The Baptist in olden times regarded it as impossible for him to die more glorious than in the cause of marriage.
St. John Fisher was born in Beverley, Yorkshire, in 1469, and educated at Cambridge, from which he received his Master of Arts degree in 1491. He occupied the vicarage of Northallerton, 1491-1494; then he became proctor of Cambridge University. In 1497, he was appointed confessor to Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, and became closely associated in her endowments to Cambridge; he created scholarships, introduced Greek and Hebrew into the curriculum, and brought in the world-famous Erasmus as professor of Divinity and Greek. In 1504, he became Bishop of Rochester and Chancellor of Cambridge, in which capacity he also tutored Prince Henry, who was to become Henry VIII.

St. John was dedicated to the welfare of his diocese and his university. In 1527, this humble servant of God actively opposed the King’s divorce proceedings against Catherine of Aragon - his wife in the sight of God, and steadfastly resisted Henry’s encroachment on the Church. Unlike the other Bishops of the realm, St. John refused to take the oath of succession that acknowledged Anne Boleyn as King Henry VIII’s lawful wife and their children as the legitimate heirs to the throne. In response, King Henry imprisoned him in the Tower of London in April 1534. The next year, he was made Cardinal by Pope Paul III, which further infuriated Henry who had him beheaded within a month. A half hour before his execution, this dedicated scholar and churchman opened his New Testament for the last time and his eyes fell on the following words from St. John’s Gospel: “Eternal life is this: to know You, the only true God, and Him Whom You have sent, Jesus Christ. I have given You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave me to do. Do You now, Father, give me glory at Your side”. Closing the book, he observed: “There is enough learning in that to last me the rest of my life.” His feast day is June 22.*

Bishop Frederick Campbell named St. John Fisher as the patron saint of The Catholic Foundation in 2011 because of Fisher’s stewardship of endowments. As a gift to Bishop Campbell for his many years of support of the endowments, The Catholic Foundation presents this gift to him – an icon of Saint John Fisher, written by Judith Hedge.
Judith is an iconographer and fine artist based in rural Ohio. She specializes in egg tempera icon panels and statue restoration. All work is meticulously researched, designed and created according to the highest standards, using natural materials whenever possible. Judith also works in portrait drawing and painting, nature drawing, stained glass, and various other fine arts media. She is passionate about renewing culture through restoring beauty in the arts.

Judith studied art at Ashland University for two years but was quickly disillusioned with contemporary art. She later graduated from Notre Dame of Ohio with a B.A. in Arts and Management. In between earning her degree, she worked as an illustrator for the US Army Reserves and attended ROTC. Upon graduation, she was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Signal Corps and was stationed in Germany, where she met her husband Mark.

They later moved to Mark’s homeland of England and resided in Devonshire, attending St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in Newton Abbot. When their priest, Father Patrick, asked her to write two large icon panels for the church, she began studying iconography and soon fell in love with the rich spirituality and history behind this sacred art form. She later attended two courses in Byzantine and Russian iconography at Buckfast Abbey, a Benedictine Abbey in Devon.

After moving back to the United States, Judith continued to keep up with her artwork while homeschooling the four children. She attended a Gothic icon course, in the Diocese of Columbus, led by David Clayton from Thomas More College of Liberal Arts, New Hampshire. The family are active members of St. Luke Catholic Church, Danville, Ohio.
Saint John Fisher
Chapter 3 - The History of Icons

What is an icon?
In traditional Christianity, an icon is an image of Christ, Mary, the saints and prophets, angels, and events from Sacred Scriptures. Icons are not considered works of art, but windows to heaven and reminders of the spiritual world: an encounter. They are more about faith than about art. Icons are not portraits, nor are they to be sentimental (to do with feelings) or brought about through the imagination of the artist, but according to Scripture and Tradition. They should express the dogmas of our faith like a visual gospel. Icons are meant to assist us in prayer and contemplation and help to bring us closer to God. Every process in the making of an icon is based on revealed truth, making it a means of theological teaching, a liturgical participation, and contemplation.

