wept with those who were weeping. He held nothing back. He gave to those in need in handfuls. He put his trust only in the God who provides.

Holy Spirit may our hearts burn with the same flame you ignited in Edmund's heart. May we also spend ourselves in compassion and in the cause of peace, of justice and of reconciliation. May our generosity too know no bounds and may our trust in the Source of All Being never falter.

We ask this through the intercession of Blessed Edmund and of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word. Amen.



Edmund Rice Chapel, Mount Sion, Waterford

Images of the Heart

A Prayer for Growth while Writing an Icon

(Adapted from the prayer "Seasons of the Heart")

Lord, as we write today, may what is dead within us fall away and prepare our hearts for new growth.

May the colours, hues and tones of your Spirit Shine through this image and dazzle us.

In your guidance of our hands, we place our trust O Lord; in the wisdom of your Spirit, we place our trust.

Lord, may each stroke of our brush awaken wonders that are asleep within us.

May what is frozen hard within our hearts be softened. May our own forgiveness of our mistakes help to heal and cleanse us.

In your guidance of our hands, we place our trust O Lord; in the wisdom of your Spirit, we place our trust.

Lord may we embrace the gifts of new life with which you surround us daily.

May each layer and cushion of pigment we apply be received as gift and awaken us to fresh and boundless possibility.

In your guidance of our hands, we place our trust O Lord; in the wisdom of your Spirit, we place our trust.

Lord, may these images glow with your joy and with the exuberance and abundance of your love.

May they radiate your presence and long be a source of inspiration and transformation.

In your guidance of our hands, we place our trust O Lord; in the wisdom of your Spirit, we place our trust.