

You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and then the likeness is re-drawn on the same material. Even so was it with the All-holy Son of God. He, the Image of the Father, came and dwelt in our midst, in order that He might renew mankind after Himself, and seek out His lost sheep, even as He says in the Gospel: "I came to seek and to save that which was lost."

Saint Athanasius the Great

Sunday 1 June 2014 is the Sunday of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

Matins Gospel: John 21:1-14

Epistle: Acts 20:16-18, 28-36

Gospel: John 17:1-13

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Angelic Powers were at your grave, and those who guarded it became as dead, and Mary stood by the tomb, seeking your most pure Body. You despoiled Hades and emerged unscathed; You met the Virgin and granted life. Lord, risen from the dead, glory to You!

Apolytikion of the Fathers:

When You had fulfilled your dispensation for us, and united things on earth with things in heaven, You were taken up in glory, Christ our God; in no way parted, but remaining inseparable, you cried out to those who loved you: "I am with you, and there is no one against you."

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Acts 21:8-14; John 14:27-15:7

Nicephorus, Abp. of Constantinople; Erasmos of Ochrid & his Companion Martyrs

Tuesday: Acts 21:26-32; John 16:2-13

Martyrs Lucillian and Paul; Athanasios the Wonderworker

Wednesday: Hebrews 7:26-28; 8:1-2; John 10:1-9

Metrophanes, Archbishop of Constantinople; Martha and Mary, Sisters of Lazarus

Thursday: Acts 25:13-19; John 16:23-33

Hieromartyr Dorotheus; 10 Martyrs of Egypt

Friday: Acts 27:1-44; 28:1; John 17:18-26

Apodosis of the Feast of the Holy Ascension; Hilarion the New; Bessarion the Wonderworker of Egypt

Saturday: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; John 21:14-25

Saturday of Souls; Martyr Theodotus; Righteous Panagis



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

1 June 2014

The True Knowledge of God

This past Thursday we celebrated the Ascension of Jesus Christ and next Sunday we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Christ is no longer among us in a bodily way as He once was, but He assures us that His Holy Spirit will comfort, strengthen and guide us.

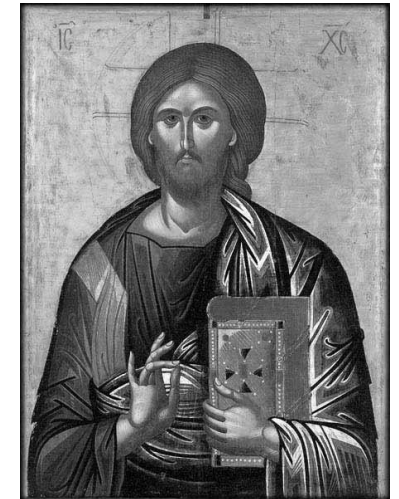
Today is also the Sunday on which we commemorate the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council. We honour them for their zeal in defending the true faith, something that can seem a little out of place in our contemporary world which emphasizes tolerance and diversity. But it is important to realize why the Church insists on the need to guard the life that Christ has left us, for here we find the truth that leads us to God, allowing us to be nourished by His life.

In today's Gospel, Saint John tells us of Jesus' prayer before His Crucifixion, in which He prays for His followers, praying that they would be kept in the truth and in unity with one another: "Holy Father, keep those You have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us."

The truth of the Gospel and the faith of the Church is not something abstract, much less something oppressive that we need to submit to out of fear of punishment. Rather, it is the possibility of sharing in the communion of the Church, of being led to a greater participation in God's own life. This is no abstract knowledge, but it is a knowledge that leads to life and is the cause of a great joy.

Let us plant ourselves upon the rock of faith and the Tradition of the Church, removing not the landmarks set by our holy fathers, nor giving room to those who are anxious to introduce novelties and to undermine the structure of God's holy ecumenical and apostolic Church. For if everyone were allowed a free hand, little by little the entire Body of the Church would be destroyed.