Theological Aspects of the Technique
From the preparation to the completion of the icon, the technique itself is a means of theological teaching. The natural materials of wood, linen, gelatin, egg yolk, and ground earth pigments represent God’s creation - plant, animal, and mineral. Christ raised up all creation into glory in the resurrection.
The iconographer takes a piece of wood and smoothes and prepares it with much care, as if it were an altar, for like an altar, the icon is a sign of the “Presence.” The iconographer envelopes the wood in a linen cloth, like an altar cloth, followed by a mixture of gelatin and chalk. This is in imitation of the creation of the human body. “God fashioned man of dust of the soil” (Gen 2:7). This is a “setting apart” for the enrobed wood is destined to express a “vision of the Invisible” (Heb 11:1-4).

After having fasted and prayed, the artist takes the prepared wood and engraves the design into the plaster. An icon is never just painted on the surface. The drawing is engraved: It is a taking into possession from within, an indelible engraving. By this engraving the color will penetrate. Here there is an analogy with the consecration of an altar. It is the Holy Spirit who penetrates the material and marks it in a definite manner. This also brings to mind what happens to us in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders.

In the composition of the icon, the religious theme is never at the service of the imagination, feelings or talent of the artist. It is rather that the artist and all the faculties of the artist (imagination, feelings, and talent) are put to the service of the mystery of teaching that is to be expressed. The structure is stylized so as not to represent what is pretty or sentimental, but on the contrary, it is to represent a reality as seen from paradise.
Virgin Mary "Extreme Humility"
The symbolic language of color in iconography is as follows:

**White** contains all colors of the visible spectrum. Therefore, it can symbolize God in his full glory. White can also denote purity and innocence.

**Black** is not a color but is the absence of light. It absorbs all light like a glutton, never giving but always taking. It is not used except in portraying death, Hades, rejection of God.

**Red** represents humanity or the earth. In Hebrew, Adam is the word for the red earth from which he was fashioned. A brighter red represents the blood of the martyrs, because of its radiance it is life-giving.

**Blue** is the color of the sky and denotes heaven. A deep blue suggests the mysterious depth of divine life.

**Green** suggests life and growth.

**Brown** being the color of the earth denotes humility.

**Yellow** can be used as a substitute for gold to represent divine light. A more neutral yellow is calming and used to mediate between complementary colors.

The use of color in iconography is an “ascent” in that it goes from darkness into light. There are various methods to write an icon - Byzantine, Cretan, Russian, Romanian, Egyptian and Ethiopian. In the Byzantine method, all areas are covered with the darkest color, called proplasma. This represents the darkness that covered the earth before the creation. To this darkness, light is added in gradual layers, representing the breath of God. Each layer becomes progressively lighter, as it is always an ascent, moving progressively towards the light. In an icon the light does not come from a particular direction, because the heavenly Jerusalem “does not need the sun or the moon for light, since it is lit by the radiant glory of God” (Rev 21:23)

In iconography the created order is denoted by pigments, while the gold represents the glory of divine light. It is the symbol of the uncreated light, divine presence and transfiguring glory. While there is a distinct difference between the gold (divine) and the earthy pigments (creation), there is an intimate relationship between them, a communion. For “while light can exist without pigment, pigment cannot become
color without light.” Just so, we cannot exist without God, yet there is communion between us. As Saint Paul says, “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). The halo is not only a distinct sign of holiness, but the radiance of one given wholly over to God: As Christ said, “You are the light of the world (Math 5:14).”

Usually a red line surrounds the icon, the halo and the figure. This symbolizes the blood of the Covenant, of which half was poured over the altar and half over the people in Exodus. In the New Covenant, the blood of Christ is poured out for a multitude, and is made present in the Eucharistic cup.

A Brief History of Iconography and the Veneration of Icons
Images and pictures were used by the earliest Christians and can be found in places such as the catacombs. According to tradition, St. Luke the Evangelist painted the first icon, which was of the Virgin Mary. The icon style appeared in the first three centuries and they were used to educate the people. Icons were usually small and found more in people’s homes than in Churches.
Madonna and Child by Berlinghiero (Italian, Lucca, active by 1228–died by 1236)
When Constantine legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire, and the great churches were built, icons became an important part of worship. While the Eastern Orthodox Church is well known for the use of icons, icons are not exclusively Orthodox. The use of iconography developed while the Orthodox Church was still united as one with the Roman Catholic Church (the western half of the Church). Although the western church makes use of statues and stained glass windows more prevalently, iconography is still important in the Roman Catholic Church, albeit they are used in worship more extensively in Eastern Rites of the Church. There is a renewed interest in iconography today among Westerners.

