

BLESSED
BASIL
MOREAU

FOUNDER
OF
RELIGIOUS
FAMILY
OF
HOLY CROSS

CRUX
AVE
SPES
UNICA



Creation of icon *a spiritual journey*

by Sister Eileen Dewsnup, CSC

Religious iconography is endowed with many purposes—to honor those depicted, to encourage introspection and spiritual meditation, to prompt emulation of the subject's qualities and holiness. Intended as a gateway to religious experience for the viewer, it also invites the person who fashions the image into deep spiritual encounter.

For me that has certainly been true, especially during the two years that I was creating an icon of Blessed Basil Anthony Moreau, founder of the congregations of Holy Cross.

My own reflection on this project, which spanned from January 2017 to December 2018, exemplifies that I could not have done it without support of friends, family and community.

Two benefactors need to be acknowledged: Theresa Rohter, my mentor in the Icon Guild of Southern California, and Edward Beckett, the instructor for the Prosopon School of Iconology, to which the guild belongs. Theresa, my trusted friend and guide, donated the indented board for the icon and the sheets of gold for the gilding. Edward helped me face the initial problem of having found no icon prototype for Moreau. That meant I must do an initial sketch, a skill I had not mastered well. This subtlety presented many obstacles from the beginning to the end of this icon. But Edward oversaw the initial and final steps of its creation, as it is

appropriate and necessary for any iconographer to submit her work to a master iconographer.

My brother-in-law, Darrell Perry, whose hobby is portrait sketching, started the icon face of Moreau by giving me the essential characteristics from Moreau's portrait; Sister M. Leonora (Donnelly), CSC, strongly exhorted me to please



make him look somewhat more pleasant; Jackie, my

youngest sister, often encouraged me in my many sketching efforts. For sure, the commitment of essential lines traced on the board took a few months.

Next came the laying of the bole (clay) to receive the gilding. As I was not sure if a "Blessed" could have a halo, my solution was to lay the whole background in gold. Moreau was not going to be ignored in this matter. However, at an iconography workshop Sister Nancy Lee Smith, IHM, a professional iconographer, cleared the matter for me: "It is indeed permissible for a 'Blessed' to have a halo."

Once the first colors were laid down, the three sequential steps of lighting and glazing provided the internal movements and structures that are devised to convey the holiness of the person portrayed. The Holy Cross sisters in the Saint Agnes community in Los Angeles, California, cheered and supported me each step along the way.

In May 2018, when I reached a decision to retire to Saint Mary's in Indiana, the icon was boxed up ever so carefully and shipped. Sister Joy O'Grady, CSC, Area of North America coordinator, provided a room where I could continue working on the piece, and she and many other sisters offered much encouragement.

All these influences, and more, are inscribed among the details of the icon—now blessed and ready for prayerful viewing and reflection.