Saint John of Damascus



A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

After we have prayed the “Our Father,” the Liturgy proceeds with the Liturgy proceeds to the reception of Holy Communion by both the clergy and the people. The see what is going to occur in the prayer that the priest prays:

Give heed, Lord Jesus Christ our God, from your holy dwelling-place and from the glorious throne of your Kingdom; and come to sanctify us, you who are enthroned on high with the Father and invisibly present here with us. And with your mighty hand grant communion in your most pure Body and precious Blood to us, and through us to all the people.

At the Ascension, Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of His Father, and yet He also remains with us in the Church, in the Gifts which He has left us of His holy Body and Blood. We believe that He is invisibly present with us at every Divine Liturgy. Saint Cyril of Alexandria writes:

Christ says that He will be invisible and in no way seen by those of a worldly mind after He leaves the earth, that is, after His Ascension into heaven. He will, however, be visible to the saints.

Just as Christ’s Body concealed His divinity during His earthly life, so, in the words of Saint Gregory Palamas, “the holy bread is like a veil, hiding the Divinity within it.” But, by partaking in this bread and wine, we are, in reality, partaking in Christ’s very Body and very Blood.

The priest then elevates the bread that is now the Body of Christ and proclaims:

The Holy Things for the Holy.

And we respond:

One is holy, one is Lord: Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

We are all called to be holy. This does not mean that we are expected to be perfect or never to have sinned; rather, it means that we are seeking to lead a life of repentance and to grow closer to Christ. We cannot be holy on our own. It is Jesus Christ who is the source of holiness and who pours it out on His Church which is united to Christ as a Bride is to her Bridegroom. It is only by being united to Jesus Christ that we can share in His holiness. In the words of Saint Nicholas Cabasilas:

When the Holy One pours Himself out into the faithful, He becomes visible in many souls and brings forth many holy people, yet He alone is the Holy One.

Does it Really Matter What We Believe?

We live in an era that tends to downplay the importance of religious dogma; people often speak about preferring “spirituality” to religion and insisting on the need for right belief is somehow seen as intolerant or judgmental of others. For the Orthodox Church, such attitudes pose a particular challenge. While we need to be tolerant of other people, we cannot betray the truth of the Gospel to which our Fathers in the faith devoted their lives.

However, it is important to understand that such loyalty to the teaching of the Church is not simply a matter of convention, or of blind obedience. The beliefs that the Councils of the Church have defined are not arbitrary, but are crucially important for our salvation. How we speak about

The Holy Fathers of Nicaea

The first centuries of the Church’s life were a time for clarifying and expressing what Christians really believe. Very often the Church did this in response to false teachers whose doctrines were endangering the truths of our salvation.

So it was that, when the priest Arius started teaching that Jesus Christ was not true God but some sort of creature, his own Archbishop Alexander stepped in to put an end to erroneous ideas and to preserve the truth of the faith. However, Arius’ ideas gathered support in various places and led to much controversy.

It was against this background that the Emperor Constantine convened the First Ecumenical Council. He was concerned with preserving the unity of the Church and so he asked all the bishops of the Church to decide what the Church really believes about Jesus Christ. The Council Fathers proclaimed that Christ is truly God and of one substance with the Father.

The ideas of Arius were to resurface in the decades following the Council and the Church would be called to further clarify what it believed. However, the Council of Nicaea was an important beacon and highlighted how important faith in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is. This is the hinge of our entire faith and it is for their role in preserving and passing on this truth that we honour the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council.



Let us praise today the mystical trumpets of the Spirit, the Godbearing Fathers, who sang a harmonious melody of theology in the midst of the Church: one Trinity, unchanging Essence and Godhead; the overthrowers of Arius, the champions of the Orthodox, who ever intercede with the Lord that he have mercy on our souls.

From Vespers for the Sunday of the Fathers of Nicaea

God, and about God’s reaching out to us in the person of Jesus Christ, is important because we ourselves are in relation to God. We are created in His image and although this image has been marred by sin, Jesus Christ came to us in order to renew the image of God in us.

The early Fathers sought to clarify the relationship between Christ’s humanity and His divinity, for both of these were necessary if He was to refashion us according to what God intended us to be. If Christ was not fully God, He would be powerless to save us. But if He was not also fully human, He would also be powerless to save us, for He came to heal our nature from within.