The 7th Ecumenical Council in 787AD affirmed the use of icons for veneration, in response to the iconoclast controversy. During the iconoclast period, it was questioned whether the veneration of images was idolatry. Saint John of Damascus argued that to venerate (or show reverence to) icons is to affirm the doctrine of the incarnation. Because Christ became man and was visible to man, we have an
image of Him. Through His incarnation He sanctified all of creation; by the grace of Jesus Christ, matter is assumed and sanctified. Veneration of icons is to give reverence to the person depicted as Saint Basil the Great explains, “Honor given to the image is transferred to the prototype.” The Council differentiated between worship, which is due to God alone, and veneration which is given to all that is holy and sanctified by Christ.

Icons play an important role in the worship of the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Rites, where “the permeation of the human nature by the divine nature” is emphasized. The word “Icon” comes from the Greek word for “image.” God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Gen 1:26). Saint Paul says, “He is the image of the invisible God.” (Col 1:15)

Icons are not depictions of the past, but are current witnesses of a life of holiness and as such are important to Christianity. As inanimate materials are used in the sacraments to bring about sanctifying grace through the action of the Holy Spirit, so in iconography wood and paint are used to draw us in and help us share in the heavenly kingdom. In summary, an icon is a concentration of all the Christian life and of the economy of salvation. It is an encounter, a union, an expectation of the return of Christ.

Saint John Fisher

Chapter 4 - The Saint John Fisher Icon Symbolism

Besides the many Western and Tudor elements within the icon, it is still essentially based on the byzantine icon. Elements include: the raised border, the gold halo representing the radiance of the Holy Spirit, and the writing of the person’s name. The writing represents the completion and crowning act of the icon that distinguishes an icon from a portrait. It has great theological significance, because invoking a person’s name is to invoke them. The Scriptures place a great emphasis on the importance of a name, particularly the name of God. Everything in the icon, however bold or subtle, is outlined in red, which profoundly signifies the sealing in the blood of Christ.

Geometric Construction

The harmony in an icon is normally achieved by using an underlying geometric construction, which includes the arrangement of the individual elements in relation to one another and to the panel. The underlying construction of the portrait pages of the Book of Kells, in which a $\sqrt{2}$ rectangle is drawn using an asymmetrical construction. Six diagonal lines provide all the points of intersection for the border and figure, as well as the lettering and the building of St. John’s College Cambridge gatehouse and the scroll. The eyes are placed exactly on a line of construction, as was done in the portraits in the Book of Kells, which makes them seem as if they are gazing out from another world. The crucifix is at the very center of the icon in the construction of the drawing.

Saint John Fisher

Due to the dramatic way in which John Fisher clashed with Protestantism and various abuses, e.g. he was the only bishop in England who did not abandon the Rock of Peter, there are a great deal of contrasts appearing in the icon. The saint is meant to be stately, yet stark in his appearance, solemn and concerned in his expression yet loving, and as he is now in the beatific vision, and he is also joyful. His eyes are sad, the pucker in his eyebrow suggests concern, while the hint of a smile suggests his inner joy. He is wearing the ordinary daily attire of bishops during his time, consisting of a white pleated shirt, and white cleric’s collar with a red band at his neck, and a dark brown hat and stole. Although the colors are what was worn at the time, they also double in iconography color symbolism to be: Brown for Humility, White for Purity, and Red for Martyrdom.
His face is a combination of the features from the portrait of Fisher, by Hans Holbein, and the more stylized features of iconography, which are not meant to look naturalistic. He holds the scroll forward so that we may see his words concerning the sanctity of marriage, and modestly holds the gatehouse of St. John’s College which he founded. The college is small in scale in comparison to Fisher, yet looms up as a tower representing not only higher learning, but to also represent the fact that all authentic knowledge is established on truth. A serene, almost “heavenly” blue-green background surrounds the saint and separates him from the border.
The Border

The border is meant to be a sort of visual representation of John Fisher’s life and the Tudor England in which he lived. It is purposefully meant to be overly busy and chaotic, as Tudor designs were, in order to not only be of the style which was prevalent during his life, but so that one single element within the border does not draw the eye away from the saint himself. Fisher rises as a figure of great peace and strength, inspired by God (the dove) and wrapped in the mantel of our Lady.

