

Prayer by reason of its nature is the converse and union of man with God, and by reason of its action upholds the world and brings about reconciliation with God;

it is the mother and also the daughter of tears, the propitiation for sins, a bridge over temptations, a wall against afflictions, a crushing of conflicts, work of angels, food of all the spiritual beings, future gladness, boundless activity;

it is the spring of virtues, the source of graces, invisible progress, food of the soul, the enlightening of the mind, an axe for despair, a demonstration of hope, the annulling of sorrow, the wealth of monks, the treasure of solitaries;

it is the reduction of anger, the mirror of progress, the realization of success, a proof of one's condition, a revelation of the future, a sign of glory.

Saint John Climacus



**24 May 2015 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 above Thy tomb, and they that guarded Thee became as dead. And Mary stood by the grave seeking Thine immaculate Body. Thou hast despoiled Hades and wast not tried thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin and didst grant us life. O Thou Who didst arise from the dead, Lord, glory be to Thee.

Seasonal Kontakion:

O Christ our God, upon fulfilling Your dispensation for our sake, You ascended in Glory, uniting the earthly with the heavenly. You were never separate but remained inseparable, and cried out to those who love You, "I am with you and no one is against you."

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Luke 7:17-30; 2 Corinthians 4:6-15; Matthew 11:2-15

Third Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist; Therapon the Hieromartyr, Bp of Cyprus

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

Carpos and Alphaeus of the 70; Martyr Alexander of Thessalonica

Wednesday: Acts 23:1-11; John 16:15-23

Hieromartyr Helladius; John the Russian Confessor

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

Martyr Eutychius; Nikitas, Bishop of Chalcedon

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

Apodosis of the Holy Ascension; Martyr Theodosia; Virgin Martyr Theodosia of Constantinople

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

Saturday of Souls; Isaacius of Dalmatus; Macrina, grandmother of St. Basil the Great



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

24 May 2015

**Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa**

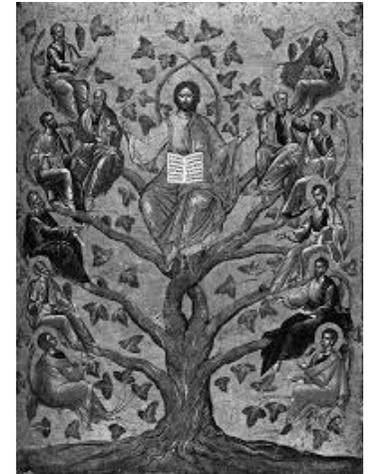
Keep Them in Your Name

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.

In today's Gospel we hear 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. This truth is not something abstract. Rather it is about a relationship – a relationship that God has given to us. He has revealed His truth to us in His Son, and He preserves and holds us in this Truth. As Jesus prays: "Holy Father, keep those You have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us."

In the same way, the Church is not simply a collection of individuals who believe the same things. Rather, the Church is a living organism that is held together by our communion with God and with one another. It unites us to the Source of Life, which is God Himself. It is the place where we are protected, nourished and sustained in the midst of an often unsafe and hostile world.

On this Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the Nicaea, we are reminded of the importance of the truth of our faith – and of our debt to those who have defended it for us. This truth 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 knowledge ... is life. For it dwells in our hearts, reshaping those who receive it into sonship with Him and molding them into incorruption and piety toward God through life, according to the Gospel.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria

The Mystery of Repentance

A series on the meaning of Confession

We have seen that repentance involves an ongoing process of conversion in which we are gradually transformed in the depths of our being. But how does this relate to the Sacrament of Confession? And why, as we are sometimes asked, do we need to confess our sins to a priest?

We should note here that repentance and confession takes different forms. In the Orthodox Church we are encouraged to practice both personal daily confession and sacramental confession before a priest.



Personal, Daily Confession

The daily prayers of the Church found in the prayer books include prayers in which we confess our sins to God and ask for His mercy. Some particularly striking examples of this can be seen in Psalm 50 (51 in some Bibles) and in the Jesus Prayer, in which we pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

This practice of daily repentance can also help us to look back over our day, as we examine our conscience and become more aware of both the good and the bad in our lives. It provides us with the opportunity both to thank God and to ask for His mercy and forgiveness.

Confession before a Priest

Since the earliest times, the Church has also practiced the confession of sins before a priest. Some sins are seen as so grave that they cut us off from communion with God. In order to be restored to communion and able to participate in the sacraments we therefore need to confess to a priest and receive the absolution that Jesus promised when He said to the Apostles: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18)

We may not always be clear on what constitutes a grave sin and in this case we should ask a priest. But the Sacrament of Confession should not be seen as limited to grave sins, for the roots of grave sins often lie in our daily thoughts and attitudes and the "smaller" sins that we do not see as so serious. The regular practice of sacramental confession, or the Mystery of Repentance, can serve as a sort of spiritual checkup and is therefore recommended by the Church.



It is the property of angels not to fall, and even, as some say, it is quite impossible for them to fall. It is the property of men to fall, and to rise again as often as this may happen. But it is the property of devils, and devils alone, not to rise once they are fallen

Saint John Climacus

The Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

Today, on the sixth Sunday after Pascha, we commemorate Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council which was held in Nicaea in 325.

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 Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

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