

From 16 to 27 June, Orthodox bishops from around the world are meeting in Crete for the **Holy and Great Council**. Although not an ecumenical council like the one we commemorate today, this is an important gathering that is intended to strengthen the bonds of unity in the Church and to reflect on the challenges the Church faces in today's world.

Here is a prayer that we can pray for the bishops as they gather in Crete:

Master, God Almighty, when the apostles were gathered all in one place together, you sent your Holy Spirit upon them, and they were enabled to proclaim the joyous news of the resurrection of your only-begotten Son. Throughout the ages, you have fulfilled the promise of your Son to the disciples, that he would be in their midst when two or three gathered in his name. By the descent of the Spirit, your apostles and their successors have received the divine grace of proclamation to rightly divide the word of your truth, and the gift of boldness to carry the cross and bear witness to your son. As the successors of the apostles gather in Crete, you yourself, Master Almighty, now as then, send your Spirit upon them. Protect them from danger, lead them not into temptation, and deliver them from the clutches of the evil one. Grant them courage to bear witness to your truth and to fulfil your divine will, with love for you and for all of your children, and for the life of the world, so that we may be inspired to sing the thrice-holy hymn with joy, praising you, together with your only-begotten Son, and your all-Holy and life-giving Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 13 June: Acts 21:8-14; John 14:27-15:7
Martyr Aquilina; Triphyllos the Bishop of Nicosia

Tuesday, 14 June: Acts 21:26-32; Luke 4:22-30
Prophet Elisseus; Methodius the Confessor

Wednesday, 15 June: Acts 23:1-11; John 16:15-23
Prophet Amos; Father Hieronymus

Thursday, 16 June: Acts 25:13-19; John 16:23-33
Tychon the Wonderworker; 40 Martyrs of Rome

Friday, 17 June: Acts 27:1-44; 28:1; John 17:18-26
Apodosis of Ascension; Martyr Isaurus & Companions; Martyrs Manuel, Sabel & Ismael

Saturday, 18 June: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; John 21:14-25
Saturday of Souls; Martyr Leontius & Companions

12 June 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:

You are greatly glorified, O Christ our God, who established our Fathers as luminaries upon the earth, and through them led us all to the true Faith. O Most compassionate, glory to You.

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."



Evangelion

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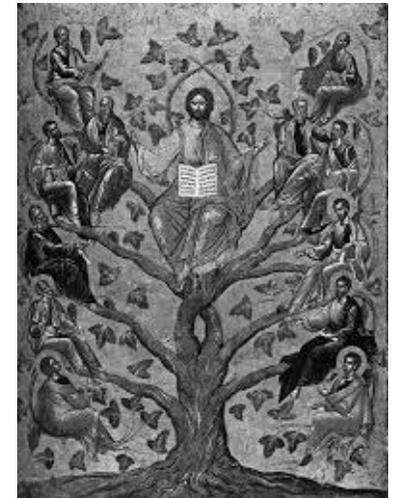
Keep Them in Your Truth

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

On Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ

By Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

Since Christ himself has declared the bread to be his body, who can have any further doubt?

On the night he was betrayed our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said: 'Take, eat: this is my body.'

He took the cup, gave thanks and said: 'Take, drink: this is my blood.'

Since he himself has said quite categorically, "This is my blood," who would dare to question it and say that it is not his blood?

Therefore it is with complete assurance that we receive the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ.



His body is given to us under the symbol of bread, and his blood is given to us under the symbol of wine, in order to make us by receiving them one body and one blood with him.

Having his body and blood in our members, we become bearers of Christ and sharers, as Saint Peter says, in the divine nature.

Once when speaking to the Jews Christ said: *Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you shall have no life in you.* This so horrified them that they left him. Not understanding his words in a spiritual way, they thought the Saviour wished them to practise cannibalism.

Under the old covenant there was showbread, but it came an end with the old dispensation to which it belonged.

Under the new covenant there is bread from heaven and the cup of salvation. These sanctify both soul and body, the bread being adapted to the sanctification of the body, the Word to the sanctification of the soul.

Do not, then, regard the Eucharistic elements as ordinary bread and wine: they are in fact the body and blood of the Lord, as he himself has declared. Whatever your senses may tell you, be strong in faith.

You have been taught and you are firmly convinced that what looks and tastes like bread and wine is not bread and wine but the body and the blood of Christ.

You know also how David referred to this long ago when he sang: *Bread strengthens the heart and makes the face glow with the oil of gladness.*

Strengthen your heart, then, by receiving this bread as spiritual bread, and bring joy to the face of your soul.

May purity of conscience remove the veil from the face of your soul so that by contemplating the glory of the Lord, as in a mirror, you may be transformed from glory to glory in Christ Jesus our Lord. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.



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