Gold

The interwoven gold edge envelopes all the other designs in the border, such as the coats of arms, the Tudor roses, the keys of Peter, etc., and is inspired by Tudor art. In iconography, gold represents God, His heavenly kingdom, and divine grace.

The Keys of St. Peter

John Fisher rests directly on the keys, as he was the only bishop in England who had the courage and strength to stand up to the demands of the throne and remain faithful to the Catholic Church and the Holy Father as the head of the Church.

Heart and Diamond Design

They are butted up against each other to represent conflict, but they also contain the fish - a symbol of Christ and John Fisher, whose motto is “I will make you fishers of men.” A fish and wheat shafts are within his coat of arms represent Fisher’s priestly ministry, in particular his refutations against the heresies attacking the Priesthood and the Eucharist.
Interwoven Rose Branches and Tudor Roses

These woven branches represent the tangled time of John Fisher. The branches have thorns and remind us of Christ’s passion and John Fisher’s coming martyrdom. Within the branches are white Yorkshire roses, the county in which Fisher was born and raised. He had a great love of nature and the outdoors and the border is to be seen as natural and growing. It represents his life, some parts budding - others in flower, as his life came to completion and fulfillment. The three leafed roses are reminiscent of the trinity. The War of the Roses, between Lancaster (red rose) and Yorkshire (white rose) had just finished with the Tudor’s victorious. The kingdom of the Tudor’s was a combined red and white rose.

Coats of Arms

On the left is the coat of arms of the Bishop of Rochester, a diagonal red cross and white background with a scallop shell in the center. On the right of the shield is the coat of arms of the Fisher family, a blue background with a yellow fish in the center with three shafts of wheat surrounding. Above the coat of arms is the bishop’s miter and a flame, representing that he is a successor to the apostles whom the Holy Spirit descended upon.

On the right side is the coat of arms of the Tudor family, including both Lady Margaret Beaufort, (the mother of Henry VII, who was Fisher’s patron and he was her confessor) and of Henry VIII. Above that sits the royal crown and fleur de lis, which is part of the coat of arms and the royal family.

Crosses

These are like the cornerstones of the icon; Christ, and our redemption through Christ’s suffering on the cross. These crosses are in Tudor style.
Young Sprouting Branches
This part of the border is brighter, and represents the new life that sprouts up from the blood of martyrs, and the peace and joy that awaits those who persevere. Fisher also loved the Yorkshire countryside; the green grass in the springtime and the blackthorns blooming in May. This section, following the curve of the raised border includes Fisher’s family motto in Latin and twelve fish to represent Fisher’s direct link to the Apostles in Apostolic Succession.

Dove and Mandorla
A traditional element in iconography is a circle or oval shaped mandorla, representing the radiance of divinity and His eternity. It is seen behind Christ in icons of the transfiguration and Resurrection. The dark blue symbolizes the mystery of God. In Eastern iconography a hand comes from this to represent Christ and his help of grace.

Trinitarian Wheat Design
This is another Tudor design, but of the trinity, and made up of wheat. Again, this brings in the Eucharist and his priestly ministry.
Bishop Frederick Campbell identified St. John Fisher as the patron saint of The Catholic Foundation because of Fisher’s stewardship of endowments. The Catholic Foundation’s mission is to inspire giving and assist donors in providing for the long-term needs of the Diocese of Columbus. The Foundation wanted a group of individuals that were passionate about their faith and wanted to serve their parishes and ministries in a meaningful way. The Saint John Fisher Stewards serve as volunteers, and promote the growth of endowments in collaboration with The Catholic Foundation’s awareness and service initiatives.

A Saint John Fisher Steward makes a two-year volunteer commitment and must have an existing affiliation with The Catholic Foundation. They serve as a liaison between the parish and The Catholic Foundation.

To learn more about this group and how to become a member, please visit our website www.catholic-foundation.org/st-john-fisher-stewards or call 614-443-8893.